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TELLING "MY STORY":

REVISITING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

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Although arguments about the personal essay in the writing classroom have been taking place since before composition studies even existed as an academic field, I think that in light of a renewed interest in autobiographical writing in the academy and in popular culture, it is important to take another look at this type of writing. Writing about the self in the form of the often-assigned autobiographical essay is controlled by the expectations of the self in the economy of the university, and students willingly and sometimes even forcefully engage in the type of writing that represents the self as disembodied, coherent, and stable. Students often use autobiographical writing assignments to repeat "my story," a safe and linear narrative that is validated in the composition classroom and in mainstream culture because it replicates the self as a knowable and unified object. A poststructural approach to the autobiographical essay assignment can move students and their writing beyond these problematic, if comfortable, confines and help them explore their lives in writing that is more rhetorically rich and complex.

In *Fragments of Rationality*, Lester Faigley argues that the postmodern subject "is the locus of overlapping and competing discourses, it is a temporary stitching together of a series of often contradictory subject positions" (9). This "patchwork" self has many implications for the writing classroom. Writing teachers cannot assume that a writer has the capability or desire to produce a stable, coherent self. In fact, as Faigley argues, composition studies as a discipline is not willing to let go of this notion of the unified student self:

Where composition studies has proven least receptive to postmodern theory is in surrendering its belief in the writer as an autonomous self, even at a time when extensive group collaboration is practiced in many writing classrooms. Since the beginning of the late nineteenth century, college writing teachers have been heavily

invested in the stability of the self and the attendant beliefs that writing can be a means of self-discovery and intellectual self-realization. (15)

Certainly, most students do not protest valuing this version of the self. If many of our students either are members of the middle class or strongly identify with current depictions of the middle class, they have too much at stake to easily abandon a unified, whole self. The instability of the postmodern world threatens the middle-class identity and the proposed exclusivity that comes with that identification. Therefore, asking or requiring our students to accept this instability is asking them to abandon the notion of knowing the self and who they are in the world. It is also dangerous for composition studies, because abandoning the unified writing self necessarily means challenging university ideologies, which seek to produce a certain kind of worker for a certain kind of workplace. If you challenge the very system of which you are part, the consequences, such as reduced funding and loss of credibility, can be severe.

In *Fleshly Writing*, Jennifer Bay discusses the way in which the student writer and composition studies work in what she calls the “restricted economy” of the university. She argues,

The subject produces writing that is exchanged for the cultural capital of a university education, while composition studies exchanges the pedagogy on which that writing is based for status in the university. Furthermore, university degrees are bestowed in exchange for the production of certain types of citizen-subjects who will better serve the society at large. (84)

Therefore, the postmodern self is not only devalued in the current university system, it is also often rejected within composition studies. If we are to truly meet the needs of our students as writers, readers, and thinkers, then we must be willing to redefine the ways in which they are inscribed in and by composition studies.

Telling “My Story”

Writing about my own life has caused me a great deal of confusion and frustration, but until very recently I could not quite grasp the source of this anxiety. Writing about my life always involved an almost automatic return to the same narrative. In brief, when I was seventeen, my now ex-husband murdered our three-month-old daughter and went to prison. This narrative, which I came to call “my story,” seemed to weave its way into every attempt I made to write about my life. It often canceled out and overwrote other stories of my life. I was perplexed why “my story” kept coming back in every piece of life writing I attempted.

I first told “my story” as the final exam essay in my first-year college English class. The assignment, to write about a big event that changed my life, seemed perfect for “my story.” My purpose, then, was to tell someone about it, to raise it up, not as an emblem of martyrdom, but as an attempt to fit this story, this anecdote, within the rest of my life. Written in the classroom. Timed. Dictionary allowed. Pencils only. The words rippled out of my body and onto the page. I was scared, wondering what the teacher would think of me, but not so scared that I could not tell “my story.” After all, I knew that I would not see the teacher again until the next school year.

We had the option of turning in a self-addressed, stamped envelope with our final essay so that it could be returned to us, graded, over the summer. What did I want my writing teacher to say to me in response to “my story?” Did I want her pity? Did I want her to congratulate me for having overcome adversity? I know that I wanted a response. Her comments were kind. She noted that, indeed, this was a tragedy and that she thought it was great that I had overcome such an event and enrolled in college. She also encouraged me to become an

English major if I wasn't one already.

