

Unsettling Stories: Theorizing Representational Violence and Practising Dignity

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Abstract

In this paper I examine how dominant social work discourses use representational violence to maintain binary helper/helped identities, often through evacuating relational or partially shared narratives that might instead be grounds for collaborative work and solidarity. I centre a practice example to interrogate the role that performative professionalism plays in representational violence. My argument is situated in the knowledge that there is no innocent ground from which to represent another's story of violence, that representation is a process of producing the Other and mutually constitutive of the self (Macías, 2013). Drawing on Rossiter's (1999) notion that justice requires representation, I conclude by considering the possibilities of transgressing dominant representational boundaries posed by the ethical dilemma of representing violence. I suggest that reproducing another's experience of violence through representation might be disrupted by combining the theory of "unsettled practice," one that denies totalizing representations, with Response-Based Practice to foreground a spectrum of representations of resistance and so centre fluid agentic being (Richardson, 2008; Richardson & Wade, 2009; Rossiter, 2011). While this paper centres a practice example, my argument is relevant to representation in research and is informed by a body of work that locates research as an important site of resistance to dominance (Brown & Strega, 2005). This paper argues that representing the violence that another has experienced through the act of critically reflecting on the re-telling of that violence may inform counter-representations that lead to social justice responses.

Keywords: representational violence, identity formation, ethics, Response-Based Practice, unsettled practice

I wish to express gratitude to the remarkable woman whose story I centre in this paper. She has reviewed and has given me permission to publish this paper. The privilege of working alongside her, her feedback on this paper, and our process of sharing this work inspires me and challenges me to grow better theory and practice. She contributed the following foreword:

"They thought they knew who I was before they knew who I was."

In this paper I analyze how I used dominant discourses of representation to re-tell the story of another woman's experience of male violence by relating a practice situation. In this re-telling (a term I use to call attention to the productive power representation

plays in relating narratives) I represent myself as a certain kind of helping professional by relying on dominant social work discourses that allow me to efface my own location as a woman who has resisted male violence. I examine the role re-telling plays in the representation of Others in order to consider how my re-telling of another woman's narrative of violence mediated my intersected locations as both a woman who has resisted violence and as a social worker in work alongside women resisting violence. I reflect on why I felt it was necessary, in order to perform dominant professionalism, to diffuse my personal location as a woman who has resisted violence and on what discourses I used to achieve this. I analyze how my re-telling of another's story of violence maintains the "power of being professional" by situating myself as agentic against a passive production of a woman I worked alongside (De Montigny, 1995). This analysis centres on a practice example. However, the site of practice is not discreet. It is important to acknowledge that the politics of how knowledge is produced through representational practices are relevant to (and interlocked among) social work theory, practice, and research.

In approaching this work I consider the way in which I represent myself as a dominantly situated professional against how I represent a woman I worked alongside by effacing my experiential location of violence through her experience of violence. By producing myself in binary opposition to the woman I worked alongside, I successfully avoided telling my own story even as I constructed my position as one reliant on compelling her story—a normative social work tool. Drawing on Rossiter's (1999) notion that justice requires representation, I conclude this paper by examining the possibilities of transgressing dominant representational boundaries posed by the ethical dilemma of representation. I consider how the maintenance of violence through the representation of another's experience of violence might be disrupted by utilizing an "unsettled practice," one that denies totalizing representations by foregrounding instead a spectrum of representations of resistance and so dynamic agentic being (Richardson, 2008; Richardson & Wade, 2009; Rossiter, 2011). I acknowledge there is no innocent ground from which to re-tell another's story of violence. Representing violence is always a process of representing the Other and in that action mutually constitutive of the self (Macías, 2013). I argue that representing the violence that another has experienced through the act of re-telling that violence can also articulate resistance and so inform representations that lead to social justice responses.

Re-telling a Story¹

I worked with a woman who left a relationship in which her partner beat her and their infant daughter and subsequently stalked her. She was escaping with her infant daughter when he pulled her back into the house and beat her, striking her daughter. She called the police who arrested both of them, charging her with failure to protect—even as she was attempting to protect her daughter.

¹ This re-telling purposefully contains details that do not need to be included in order to understand the ethical dilemma. I chose to include these details because they illustrate how I constructed myself within the process of re-telling. I include these details in this iteration of the re-telling with the permission and under the direction of the woman whose story I foreground.

