

DROPPED INTO THE DEEP END: A STUDY OF PERSONAL  
JOURNALS IN FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION

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This study investigated the lived experiences of first-year college students who kept personal and private journals in an English composition course. The purpose of this study was to provide a description of the lived experiences of keeping those journals from the point-of-view of the journal writers themselves. Forty-eight students were involved in the journal writing assignment, of which thirteen participated in this study. The research question addressed in this study was *what do students experience when they keep a personal and private journal in the context of an English composition course?*

The literature about journals showed them to be adaptable to many different educational purposes and classroom contexts. Journals are employed across grade levels, across disciplines, and they are put to many different purposes. This study investigated student experiences with writing in journals in a composition course. The journals were unread by the instructor, and students decided what to write about.

The data collected in this study were primarily interviews that addressed participants' lived experiences with journal writing. Secondly, this study used the students' journals themselves. Analysis of the interviews revealed ten essential themes. Those ten themes provided the evidence used to describe student experiences with an unstructured journal writing assignment.

Participants found it difficult to adapt to the open-ended nature of the assignment. They saw the assignment as hard work. Some participants found that journal writing gave them much needed practice with writing, while others found journal writing to be a continuous practice that they kept going well after the course had ended. Most participants practiced reflection, metacognition, and critical thinking in an ongoing conversation with multiple *selves*. For others, writing in a journal had a therapeutic effect because it helped manage problems. Keeping a journal brought a strong sense of ownership of the journal. Participants described a dual experience of using the journal as a safe place to record personal thoughts, yet writing down those thoughts was a risk in that another person could read the journal.

Journal writing, for the participants of this study, was a complex activity that yielded many benefits as well as many frustrations. Once participants acclimated to the assignment, most found it to be a rewarding experience that yielded improved results not only in writing, but in coping with the problems of everyday living.

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## DEDICATION

To my daughters,  
Flannery Jane and Chloe Adeline.  
I love you.

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## PREFACE

I began writing in a journal at the age of seventeen when my friend Suzy gave me a copy of Bob Greene's *Be True to Your School* (1987). That book, which is the publication of the diary Greene kept during his senior year of high school, has stuck with me. My encounter with it was timely; I formed an instant connection to it when I was in the very same walk of life as Greene. Though the eras were different, Greene in the 1960s, and I in the 1990s, I found comfort and connection in reading about Greene's struggles with many of the same issues, the same worries, that I struggled with every day. Among those issues were girls, grades, social awkwardness, negative self-consciousness, and uncertainty about the future.

One reason I fell in love with that book is that, in addition to the big issues, Greene offered plenty of the mundane, and I loved how he recorded his seemingly trivial thoughts and ideas, such as the music he listened to, the movies he saw, the things he did at school, and his adventures with friends. Those details resonated with me; I understood something that my English teacher at the time, Betty Crane, liked to say: I realized that part of the richness of life could be found in the small things. Little details add up to something greater than the sum of their parts.

Greene exposed me to the literate life of a high school senior when I was a high school senior and just beginning to fashion a literate life of my own. He provided a blueprint for me to follow. He detailed his journal writing project, the goal of which was to write every day, no matter what. It was stunningly simple and straightforward. Write every day. Write something. It hardly matters if the journal entries seem interesting; it

certainly does not matter if they are sloppy, or undeveloped, or grammatically incorrect. All that matters is the writing.

Some of Greene's entries are factual and brief, while others are longer and more detailed. I was fascinated, and for the first time in my life, I felt an emotional connection, a relationship, to another person through his writing. I felt Greene's humanity.

Inspired, I committed myself to keeping a daily journal of my own. Every day of my senior year I wrote a journal entry before I went to bed. Journal writing became a habit, and since then I have kept a journal almost continuously, and as of this writing, my stack of filled journals reaches knee-high. I consider journal writing the cornerstone of my literate life. My journals are my constant companions.

I continue to write in a journal for myriad reasons, though if pressed I think two reasons stand above all others. First of all, I like the idea of recording for posterity, of writing something that has the potential to exist when my lifetime is over. I like to think that my journals could become family heirlooms, that one day my daughters will read them and perhaps hand them down to their children. My journals mark that I was here, that I lived.