For the first time, “my story” had value, and I had told it well enough to prompt an English professor, someone who held the very position I desperately wanted to occupy, to encourage me to become an English major. In one paragraph, she validated my version of “my story” and therefore validated my life and my writing. Why would I want to revise any of that? After that, I told “my story” the same way to anyone who would listen, constantly seeking sympathy and understanding. I think I was also attempting to raise my credibility. In many ways, I felt that I did not belong in college. No one in my large Appalachian family had ever even visited a college campus, let alone attended classes there. I kept thinking that I would be found out, labeled a fraud. I guess I figured that the stronger I made “my story,” the stronger my ethos would be.

By the time I entered graduate school, “my story” was clearly commodified, neatly packaged, and tucked away. I stopped writing about it, and I would only tell it to the right person at the right time. Once I felt that I was getting to know someone, becoming a friend, I felt like I *should* tell “my story.” But why? Other bad things had happened to me in my life: as a newborn I lived in an abandoned church in West Virginia, my stepfather used to beat me, I ran away from home to find my biological father. Surely these events were also traumatic.

Now, I realize that perhaps I felt compelled to tell my story because it had become “my story.” It was lifted out of my life, not a part of my life but apart from my life, bound by the ways in which it was lauded. “My story” had become static and flat, and I knew all too well its social and cultural worth.

My confusion about my own need to return over and over to this one story made me think in new ways about my students, who often turn in very flat, very linear, and very boring first drafts of personal essays. Most of them, I realized, had their own versions of “my story,” and I became interested in finding out, for them and for me, why this type of writing keeps reappearing. My research led me to a two-pronged conclusion: they, we, were writing about our lives in a way that was at some point validated by a teacher, a respected authority figure, and/or popular culture, and the subject positions that we were creating in these pieces of writing were ones that were expected by teachers, the university, and mainstream society.

Before I begin my discussion of these two issues, I want to make clear that I am not dismissing the importance of writing about personal experience for the sake of telling the story that you have to tell. Especially for women and members of minority groups whose experiences have been ignored and marginalized, being able to simply write down what happened to them has been and will remain a vital strategy. I know that telling “my story” to anyone who would listen without moral judgment and, yes, with sympathy was crucial in enabling me to deal with this major, traumatic event and move on with my life. I think that simply listening to our students is important. Yet my job is to help students become better writers. I don't think that allowing them to continue to replicate the same story in the same way in the composition classroom and in the university is helping them accomplish that goal. I am not advocating the complete removal of “my story” from the writing classroom, but rather, as I will discuss later in this essay, a critical approach to “my story.”

Although I no longer give writing prompts as nebulous as “Describe an event in your life that shaped who you are today,” I know that many teachers still do. For example, the most recent edition of *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, “the most successful college rhetoric published in more than a decade,” divides autobiographical writing and exploratory writing, making it clear that these two types of writing are always separate (*Allyn and Bacon Online*). Ramage, Bean, and Johnson's “plot ideas” include writing about a “situation in which your normal assumptions about life were challenged,” a “time when you left your family for an extended period or forever,” and a “time that plunged you into crisis” (170).

These types of prompts, as Michelle Payne discusses in *Bodily Discourses*, often elicit a broad spectrum of personal essays, many of them, especially from women, dealing with bodily violence, such as rape, physical abuse, and eating disorders. These essays, and I have, in the past, received many of them, can be generally described as formulaic, linear, and conclusive. For example, what Joan Jacobs Brumberg calls the “typical anorexic essay” follows a fairly rigid outline, dictated by after-school movies and adolescent fiction: the event

that prompted the writer to start controlling her food intake (e.g., not being able to fit into an old pair of jeans, reading an article about anorexia in a magazine), the way that she concealed her behavior (e.g., hiding food in napkins or rearranging food on her plate), how this behavior changed her relationship with others (e.g., avoiding eating with family and friends, lying about food intake), how her body changed and the way others reacted to those changes (e.g., suddenly visible ribs and compliments from other girls), how her problem was discovered and by whom (e.g., her mother finds bags of food in her bedroom trash can), and how she recovered from the eating disorder (e.g., through psychotherapy or hospitalization).