Her daughter was abducted by child protection workers. He was charged with felony domestic violence and jailed. We worked together while she switched jobs, secured housing, and completed a long list of requirements that pathologized her as a bad mother in need of rehabilitation through the capable guidance of social service workers. This production of her as an inadequate mother concealed her ex-partner's violence (Coates & Wade, 2007). The coercive requirements she completed were mandated by the legal system as conditions under which the return of her daughter might be considered (Campbell & Davidson, 2009). She had to complete courses and assessments, including an abuser course. Her ex-partner's violence was represented as "neglect" of her daughter, producing her as her daughter's abuser and further submerging her ex-partner's violence (as discussed by Strega, e.g., in Strega, Krane, Lapierre, Richardson, & Carlton, 2013). A financially marginalized single mother, she completed all of these requirements at her own cost because the social service systems she was able to access were not free.

She found a new job. She obtained "safe" housing. He located her at several different addresses. She and I attended regular child protection team meetings and several court hearings, where we both testified and worked together on letters of support aimed at reunifying her with her daughter.

Eventually, her daughter was returned to her custody. All the social service workers who had questioned her parenting eventually lauded her as an amazing mom in order to produce themselves and their policy requirements as necessary and successful (Abrams & Curran, 2000). He was charged in a different case; and the presiding judge gave him a choice to enrol in a program of study full time, secure employment, or be incarcerated. At this time the woman was also working with me in another capacity in another place of employment. He chose to enrol in study, and her choices and ability to structure safety were limited by this choice. We talked about how her protective order would force him off campus, but she decided that this would make him angry because he would then have to find a job (an almost impossible task considering his police record and the employment market). If he could not secure employment, he would then be incarcerated. She feared that this would increase her vulnerability to his violence. She decided to see if he was able to remain successfully enrolled and reassess her options at the end of the semester. While on campus I read a gesture he made toward me as an attempt to intimidate me. I became concerned about my safety on campus.

Universities comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This means that I could not disclose student information; I could not assure the woman that I would not work with him. I told her that it would be a conflict of interest for me to work with him, and I told her that there are structures in place to ensure I could indicate reasons for not working with a student. I could not legally indicate to university administrators that I knew him from another setting because of the confidentiality policy. If I did so, I would then be outing her experience and potentially give him "evidence" of what could be constructed as my discrimination against him, which he could then compel for court and use against her. In order to explain to my supervisor why I could not work with this student, I

would need to ask the woman to sign a release, thus potentially re-victimizing her in order to protect myself.

We all appeared in court again. This time his parental rights were removed. He seemed livid and appeared to direct his anger at the woman and me. This event prompted me to go to my supervisor at the university and state that I could not tell her why, but that I could not work with him as a student as a matter of conflict of interest and personal safety. My choice to do this in a community where my multiple roles were known potentially revealed him as someone who had been charged with domestic violence assault (a fact easily verifiable by consulting power *dispositifs* such as online and newspaper arrest reports) and potentially revealed her as a woman resisting his violence (Tamboukou, 1999).

My supervisor at the university asked if I wanted to put an “alert” on his name in our scheduling system. When I declined I told my supervisor that it was in order to support confidentiality for the woman. On further reflection, I also declined because he might find out that there was an alert on his records and potentially retaliate against me. I advanced my safety by producing myself as a good social worker who was concerned about her confidentially—even as I marginalized it.

Theorizing Representational Violence

My post-structural feminist analysis of my use of representational violence (violence accomplished or maintained through dominant representation of Other/Self) to produce a dominant notion of my professionalism in my re-telling of the story is situated in the body of work by the following academics: Macías (2013) on the intersection of the violence of and the need for representation; Razack (2007) on “stealing the pain of others” through representation; Ahmed (2000) on ethical encounters; and Rossiter (2011) on the possibilities of subverting the violence of representation through “unsettled social work.” Following the work of Coates and Wade (2007), Richardson (2008), and Richardson and Wade (2009), I argue that centring a critical re-telling of resistance might meet the need for representation in order to centre justice through the restoration of dignity. I also investigate what this means for dominant representations of social work professionalism.