Secondly, journal writing helps me in a therapeutic sense. Journal writing helps me understand my problems and worries and feel better about them; it helps me find solutions. I believe journal writing helps me know myself better, and I believe it helps me make better decisions.

In 2007, after a year-long hiatus from teaching that allowed me to focus exclusively on my doctoral coursework, my first daughter was born, and the need to bring in money compelled me to return to the classroom. I found myself in the composition

classroom as an adjunct instructor at a small, four-year college in Western Pennsylvania, eager to get back to teaching, eager to apply what I had learned after a year in IUP's doctoral program, eager to implement my new pedagogical outlook. I was in a decidedly experimental frame of mind.

As a teacher of composition, and as someone who keeps a personal journal and finds that journal writing enriches his life, I have long questioned the conventional/traditional view that writing in composition courses should be exclusively centered on academic discourse to the exclusion of personal writing. I have taught composition courses and wondered, is this all there is? Isn't there room for more? In addition to the specialized discourses of the academy, over time I envisioned a composition course that gives students experiences with personal expression, and to that end, I have assigned personal journals. This dissertation springs from those experiences.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

In the 2007-2008 school year, in the freshman composition courses I taught as an adjunct instructor at the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown (UPJ), I required my students to keep personal journals. This dissertation investigates the lived experiences of the first-year college students who kept those journals. Employing a phenomenological research method, this study seeks to provide a description of personal journal writing as experienced by the journal writers, my former students, this study's participants.

#### The Journal Assignment

As I designed the course in which I assigned personal journals, the course description left little space to negotiate an expansion beyond the traditional emphasis on academic writing and grammatical/mechanical correctness. *That is no small point.* I was an adjunct instructor, which meant that my opportunities to design the course were limited. My department head handed me a model syllabus which outlined the departmental requirements for the course, and I was expected to conform to those requirements. That makes the context of this study unique when compared to many other approaches to journal writing described in the literature. The courses in which personal journal writing was assigned, and which eventually became the context of this study, were thoroughly grounded in a model that emphasized academic writing and correctness. From the departmental syllabus:

In this course, students study and practice the essentials of essay writing, with an *emphasis on producing clear, correct prose.* This section will focus on the writing skills required to produce meaningful *academic prose*, especially informative

essays that use primary texts [emphasis added].

As an adjunct, I was bound to design my courses to fit the mold outlined above, so the more current-traditional composition course that emphasized correctness and academic discourse had to be the primary emphasis. But, as I read the syllabus, I noticed under the heading *Course Requirements* a journal writing activity worth 10% of the final grade. The syllabus did not specify how the journal should be used, so I focused my attention on the journal writing assignment as the best way to include personal writing in the course. That 10% of the course that was dedicated to journal writing would be our personal space. Students would keep a personal journal, a diary, a book of oneself, for oneself, in which the writer, and only the writer, decided what to write about. The idea was that since the bulk of the course was devoted to the academic discourse, especially that discourse employed for the production of research papers, of avoiding plagiarism with paraphrasing and direct quotation, I would reserve a small part of the course for students to just write for themselves without the pressures of audience, formality, and assessment. It was in that 10% of the course that students would practice personal writing. That 10% was a small space in the course for students to do something outside of the departmentally-required academic emphasis.

Once I made that decision, I developed the activity: In blank lined books, students would write about whatever they wanted to write about. I hoped the blank books, as opposed to a composition notebook or a three-ringed binder, would boost the authenticity of the journals and make them feel more like the genuine article (I'd always loved the substantial feel of bound blank book).

Journal entries were written during class and outside of class. In-class entries

were written once or twice a week, usually at the beginning of the period. In the interest of paying attention to space, I sought to minimize the pressure to treat the journal as an academic exercise. At the time, I believed that if students had some choices about where they could go to write in their journals, they would be more likely to treat the journal as a personal document. To that end, students were dismissed from the classroom for twenty minutes and instructed to find a place to write.