Despite the close similarity between these student essays and popular narratives of anorexia, Payne argues that they “do not appear in writing classrooms only because Rikki Lake, *The National Enquirer*, and group therapy have made such experiences sensational, good voyeuristic fodder, or signs of pathology” (116). I agree that the popular interpretation of the anorexic adolescent is not the only motivation for writing these formulaic essays. The “typical anorexic essay” continues to be written because it is a safe representation of the disordered self. As Payne notes, “these stories stop short of depicting the graphic realities of the disorder” (62). Instead, these essays simply replicate the student subjectivity, controlled, unified, whole, expected of writing teachers and the university.

The responsibility for the production of these types of narratives does not lie solely, or even mainly, with the teacher. Many students, especially ones who have lived through traumatic life experiences, use the personal essay to construct a coherent, safe narrative of the self. I know I did. In an academic situation where students often feel isolated, abandoned, and insecure, being able to represent a controlled version of the self is important to them. In fact, as Payne's research reveals, “many students seemed to desire the normalizing functions of college writing” (117). She argues that preconceived notions of college as impersonal and objective allow students to write about their disordered bodies and socially unacceptable lives.

Yet, as Ursula Kelly argues, this kind of life writing does not make for good writing, nor does it even, if we choose to see writing as therapeutic, allow students to feel better about who they are. Instead, they create a representation of their selves that is without conflict. They are cured or, from a writing perspective, conclusive. One of the problems with validating this narrative is that “to tell one story is to silence others; to present one version of the self is to withhold other versions of the self” (Kelly 51). Madeleine Grumet also argues that this kind of personal essay becomes problematic: “when there is one story, it becomes *the* story, *my* story” (76). Obviously, it is not possible or even desirable to explore all or many subjectivities in one essay or even in a lifetime because the self is always in flux, but replicating “my story” necessarily others the parts of the self that cannot tidily fit into this narrative. In the case of the typical anorexia narrative, the part of the woman that still craves all-day exercise sessions and cannot stand the sight of certain foods does not fit into this neat picture of a sick girl who became healthy.

Beyond “My Story”

When given an assignment to write the traditional personal essay, students work hard at producing a linear, coherent narrative of a major life event. Most of these narratives are not only mediocre pieces of writing, but they also prohibit the student from seeing himself or herself as an active subject who participated in the events of “my story.” In addition, “my story” is often disembodied. In order to conform to the standards of university-sanctioned subjectivities—well-behaved, goal-oriented, middle-class—students necessarily have to edit out essential aspects of the self from their telling of life experience.

In the postmodern culture in which we live, identities are said to be fragmented and often contradictory. For example, according to the rhetoric of femininity, women must be rail thin, yet still able to bear children, which is not easily done without a certain amount of body fat. In light of this view of multiple and conflicting subjectivities, Lester Faigley argues that assigning the personal essay in the composition classroom is not only useless, but

harmful: “suppressing contradictions to achieve coherence involves more than training students for a future in corporate America or shaping students as rational subjects. . . . [T]he practice of making contradictions coherent has a great deal to do with the power a writing teacher exercises in the classroom” (13–34). By requiring students to write a personal essay that forces them to make a certain kind of sense of their experiences, writing teachers are simply domesticating student subjectivity in the ways that are acceptable to the composition classroom and university. Faigley asserts:

A primary means of that domestication . . . is the preservation of the belief that the student writer is a rational, autonomous individual. This belief is maintained by a fiction of textual coherence. The student writer's skill in representing his or her life experience as complete and noncontradictory is taken as confirmation that the rational subjectivity of the author is identical to the autonomous individual. (225)

Part of the problem with this domestication is that students never move beyond “textual coherence.” *If* one of the goals of our writing classrooms is to help students critically interrogate the world in which they live and their places in it, then continuing to assign the standard “describe an event in your life that has made you who you are today” personal essay and expecting or accepting linear, nonreflexive, conclusive narratives simply confines students in the same subject positions they have always occupied while giving them the false impression of empowerment. Faigley uses Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation to discuss this issue further. Althusser, according to Faigley, asserts that “the discourses of ideology ‘interpellate’ human beings by offering them an array of subject positions in which people recognize themselves and assume themselves to be the authors of those positions” (139). In the case of the typical anorexic narrative, the student recognizes herself in the predominant subject position of the typical anorexic and eagerly reads and writes her experiences with the disorder into the already established form of that subject position. Further, Faigley adds, “People are *subjected* to dominant ideologies, but because they recognize themselves in the subject positions that discourses provide, they believe that they are *subjects* of their own actions” (emphasis his, 139). In other words, students do not realize that their story, “my story,” is shaped and in many ways controlled by dominant ideology. “They fail to see,” writes Faigley, “that the subject positions they occupy are not their own constructions but are historically produced” (139).