Macías (2013) suggested that there is an ethical dilemma posed by the reproduction of violence through its detailed representation, noting that this is further problematized by how the materiality of violence also relies on its concealment—the denial of violence (p. 5). She problematized the euphemistic representation of violence as effacing and defusing its materiality (p. 6; also see Coates & Wade, 2007; Scott, 1999). By foregrounding the relational constitution of violence² she further troubled the notion that only survivors of violence might represent their experiences (p. 7). Rossiter (1999) and Macías (2013) identified this ethical dilemma of representation as further complicated by the need for representation in order to do

² By “relational constitution of violence” I mean telling, reading, and/or seeing and potentially spectaclizing—constructing the victim of violence as a spectacle, usually in order to produce a binary version of self.

justice. As Rossiter (1999) noted: “Derrida makes the case that failure to represent actually opens the door to violence and injustice because justice itself requires thought, which is representation” (p. 989).

Macías (2012) called for a Foucauldian ethics from which totalizing representations come under scrutiny through a (re)reading that makes the *process* of representation “thinkable” (Macías, 2012, p. 1). While this supports a critical reading of re-told violence, the arguments made above regarding the maintenance of violence through its representation persist—as Macías (2013) maintained, there is no innocent ground on which to stand while representing violence. However, Macías’s (2012) theory of relational reading, reading that interrogates the process of contextualized subject formation within the reading of the text, in connection with Foucault’s “practices of freedom informed by reflection,” indicates a starting point in deconstructing the work that re-telling does in representation (Foucault, 1982, p. 284). In other words, a reader (and/or one who re-tells another’s violence) might in part resist or trouble their culpability in the reproduction of this violence by maintaining a contextualized reflexivity, one that considers the aims and results of representation as they are connected with subject formation in dominant paradigms in order to enact the inverse. In the next section of this paper I attempt Macías’s (2012) “ethics that unravels and troubles processes of subject formation being negotiated through reading” in my own re-telling of the story in order to analyze how “power and knowledge regimes influence what happens in reader–text [and writer–text] relationships” (p. 1). I attempt this while working within Razack’s (2007) argument on the productive power of “stealing the pain of others.”

Razack (2007) argued that we consume representations of violence in order to produce and maintain ourselves as those either unimplicated or valorized in situations of violence. She maintained that these productions rely on “stealing the pain of others,” by dehumanizing victims of violence through representations of violence. She argued that making the pain of others our own supplants their experiences via our participation in a pleasurable spectaclizing and objectifying process, “obscuring our own participation in the violence that is done to them” while producing ourselves diametrically as humanitarian (p. 376). While Razack focused her argument on representations of the genocide in Rwanda, I apply her theoretical framework to demonstrate the critical reflexive relationship with text (as outlined by Macías, 2012) in order to reveal how my re-telling of another woman’s experience of violence produced a dominant version of social work professionalism.

The way I produce myself against the woman whose experience I re-tell is underpinned by my ability to construct myself as a professional and not as someone who has experienced male violence. In order to perform dominant professional and construct the Other as the helped against my helper role, I deny fluidities in, and intersections among, the identities of both client and worker. Frye (1992) identified a rigidly bounded production of subjectivity as key to maintaining stratification among women through racialization. Frye’s work is also salient in an analysis of how

professionalized (and often classed and raced) hierarchical relationships are maintained in social work among women who have experiences of male violence in common, but who are differently located in professionalized helping relationships. The rigid representational division between the professionalized (and experientially effaced) worker and the (wholly experientially embodied) client produces the worker and client diametrically. The client is represented paradoxically as one who is solely experiential yet non-agentic, awaiting the agency of the worker as one who knows and whose professionalized knowledge production further distances her from her experiential knowledges as a woman who has resisted violence. This simultaneously undermines and conceals the worker's experiential knowledges and skills by privileging many reductive and dominantly intellectualized forms of theory and practice, while also discounting the experiential skills of the client by marginalizing experiential knowledge as limited to a trivialized embodied experience that is constructed as lacking a professionalized intellectualism. The dominant construction of professionalism utilizes the notion of knowledge as flowing *either* from an intellectual *or* from an embodied space to normalize and maintain a version of mind-body split that feminism has long recognized as gendered, raced, and classed. The dominant mind-body split in this case constructs stratified and differently valued knowledges between the helper and the helped. The use of split mind-body dominant construction is often buttressed by essentialized raced and classed discourses to produce a helper-helped binary.