In addition to the in-class entries, students were required to write at least ten entries on their own, outside of class. I pledged to them that I would never read their journals. Assessment would be based solely on the number of entries, and it worked on an honor system. The students would do the counting of entries and report that number to me:

- 40-45 entries was an A.
- 35-39 entries was a B.
- 30-34 entries was a C.
- 25-29 entries was a D.
- 0-24 entries was an F.

On the first day of class, as I went over the journal writing assignment, I emphasized that the journal could be anything. I offered some ideas, such as writing to organize and plan, to reflect, to document things that were important to them, but I kept those remarks brief for fear of exerting too much influence. The entire concept was that the journals belonged to the student and the student alone. As the instructor, I wanted to butt out and have my students make the decisions. The only rule was that during journal writing time, they had to write. The only thing that mattered was that they were writing.



Otherwise, what they wrote about was up to them.

At the time, I thought it was best that they figure out how to use them without my interference. I thought the journal should be completely under their control, completely beyond my interference. I made it clear that if they needed help or guidance, my door was always open, but otherwise I was not going to interfere.

Here, it should be emphasized that this study was unplanned at the time of my making the journal writing assignment. The decision to conduct this study arose from an act of genuine questioning, of genuine wonderment, as I observed my students writing in their journals. I spent two semesters observing my students as they wrote. I enjoyed walking around the building, finding my students huddled here and there, (often around the radiators during the brutal Pennsylvania winter) writing. My division chair mentioned to me that as she walked into the building in the morning she took a special delight in seeing my students writing in their journals.

Occasionally, I engaged my students in conversation about their journals as they wrote, but that was rare. I thought it was best not to disturb them. But, sometimes I asked a student how he or she liked it, if he or she was finding things to write about, and from those conversations I felt the assignment was working. Most of the time, when I looked around, I saw my students writing.

Other times I would walk around a corner to find students joking and goofing. A seed of doubt was sewn. A minority of my students did not seem engaged at all, and I found that perplexing. The journal writing assignment offered freedom of choice, and I believed that the freedom to write whatever they wanted would be enough to engage practically everyone. When I caught my students goofing, I began to ask myself

questions. *Why do some students seem engaged, while others do not? How do they feel about it? What are they writing about? Is this activity even worth the class time we were spending on it? Does it have pedagogical value? What are my students experiencing?*

In retrospect, that questioning was the first step toward this phenomenological study, the first step that led to this dissertation. I had a genuine interest in what my students were experiencing. Phenomenological research begins with a researcher asking questions about the “way we experience the world” (van Manen, 1990, p. 5). The phenomenological researcher wants “to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). Though I did not realize it at the time, on my observational walks around the building, I was asking a phenomenological question: *What are they experiencing?*

#### Design of the Study

The participants were chosen from a pool of forty-eight former students, the number of students who passed their composition course. All forty-eight potential participants were invited to join the study. From those forty-eight, the total number of former students who volunteered to participate is nineteen.

Each of the nineteen students was interviewed privately, by me. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 ½ hours. I recorded each interview and took notes. At the end of each interview, I gave each participant the option to leave his or her journal with me to be included in the study. A total of seven journals were collected.

Each interview was analyzed using qualitative data analysis software and the essential themes were determined. Then, the journals were read carefully to see if the themes that emerged from the analysis of the interviews were apparent in the students writing. From these two sources I tried to gain a better understanding of what the

participants experienced by doing the personal journal activity.

### The Setting of the Study

The setting of this study was the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown (UPJ), which is the largest satellite campus in the University of Pittsburgh system. UPJ is a four-year university that grants bachelor's degrees in 46 majors. Founded in 1927, UPJ is located in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. It is a rural campus which serves an area of Pennsylvania bursting with corn fields and coal mines. Its gray buildings are built of freestone masonry, each surrounded by dense pockets of hardwoods. Squirrels and chipmunks, ever clamoring for acorns, seem to outnumber the students who hike to class on paved trails that weave through the flora.