If there are so many deficiencies with the personal essay, then why teach it at all? Shouldn't we just abandon it altogether? After all, we could teach many other genres, right? I continue to teach the personal essay because, handled the right way, it continues to do its job. Along with other genres I might teach during a term, the personal essay provides students with an opportunity not only to tell their stories in a new way, but to interrogate their subject positions and their culture. It gives students the chance to see themselves as potentially active participants in their education and in the creation of their world. It provides an opportunity for change.

If we understand and can help our students understand the ways in which ideology functions in their lives, we can help them understand the ways in which they are interpellated (not an easy task) and how they can resist that interpellation by writing critical, reflective personal essays. This project does not mean silencing student stories nor negating the power of experience, but rather offering students the means to reenvision their stories and their subjectivities as sites of resistance. Ursula Kelly offers a possibility for this type of resistance by looking at the autobiographical essay through a poststructural lens. The “poststructural auto/biography” is intertextual and intersubjective. In other words, it requires students to interrogate textual and subject production and to create a piece of writing that is aware, that is “beyond clichés of nature, essence and universality” (Kelly 49).

For Kelly, this project necessarily involves “seizing the importance of re-presenting and re-writing our selves as we reconstruct our visions of world communities [which] entails deconstructing the stories we tell (of) ourselves and the desires that inform them” (49). Admittedly, most experienced writers would have difficulty deconstructing

their own narratives, but if one of our main objectives is to help students become better writers, then we must help them do just that. Angela McRobbie discusses the power in this way of writing about the self:

It is not so much a question of what is left behind, what fragments of the disassembled self can be picked up and put together again, but rather how might the continual process of putting oneself together be transformed to produce the empowerment of subordinate groups and social categories. This might mean living with fragmentation, with the reality of inventing the self rather than endlessly searching for the self. (72)

In other words, rather than having students constantly search for ways of organizing the fragments of self to fit into an already existing, formulaic narrative or subjectivity, we can prompt them to live with contradiction and fragmentation as a form of inventing the self. By encouraging students to resist writing the typical anorexic narrative, we are encouraging them to reexamine their subjectivities.

All of this is risky, of course. As with the project of femininity, students who elect to break out of these preconceived subject positions may feel that their worlds have been turned upside down. This can especially be true for minority students who come to college with the intention of fitting in and passing. Asking them to critically examine their perhaps hard-won, normalized narratives is asking them to risk being further marginalized. Yet allowing them to continue to maintain this “fictional textual coherence” is not helping them become better writers or better thinkers. Part of the problem with “my story” is that it is often a function of this hegemony of the dominant cultural narrative. In the absence of reflexivity, the master-narrative easily and frequently influences and even controls the ways in which writers write about their lives.

Assigning Poststructural Autobiographical Essays

Given that most students are unfamiliar with poststructural personal essays, giving student concrete examples of what this type of writing might look like is essential. I begin this assignment by introducing students to a number of personal essays in a variety of styles written by a variety of authors. I generally include writing by Nancy Mairs, Leonard Kriegel, David Lazar, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Victor Villanueva, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis. Most students enjoy and are challenged by these authors and come to understand the many possibilities that this genre offers. We carefully analyze each piece rhetorically, exploring the form of the text, the author's credibility, and the effects of the text on readers. We also discuss other approaches the author might have used to discuss the same ideas. For example, in a discussion about an excerpt from Lucy Grealy's *Autobiography of a Face*, a memoir about Grealy's struggle with a cancer-related facial deformity, students wondered why she did not spend more time talking about her feelings toward her twin sister, who did not have to deal with the same body crisis. Surely, they speculated, it had to be difficult for Grealy to see a similar, yet whole, face reflected back at her each time she looked at her sister.