These diametric representations maintain passive stereotypes of women who resist male violence, buttressing male violence from within the dominant social work discourse that purports to work against it. Essentialized conceptions of embodied knowledges conceal male violence by undermining the myriad ways women resist this violence through the binary construction of more obvious resistance as valid, against the construction of more passive resistance as acquiescence to violence. Passive resistance to violence is in fact a fluid and intertwined experiential and intellectual response to violence that demonstrates an acute awareness of safety, systemic inequity, and awareness of shifting contexts. The diametric professionalized production of workers and clients who share experiential knowledge of male violence problematizes our ability to form working relationships built on solidarity (Orme, 2002). Being able to acknowledge partially shared narratives as part of the supportive relationship might lead to a more critical re-telling (and documentation) of another's experience of violence by professionals.³

³ I return to this point in my conclusion. My argument for solidarity among women could be seen as reliant on a notion of "gender essentialism" (Heron, 2004). My analysis refutes gender essentialism by insisting on contextualized and situated multiple and dynamic locations for both worker and client from the recognition of *partially* shared narrative. It may be further argued that a simultaneous recognition of Other in and by both the worker and client may expand or reverse totalizing recognition of the Other by throwing the representation of Other and Same (Self) into question. This reversal perhaps exemplifies resistance within Foucault's notion of dividing practices, signaling how experiential agency can be used to foreground a more dynamic relationality.

Connecting Representational Violence to Material Violence

In my re-telling I rely on the production of professionalism to efface my own experience of violence, even as I “steal” the experience of violence that belongs to the woman with whom I worked, in order to produce myself as both professional and innocent of culpability in representational and material violence. For example, I produce myself as a victim of the violence she is enduring by appropriating her position as the victim of his violence when I write about being concerned for my own safety on campus. I use my concern for my own safety to marginalize her confidentiality and also to excuse this action, thus appropriating her pain by centring it as my own while simultaneously maintaining our subjectivities in opposition.⁴ I commit representational violence against her by re-telling a story that constructs her as “a damaged other as the main justification” for my intervention (Doezema, 2001, p. 17). In commenting on the work we did together, the times *I* appeared in court and the letters of support that *I* wrote, I produce myself as a proficient humanitarian against her as one who is deficient (dehumanized) and thus I conceal a structural analysis of domination that effaces her considerable agency in resisting the structural violence in which I am culpable (Dietz, 2000; Richardson, 2008).

In my version of her story her “pain can only come into existence at the expense of” her subjectivity (Razack, 2007, p. 377). I produce her as an agentless woman who is acted on by social services, police, and other (bad) disciplining technologies that I include in my story in order to facilitate my production of myself (in opposition to these agents) as a good social worker, one who is located outside of and not culpable in systemic domination. I efface her pain to centralize my subjectivity, providing details of her experience of his violence in order to produce myself as heroically ethically conflicted. However true it may be that her ex-partner used dangerous and violent behaviour, by mentioning the online and newspaper arrest reports, I use (and further) the normalization of surveillance to mitigate my culpability in my decision to reveal him as a perpetrator. In Moffatt’s (1999) analysis of panoptic surveillance he noted that “a central principle of panopticon is that power should itself be visible but at the same time unverifiable” (p. 225). I use professionalized gaze and institutional power *dispositifs* to objectify him simultaneously as both hyper-corporeal and incorporeal violence that is a danger to me and necessitates my marginalization of her confidentiality. I use representational violence by constructing the disembodied spectre (incorporeality) of his violence in the arrest reports as well as inversely producing it as unavoidably near to me (hyper-corporeal) in order to construct my choice to potentially reveal him as a perpetrator (and thus her as a victim) as necessary.

⁴ My diametric construction of *either* my personal safety *or* her confidentiality is taken up in the following pages. While I foreground how my marginalization of her confidentiality facilitates centring my own pain, I acknowledge that my deconstruction of how I considered confidentiality in fact relies on a polarized construction of helper–helped that I take up in my discussion of agentic being later in the paper.

Razack (2007) explained Hartman's notion of "'disembodied universality' as a moral subject who is not of the landscape he is surveying" (p. 378). In my re-telling of the story I critique the for-profit social service systems, concealing my culpability and participation in this system (as well as half of my dual Canadian/U.S. citizenship) by re-telling to a Canadian audience. I aim to convince this audience that I am a moral subject of another (better) Canadian landscape. This conceals the inequities of the Canadian social service system and produces its victims as more fortunate.