According to the *UPJ 2007-2008 Annual Report* (University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, 2008), UPJ draws the majority of its students from its five home counties of Allegheny, Blair, Cambria, Somerset, and Westmorland, and 94% of its students are Pennsylvania residents. It maintains a moderately selective admissions policy, accepting 89% of its applicants. The average GPA of entering freshmen is 3.45, and the average SAT score is 1024. UPJ estimates that 40% of its students are first-generation college students (are the first in their families to attend college).

In 2008, of the approximately 3,000 students enrolled at UPJ, only 181 were of ethnic minority backgrounds. By far, most students at UPJ are white. During my employment at UPJ, all but one of my students was white, and all of the participants in this study are white.

Some of my students were Pittsburghers who were attending UPJ because they were denied admission to the main campus, which maintains a higher standard of

admissions, accepting approximately 59% of its applicants. They had no problem complaining about the rural setting of the Johnstown community, how boring it was compared to the big city, and how they would transfer to “Pitt Main” as soon as they could. Indeed, one of UPJ’s implicit functions in the University of Pittsburgh system is to enroll students in the Pitt system who would otherwise attend college someplace else, but for the majority of students who reside in the five home counties of UPJ’s service area, the college is a convenient and accessible way to earn a coveted Pitt degree while remaining close to home.

#### Limitations of the Study

The context of this study limits its applicability across contexts. This study investigates specific students doing journal writing in a particular context, and the reader should keep that in mind. The emphasis on the lived experience of students, the phenomenological method employed to investigate that lived experience, cautions the reader against generalizing the results of this study beyond the context of the study.

As put by Max van Manen (1990):

. . . phenomenology cannot be used to show or prove, for example, that one reading method is more effective than another reading method, or that certain instructional techniques produce high achievement scores, and so forth.

Phenomenology does not allow for empirical generalizations, the production of law-like statements, or the establishment of functional relationships. The only generalization allowed by phenomenology is this: Never generalize! (p. 22)

This study is not intended to recommend best practices of using journals in the composition classroom, nor is it meant to show that one way of doing journal writing is

better than another. Instead, this study focuses on the lived experiences of the individual participant. It uses the concept of *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1997), which means that all of the themes to emerge from this study are treated as equally valid regardless of frequency or dominance (as opposed to methods that would toss out any outliers), the themes uncovered by this study range from those that describe the majority of participants to those that describe the experiences of only one.

### Historical Context

The terms *journal* and *diary* share the same Latin root, *diurnal*, meaning daily or day, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1982). *Diary* is the older word, with the first written example dating to 1581, while *journal* is derived from French, entering the English language in 1590. *Diary* is defined as “a daily record of transactions, a journal; specifically, a record of matters affecting the writer personally, or which come under his personal observation” (p. 320-321). *Journal* is defined as “a daily record of events or occurrences kept for private or official use” (p. 606). Both definitions emphasize daily writing and record keeping. They differ in that *diary* is described as a personal document, but *journal* has a public, or official, use.

Over the centuries, the diary/journal has been adapted to many purposes. Early examples of journals date from 56 CE in China, where they were archived as historical documents (Lowenstein, 1987, p. 87). For centuries, students and scholars compiled and maintained *commonplace books*, which, before the invention of the printing press, were indispensable repositories of information and personal memorabilia (Fothergill, 1974, p. 27; Autrey, 1991, p. 75). Augustine’s *Confessions* (Chadwick, 1991) inspired a religious tradition of journal writing, famously practiced by the Puritans and the Quakers in

America. Those spiritual diaries examined how well one followed religious dictums, and they explored one's relationship with the Judeo-Christian God (Fothergill, 1974; Lowenstein, 1987; Mallon, 1984). Francis Bacon in "Of Travel" recommends that young men use journals to record their travels (Fothergill, 1974, p. 15). Fothergill (1974) categorizes the above as proto-forms, or "pre-diary" (p. 13) forms, of the journal/diary.