I generally end the sample readings with a selection of texts that focus on the same event or issue. The texts come from a variety of publications and demonstrate the potential that writers have when choosing to write. One powerful set of texts explores breast cancer. While all four of the writers in the collection write from the position of a woman who is currently living with or has recently recovered from breast cancer, each woman uses the multiple possibilities of the genre to explore her own lived experience with the disease. A selection from *Glamour* magazine offers the typical features that most readers expect in a survivor narrative: finding the lump, getting diagnosed, going through chemotherapy, going bald, and being cured. The other three selections, however, offer more complex versions of a similar life event. Julianne Buescher, for example, describes all these moments as well, but her humor and candor prompt readers to perhaps reconsider what it might be like to be a third-generation breast cancer survivor. Incorporating conversations with her grandmother and mother,

Buescher interrogates the typical, and expected, views that popular culture presents of women living with the disease.

As most writing teachers know, however, no matter how many examples students are given, they still have a great deal of trouble developing their own ideas and understanding how to apply the techniques employed by other writers in their own writing. Prompts and prewriting activities become vital in this stage of the process. Rather than asking students to simply write a personal essay, I give them carefully constructed prompts that will encourage them to explore terrain that they may have otherwise overlooked. In fact, many students think that they have nothing to write about because their lives have been unremarkable. Unfortunately, most of the hesitation arises out of the sensational storytelling that is so prevalent in popular culture. Therefore, students must be taught to re-see their own lives before they can begin to search for an exigence for writing.

Borrowing from recent, excellent creative nonfiction textbooks, such as B. Minh Nguyen and Porter Shreve's *Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*, Carolyn Forché and Philip Gerard's *Writing Creative Nonfiction*, and Janet Burroway's *Imaginative Writing*, I have created several prompts that encourage students to explore their lives and their writing in ways that perhaps college entrance or scholarship essays may not have allowed. Here are some of my students' favorite prompts:

Prompt 1: Choose a legendary family story that you want to investigate further. Interview a variety of family members, carefully transcribing each person's telling of the tale. Once you are finished, examine your relationship to the narrative. Were you there when the event occurred? Did it happen before you were born? What impact has the telling of this narrative had on you? What truths did you discover while listening to each family member's version? Were their versions markedly different from your own?

Prompt 2: Choose an event from your past for which you have a collection of photographs. Using only those photographs, not your own memories, write a short narrative of the event. Then interview another person who was present at that event. Write a short narrative based on the interview. Finally, reflect on your own memories and the differences between the two narratives. How are they the same? How are they different? What is being left out of each?

Prompt 3: Choose one of the bulleted topics below. Make a list of the “things” you've chosen. Then write a sentence or two about each item on your list. Then pick one word from your list and write your essay about it.

- Things about my body I want to change
- Things I love about my body
- Things inside my body
- Things about my body I hate
- Things people say about my body
- Things I wish people would say about my body

At first, students find this assignment daunting because it requires them to think critically and reflexively about their lives, but once they begin writing, they often find that they have more trouble finding a place to stop. As

with all other major writing projects I assign, students must engage in peer response, which is often illuminating. Students are frequently surprised at the interesting ways that their classmates have interpreted the prompts. For example, in response to prompt #2, one student incorporated excerpts from the interview and from her diary into her essay, disrupting what would probably have been a shallow, linear narrative of her senior prom. Instead, she created a rich, exploratory essay that investigated her memory of that night both the day after and a year later, as well as the memories of her best friend, the person she interviewed.

Evaluating Post-structural Autobiographical Essays

Beyond developing interesting and productive prompts, writing teachers often find evaluating personal essays, especially poststructural essays that do not resemble thesis-driven arguments, particularly challenging. The evaluation process is made even more difficult because some instructors feel emotionally bullied by the stories their students tell. As a colleague of mine once asked about his student's essay, "He told me his dad tried to murder him with a butcher knife. How can I possibly grade *that*? How can I assign a grade to his trauma?"