As a disembodied universal subject in my re-telling, I remove myself from having experienced male violence while producing the woman with whom I worked as "a sentimental resource," a representation that allows me to take pleasure in my production as the capable helper (Razack, 2007). In the case of my history, her production as a "sentimental resource" allows me to sentimentalize, trivialize, and so locate in a very distant and inconsequential past my own experiences with male violence, thus facilitating the effacement of a production that would not serve my representation of myself as a dominantly located professional. While I often insist that experiential knowledge is invaluable in working alongside women resisting violence, my re-telling of this story indicates that I am maintaining an inverse ideology, one that preserves stratification between those who experience violence and those who appear to *know better* than to experience violence. I violate my own epistemology as a feminist and as a woman who has resisted male violence by producing myself against other women who experience male violence. In my re-telling I am outraged that she has been produced as her daughter's abuser, yet it is a short step to suggest that by concealing my own experience of systemic violence in order to represent myself as a certain type of professional, that I am producing other women who resist male violence as deficient and therefore in some way as culpable in their victimization—a dominant discourse that my practice philosophy actively works against. Brookfield (2009) noted that dominant ideology often foregrounds "assumptions and practices that seem to make our lives easier but that actually end up working against our own best long-term interests—in other words, those that are hegemonic" (p. 299). Representational violence plays a key role in both producing and maintaining dominant ideologies.

In my re-telling I contend that I was attempting to exercise good social justice ethics in refusing to use professionalized power by asking the woman to sign a consent that would allow me to speak openly with my supervisor. I write that I thought she would feel pressured to sign a release. While I insist that this indicates that I am practising social justice, my assumption regarding how she might experience this request removes her agency while maintaining us in the power differential that I was ostensibly responding against. Further, by using the professionalized power of policy to go around her consent, I depended on a paradox of normalizing social work discourse that both evacuated her subjectivity and appeared to render "effect without force" (Epstein, 1999, p. 8). I evacuate her agency in a double sense here: through my actions as described above and through representation in my re-telling of the story. I write that I did not want to make her feel like she needed to reveal herself as a victim in order to save me from potential

violence. However, in representing her (assumed) response as one who would prioritize her confidentiality, I rely on dominant constructions of social work policy to remove her agency by negating her as a reciprocal being, as one who might care for me (Mullin, 2011). I represent myself as one who helps against her as one who needs help and cannot help. I vilify her in my intimation that her (assumed) attitude is putting me in harm's way, though I also prioritize a narrowly defined version of the confidentiality policy as of primary importance, trapping her in between two (wrong and assumed) 'choices.' I advance this dominant narrative on a construction of myself as *benevolently* prioritizing her (assumed/produced) feelings and actions ahead of my needs for safety.

Ahmed (2000) noted how a textual encounter can re-produce violence through a totalizing recognition of the subject. The encounter I describe carried historical, professional, and personal contexts from which I diametrically recognized her and totalized her difference. The story I re-tell becomes another layer of representational violence that always already recognizes and so again reproduces subjects in their reductive totality (Ahmed, 2000, 156). Ahmed (2000) introduced the concept of "commodity fetishism" to explain how an Other is separated from their contextual being in order that the Self is able to advance their narrative over the Other, to inscribe an active being on the body of the Other who is constructed as passive (p. 150). In my re-telling of the story it is important, too, that while I maintain the context of the dominant professional, I must also become unmoored from a personal and political historical context.

Razack (2007) called attention to how "understanding ourselves outside of history" facilitates an effacement of our culpability in material and representational violence (p. 380). Decontextualization of the self underpins the construction of a space of innocence, ironically a space that depends on the combination of material and representational violence that is sanitized through epistemic violence—through relying on dominant discourses of social work benevolence to naturalize and personalize what counts as truth. For example: My re-telling of how I was immobilized by policy works to remove me from culpability and participation in contexts of neo-liberal policy. I practise policy even as I contend that I am constrained by it. In my re-telling I shift the violence of policy as it impacts her to foreground how it constrains me. I do this in order to take contextual advantage of policy while I simultaneously locate myself as outside of and victim to this policy-bounded context. By indicating that confidentiality policies must be respected, I utilize neo-liberal managerialism to efface and limit a more dynamic consideration of the ethics of encounter, power, and dominance (Green, 2009). I situate myself at once as removed from the site of policy (as its victim), using the context of professionalism to conceal my culpability while upholding the idea that professionals merely have to follow policy in order to demonstrate "good ethics" (and innocence). In representing policy at an individual level, my re-told story conceals (and so maintains) the systemic inequity produced by policies at the macro level. My micro representation of policy in fact depends on discourses of paternalism that are interlocked in micro and macro representations of (and through) policy but that are

more obviously inequitable at the systemic level. I rely on policy to produce myself as caring on the micro level, concealing a macro level analysis of how policy is able to produce paternalism that is dependent on the construction of clients as deficient as a valid (and caring) representation of the helping profession.