The journal/diary as we know it today emerged during the Renaissance, "when individuality becomes important" and "private, autobiographical writing" becomes common (Lowenstein, 1982, p. 87). The gradual shifts in thinking that occurred during that time enabled the journal to become a personal document "that places value on the singular, knowing self" (Gannett, 1992, p. 105). Previous to the Renaissance, journals/diaries tended to emphasize the external or observational. They often had an explicit record-keeping function, such as the log kept by a ship's captain. The Renaissance, which emphasized the importance of the individual person, set the stage for the journal to become a book about the inner, private life of the journal writer. The journal/diary evolved into a book of the self.

Samuel Pepys' *Diaries*, written in the 1660s but not published until 1893, are a prominent early example of a journal that focuses on the self. The diaries, according to Fothergill (1974), are unique because they achieve a balance that is absent in the pre-diary forms:

[Pepys] balances the outer and the inner life in very harmonious relation to one another. In a manner which appears to be simplicity itself, but is actually very rare, he renders all his experiences, from the most public to the most private, in the same key, as it were, treating all the contents of the day impartially.

(Fothergill, 1974, p. 13)

In Pepys' diaries, the reader finds descriptions of his breakfast in one sentence and a reference to the inner-workings of Parliament in the next. That balance between the inner and the outer, the private and the public, in addition to Pepys' position of privilege that afforded him access to the upper echelons of English public life, place Pepys' diaries among the first to achieve canonized status. Pepys' journals are celebrated by Fothergill (1974) as the first journals to ascend to the realm of great literature.

Pepys' diaries are distinguished from the earlier pre-diary forms in that they were intensely personal; they were never intended to be read by anyone other than Pepys himself. Pepys went so far as to write his diaries in code, and it was two hundred years after his death that the code was cracked and his diaries were published for a Victorian audience (Gannett, 1992, p. 114). Prior to that publication, diary-keeping was a genre that was "unaware" of itself (p. 114). The publication of Pepys' diaries launched the diary into public consciousness, and diary keeping became popular and widespread, a trend that continues to the present day.

Pepys' diaries are an example of how the journal/diary was adapted to accommodate the personal life of the journal writer yet still maintained a balance between the public and the private. The continuing evolution of the journal/diary, enabled by the Romanticism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which emphasized a "fuller expression of emotion and sensibility," and by the "development of psychology, with its emphasis on understanding the structure of consciousness and the nature of the unconscious" (Gannett, 1992, p. 141), changed the journal/diary into a form that became less and less about public life and more and more about exploring the inner,

private life of the writer.

That trend toward private writing is the most recognizable feature of the contemporary journal/diary as we know it today. Rainer's (2004) "New Diary," which focuses on "creativity, personal growth (meaning growth of the whole person), and healing or therapy" (p. 141), exemplifies the contemporary journal/diary. The "new diary" differs from previous diary forms in that it focuses exclusively on the emotional states and inner life of the writer and it has an explicit *therapeutic* function. Gone is the idea that the journal/diary is a rigid everyday activity. Instead, the new diary may have structure or no structure at all. The new diary is whatever the diary writer wants it to be.

As put by Rainer (2004):

[People] are keeping a natural diary as an active, purposeful communication with the self. They write, sketch, doodle, and play with their imaginations. They record whatever their immediate feelings, thoughts, interests, and intuitions dictate. They write whenever they wish—for pleasure and for self-guidance. (p. 2)

### Gendering the Journal/Diary

The separation of the terms journal and diary is a relatively recent phenomenon that demarcates the gender of the journal/diary keeper. Although the journal writing traditions of women and men have a great deal of overlap—threads of the historical pre-forms described by Fothergill (1974) are found in both—men's journals tend to skew more to the public, academic forms while women's diaries tend to be more personal and private (Gannett, 1992, p. 130). Concurrent with the trend toward privacy that is characteristic of Pepys, which eventually evolved into the therapeutic and personal



development focus that characterizes Rainer's (2004) new diary, the term diary became increasingly associated with the femininity and the term journal with masculinity.

Gannett (1992) argues that diary writing was especially important to women because it was one of the few avenues for personal expression available to them. Historically, women had only restricted access to the avenues for public expression that were afforded to men. In diaries, women found safe places to explore their deepest thoughts free of the judgments and the risks associated with public expression.