In "Seducing Composition," Michelle Ballif explores this difficulty by turning to what she calls "identity-disclosing pedagogies," "which suggest a return to the personal, as a locus of subjectivity while simultaneously focusing on the discursive formation and performance of that subjectivity, thereby avoiding the criticisms leveled at the self-expressivists of an earlier time" (77). Ballif focuses on Sherrie Gradin's disclosure in her book *Romancing Rhetorics* of being sexually molested as a child. "Although we can acknowledge Gradin's suffering," Ballif argues, "we cannot 'contend' with her narrative. Furthermore, such uncontestable pathos-loaded narratives often have the undesirable effect of rendering the suffering common, reducing it to a theoretical commonplace" (81). "My story" often functions in this way; many students seem to be aware, at least on some level, of that perceived "uncritiquability" of the narratives that they write. After all, many writing teachers wonder, how can anyone critique or grade an essay about being raped, beaten, starved, etc.? Ballif sees these narratives, these rhetorical moves, as a way of emotionally bullying readers into identifying with the writer: "The pathos of many issues is so loaded, historically and culturally, that it becomes impossible to disagree or negotiate. Pathos holds numerous trump cards; to play one is to end all contestation" (81).

What Ballif sees as a nonnegotiable text, however, I see as a rich pedagogical opportunity to teach students how their stories are constructed within and by the dominant cultural scripts and to point to the moments, the gaps, the fissures within their seemingly seamless narratives where they can move beyond the conscripted, flat, disembodied, expected texts to their own inconclusive, fragmented, embodied essays, their own hysterical transgressions. As Wendy Hesford writes, "Agency does not emerge from a clear space or a 'wild zone' outside of culture or language but is born out of the gaps within culturally dominant discourses and ideologies and their material elements" (202). In other words, it evolves from those rhetorical moments when the material, lived world collides, intersects, and punches a hole through expected, culturally sanctioned narratives.

Admittedly, grading personal essays can be as daunting as writing them, as many other writing instructors have argued. It is difficult to know how to respond to confessional narratives. On the one hand, some students use the assignment as an opportunity to "confess" traumatic events, like rape or abuse, while other students view the call to write as a venue to explore their own philosophies of life and living. Some students want their professors to respond directly to the events in their stories, as I believe I did when I confessed "my story" to my first-year writing teacher, but other students simply want feedback on their writing.

Jennifer Bay argues that we must not only listen to our students, but let them know that we have heard what they have to say (79). By simply indicating that we have heard them, we can then get on with the process of critiquing their writing. Writing students (and professional writers as well) often feel personally attached to their writing: the teacher's approval or disapproval of the writing seems to signal that the teacher likes or dislikes the student personally. Responding first to the content of the narrative and then to the form may alleviate some of the anguish that students feel about their teachers' commentary, especially if it points to many places that need

improvement.

Therefore, when evaluating poststructural personal narratives, I am quick to comment on the substance of the students' narratives, though I also look for the same aspects that I look for in most pieces of student writing: idea development, word choice, syntax. But I also look for the following elements that make student prose move beyond the confines of the linear narrative and into more reflexive essays: reflection, exigence, authorial credibility, form, intentional and accidental omissions, temporal gaps, and many other features that are hallmarks of this form of exploratory writing. Students are aware that I will be using these features to evaluate their essays because we develop the list together as we respond to the published essays. Through this process, students learn not only what is expected of them, but more importantly, what makes for well-written personal essays.

Kelly reminds us that this project of re-visioning is difficult for writers: "Auto/biography is unsettling work. . . . [I]t is unpacking the sediment layers of subjectivity through difficult questions, uncertain procedures, and irresolute findings" (62). Students want that conclusion. They want the control that "my story" offers them. Yet we must encourage our students to refuse to accept the conventions of a subgenre such as the typical anorexic essay as static and unchanging. Instead, as Kelly asserts, "Uncovering and investigating both the generic and social processes of this construction marks the beginnings of a politically useful knowledge, a conceptualized 'making strange' of what appears to be natural and universal—the self" (62–63). Making the self strange requires a great deal of work and courage on the part of the student and on the part of the teacher who must critique these presumably uncritiquable narratives, yet the potential for such re-visioning seems to trump the alternative of allowing "my story" to bully its writer into a narrow, disembodied understanding of the self.

Unlike "my story," which conforms to the acceptable conventions of university-sanctioned student subjectivity, reevaluating the autobiographical essay as a site of critically witnessing the self offers writers the opportunity to see their lives and identities as fluid, multiple, and changing, which may help them understand, as I eventually did, that we are not bound to our story. We can escape it. We can outgrow it.

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Return to the [Table of Contents](#)