Through my re-telling of this story I come to know myself as transformed through the pain of the woman I worked alongside while remaining blameless in it (Razack, 2007). I make her suffering my own, I steal her story of marginality to centre myself as a benevolent professional and my goodness then becomes descriptive of social work's goodness. I attempt to bring the benevolent Canadian social work reader along with me to verify my re-telling and so my subjectivity. In my re-telling I am the decontextualized/hyper-contextualized heroine of a story written on the woman with whom I worked (Razack, 2007).

Considering Contexts

All of my representational and material violence includes and relies on various forms of decontextualization (Coates & Wade, 2007). Context then becomes central in charting potential ethical solutions and outcomes. To address totalizing representation, Ahmed (2000) argued that “something giving in the very encounter between a ‘me’ and a ‘you,’ begins only with a recognition of the debts that are already accrued and which assimilate bodies, already recognized as strange or familiar, into economies of difference” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 154). Ahmed's recognition of the central role of political and historical context in ethical encounters was picked up in Rossiter's (2011) notion of “unsettled practice,” a “commitment to struggle with the vast historical legacy to totality—it is a commitment to a struggle that requires constant judgments of the conflicts between ethics and justice” (p. 995). Unsettled practice calls for a recognition of the need for contextualized representation in order to do justice that is at the same time vigilant and critically engaged with sites of representation. Rossiter's (2011) insistence on doing unsettled practice on this “razor's edge” between representation and justice centralizes the importance of remaining alert to how “knowledge claims” facilitate the totalizing violence of representing the Other (p. 981).

Representing the violence another has experienced through the act of critically re-telling that violence, while never an innocent act, may articulate resistance and inform representations that lead to social justice responses. Rossiter's (2011) unsettled practice on the razor's edge between representation and justice underpins the awareness required to re-tell resistance.

Practising Solidarity and Dignity to Do Unsettled Representation

Following the work of Coates and Wade (2007), Richardson (2008), and Richardson and Wade (2009), I argue that centring a critical re-telling of resistance informed by unsettled practice might create space for a wider spectrum of (unconfined) representation that centres justice through the restoration of dignity. Richardson (2008) and Richardson and Wade (2009) identified dominant knowledge production as reliant on binaries. Binary knowledges depend on identifying

normative against abnormal (Chambon, 1999). If unsettled practice takes as its centre the understanding that resistance is articulated on a fluid spectrum and not in recognizable binaries, then unsettled critical re-telling of resistance (and dignity) might become a way in which to resist the violence and totality of representation. As Curran (2010) wrote, “transformation ... depends upon alternative relations” (p. 821). That dominant representational violence is lasting does not signal that it is entirely unavoidable.

What might a more critical unsettled practice of representation contribute to possibilities of ethical social work? The act of storytelling itself may be resignified to resist totalizing: “A narrative is never concluded, it is always subject to reconstruction and reinterpretation” (Hyden, in Fraser, 2004, p. 196). If a worker and client share experiential knowledges of male violence, and if unsettled practice resists binary representation by suggesting that there are contextualized and dynamic locations for both worker and client from the recognition of *partially* shared narratives, then it opens the possibility that the client and worker might simultaneously acknowledge the changeable identities of one another and that this acknowledgement might replace totalized recognition of either. This unsettled recognition opens space to consider the centrality of context, affirm spectral identity, and confirm the validity of diverse knowledge production. This may subvert totalizing recognition of the Other by throwing the representation of Other and Self into question. It seems that this reversal exemplifies resistance from within Foucault’s notion of dividing practices, supporting fluid and incomplete recognition as springing from what Anzaldúa (1987) termed the *borderland*, the “margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity” (preface). This type of unsettled practice may allow the participation in “relationships of resistance in which power is exercised with others to challenge oppression and inequity through acts of solidarity to a common cause” without essentializing relationships or representations (Swigonski & Raheim, 2011, p. 16).