Gannett writes:

In addition to having somewhat restricted access to more privileged journal types, women belong to a powerful popular-culture tradition of journal/diary keeping that sustains women's discourse networks, although women have been socialized to see their diary keeping as less important, as belonging only to the private sphere and to the realm of emotion rather than that of intellect. (p. 149)

My guess is that most people are aware of the popular tradition of females' diary keeping. As Hubbs notes, "Personal journals (i.e., personal diaries) conjure the image of the little pink book with a flimsy lock kept by adolescent girls for recording secrets and dreams to be read by none other than the author" (2005). When I was a child, my little sister had a diary with a lock and key that she had received as a present. I was never given such a gift. I recently saw the gender trend continuing at the birthday party of my nine-year-old niece, where she received a blank book, a diary, with the words "My Space: Keep Out!" printed on the cover. In my own writing, I have always referred to my stack of filled blank books as journals, never diaries. When journals are discussed in the more educational or professional sense, the term journal is almost always preferred.

Diaries are kept by women, privately. And, like the coded diaries of Pepys, diaries must be safeguarded. They are *kept*, protected from prying eyes.

In the peer-reviewed literature about journals in educational contexts, the form is almost always referred to as a journal. The term diary, by contrast, is almost completely absent, with a few exceptions. One of those exceptions is found in Dehler (1989), who, unsurprisingly, uses the term diary in the context of a course on women's studies. She affirms the secretive, safeguarded properties of the diary, noting, "I find that my students are very attracted to the secretive, hidden nature of the diary, as if they were reading something they shouldn't be, like a note being passed among them in the classroom" (p. 53).

Burt (1994), Gannett (1992), and Dymont and O'Connell (2003) found that there were gender differences in journal writing. Burt (1994) found that females were more likely than males to have prior experience with journal writing as children. Females were also more comfortable with the emotional and therapeutic functions of journal writing, and females demonstrated a broader range of writing in their journals. Women were more likely to write about thoughts and feelings and emotions. Further, women were more proud of their entries than men, and they were more likely than men to describe journal writing as a positive experience. Dymont and O'Connell (2003) speculate that this difference could be attributed to women's socialization with diaries, echoing Burt's finding that girls were more likely to have kept diaries as children.

## Journals and Therapy

A search of popular titles about journal and diary writing on amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com revealed a large and seemingly thriving market within the categories of self-improvement and religion. Many of the titles are guides to keeping a journal or diary about grieving, mending a broken heart, healthy living, and similar topics with a self-help theme. Journal writing is prescribed for many different therapeutic purposes, such as stimulating one's creativity and one's ability to reflect, meditate, and develop self-knowledge (Beattie, 2003; Capacchione, 2001, 2006; Dowrick, 2009; Kominars, 2007).

Among those self-help books about journal writing are hundreds of titles with a religious focus. The religious titles have the same self-improvement themes, but they are often focused on religious texts or religious spirituality, and the self-improvement emphasized is that of religious or spiritual growth, of coming closer to God (Budd, 2002; Cepero, 2008).

It can be difficult to separate the popular self-help literature about journal writing from the research-based literature about journal writing rooted in the field of psychology. Indeed, many of the self-help books are based on empirical psychological research. That blurring of boundaries is exemplified by Ira Progoff (1992), whose journal writing method is rooted in his psychological research as a practicing academic, and who is perhaps the foremost academic-turned-popular-advocate of the therapeutic journal. Progoff's "intensive journal method" is presented in his *At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability* (1992). Progoff's method is a highly structured and complex step-by-step journal writing process that

involves reflection, meditation, and dialogue with the self. The journal is promoted as a means to develop creativity and to foster exploration of the inner life.

To disseminate his method, Progoff founded *Dialogue House*, a journal writing center which conducts workshops devoted to teaching the intensive journal method. According to the foundation's web site, the center conducts over 150 workshops a year, across the country. The cost of attendance varies, with a median cost of about \$300 for an all-day session.