Unsettled Story: A Methodology of Inconclusive Conclusion

Representing the violence another has resisted by centring dignity and solidarity that unsettles binary representation is a challenge to do justice. In this paper I examined the story I re-told in order to reveal how I used my social location to perform a dominant version of professionalism that concealed my experiential knowledges and in that process maintained binary representations of helped and helper. While this was an important first step for me, the work of unsettling narrow and dominant representations in my re-telling relied on collaborating with the woman whose story I retold.

We met several times and she reviewed this paper. She wrote the foreword and gave me her permission to submit the paper to this journal and for it to be published. She offered me editorial advice throughout—a conversation in which she pointed out her spectral and fluid resistance to violence, unsettling my re-telling by centring her dignity. As we spoke, I recognized her sites of resistance to intimate partner violence through recalling my own. We spoke about how a shared solidarity supported us to

recognize one another's work to resist violence. We considered how our mutual recognition of one another's resistance to violence could disrupt our totalizing recognition of one another by foregrounding context—how we were each diversely represented by systemic dominance. We worked on creating a solidarity that reduced neither of us, but that expanded the discourse to an analysis of how binary performative social work professionalism at times has much more to do with maintaining dominant identities than it has to do with dignity. We discussed how differently we were represented in dominant systems and how our access to diverse strata of systemic inequality allowed me to conceal my experience with intimate partner violence, while it (and its facilitators—notably myself) had forcibly compelled her to disclose her experience and then had used these narratives to represent her in unjust ways that concealed her resistance to violence. We discussed how the difference in equity we experienced informed and maintained how we were considered to be dominantly *known* and how intimately that linked to our abilities (sometimes perceived and sometimes material) to maintain and have our dignity acknowledged. In part, my ability to conceal my own experience of intimate partner violence still allowed me to experience these private conversations we shared as a relief, it allowed me access to represent myself as a “good” social worker and so resettled some of dominance we had worked to disrupt. Addressing my recuperation of dichotomous representation called for further unsettling.

A part of my work in continually unsettling how I have dominantly represented myself through performative professionalism means standing in a solidarity that is experientially bound. For me this meant re-examining and revisiting how I concealed my experience of intimate partner violence in another part of my re-telling of the story. I did not initially want to submit this paper to be considered for publication, in part because it meant revealing my own experience of intimate partner violence, which is a personal and professionalized challenge. By not disclosing my own history I could resist being essentially and limitedly represented—but only so if I believed (and so maintained) a dominant representation of professionalism that, while privileged, is also totalized. In this paper my theory works at disrupting dominant notions of a professionalized, specifically non-experiential representation of myself, and at expanding representations of professional knowledge production. However, my initial apprehension of practising a theory of unsettling representations of dominant professionalization by refusing to reveal my own experience with violence describes a privileged trepidation.

The story that I have not told up to this point and did not include in my re-telling of the story has to do with initially meeting with my supervisor at the university. Practising and performing the dominant and narrow idea of professionalism, I initially omitted part of this story in order to conceal my own experiential knowledges of intimate partner violence from my supervisor during the discussion I recount in my re-telling. Practising the unsettling methodology I propose necessarily includes a recounting of this story. This is that story: After gaining the permission of the woman whose story I centre in this paper, I sought the advice of my supervisor. I wanted to ensure that my paper did not contravene FERPA. Initially

I did not offer to let my supervisor read this paper, even though I had the permission of the woman with whom I worked to do so, and even though my supervisor significantly supported me in this work in ways that inspired the unsettling of representations. After speaking with the woman with whom I worked about unjustly situated disclosure and building solidarity, I chose to ask my supervisor to read this paper. Her support further solidified the idea that disrupting dominant representations of professionalism in helper–helped relationships foregrounds social justice responses and practices of dignity.

Research and Unsettled Storytelling

Representational violence is ubiquitous. It is this very characteristic that makes using unsettled forms of social work practice so transferable to other sites of justice-doing. As I recount at the onset of this paper, representational violence in the service of constructing the Self against Other is not limited to social work practice and is being challenged in the realm of social science research that transgresses dominance. Rossiter's (1999) notion that justice requires representation is certainly central to social justice-based research. Social science research depends on producing knowledge through representation, from identifying participants to data collection and from the coding of data to the presentation of stories. Using theories of representational violence to examine material sites that are sanitized through the dominant construction of professionalization and notions of research neutrality has the ability to popularize and create unsettled forms of research that resist the violence of totalizing representation in order to do justice.

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