Mirroring much of the self-help's emphasis on spirituality and religion, Progoff's work is steeped in a religious sensibility, though it does not take a position with regard to a specific religion. Still, in reading Progoff, I get the distinct impression that he is attempting to create a new religion based on journal writing. Progoff writes:

I used to lie awake wondering what the human race would do if all its sacred scriptures were destroyed. Finally one night the answer was given to me. It came as a simple practical statement spoken in everyday tones. We would, the voice said, simply draw new spiritual scriptures from the same great source out of which the old ones came. (p. 2-3)

In the popular literature about journal writing, the traditionally rigid distinctions between the sacred and the secular, between the academic and the popular, seem to blur as questions about the therapeutic uses of journal writing come to the fore.

Yet, despite the claims about spirituality and mysticism, the psychological basis for the popular self-help literature is based on sound empirical evidence. Studies show that personal writing, specifically writing about emotions and writing narratives that connect and make meaning from experience, have therapeutic functions that correlate to

improved physical, mental, and emotional health (Barry & Singer, 2001; Pennebaker, 1991,; 1997, 1999; Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser & Glaser, 1988; Pennebaker, Colder & Sharp, 1990; Smyth et al., 1999).

Pennebaker has led several research teams that have conducted studies about the therapeutic benefits of personal writing. Those studies show that when people write about traumatic experiences they are better able to cope with those experiences, which yields significant health benefits. The researchers report that even though the writing may be difficult for people and may sometimes prompt them to cry and become “deeply upset” (Pennebaker, 1997, p. 162), most subjects report that the experience is nevertheless positive. Further, such writing yields “consistent and significant health improvements” (p. 164), such as fewer visits to the doctor, higher immunity levels, and less depression. The “dramatic” (Berman, 2001, p. 51) health benefits of journal writing are also compellingly demonstrated by Smyth et al. (1999), who, when controlling for journal writing in a control group and an experimental group, found that personal, expressive writing yielded improved health among 47% of the experimental group compared to 24% of the control group (p. 1308).

With regard to college students, Pennebaker (1997) found that students who wrote in journals had higher grade point averages than those who did not write in journals. Further, Pennebaker, Colder, and Sharp (1990) found that students who wrote about traumatic and stressful events had better health as judged by fewer doctor visits, but interestingly, writing about their transition from high school to college left them with “negative moods and poorer psychological adjustment” by the end of their first semester (p. 536). The researchers speculate that those negative effects may be seen as a trade-off:

Though the students had negative moods, they were healthier and their GPAs were higher. They speculate that writing about the transition to college “stripped their normal defenses away” (p. 536) and forced them to confront their thoughts and feelings about transitioning to college.

Supporting observed gender differences in journal writing, Smyth et al. (2008) found that women were more likely than men to write about sexual abuse, and that women were more likely to write in depth about their traumatic experiences, demonstrating a greater willingness to disclose and confide about their emotions in their journals (p. 76).

### Journals in the Classroom

Given the vast market for journal writing guides discussed above, we can safely estimate that every day in the United States thousands of people put pen to paper in their diaries and journals. If we include the literature about journals in educational contexts, we can reasonably conclude that a considerable portion of those journal writers are students inside and outside of classrooms, assigned by their teachers to keep journals for various educational purposes. In educational contexts, journal writing is ubiquitous, at all educational levels, employed across practically all academic disciplines.

For instance, students in nursing programs are encouraged to write in journals to develop a balance between empathy for their patients and the necessary professional distance required to provide effective care, to demonstrate ongoing professional development, and to become reflective practitioners and better critical/analytical thinkers (Chick, 2004; Heath, 1998; Jasper, 2000). Students in literature and composition courses use journals to make personal connections to what they are reading and to deconstruct

literary texts in their own words (Ede, 2005; Gatlin, 1987). Mathematics students use journals to gain a more intuitive understanding of material that is inherently abstract and conceptual (BeMiller 1987; Kim, 2003; Loud, 1999; Schubert 1987; Selfe, Petersen, & Nargang, 1986). Many more examples exist in the fields of history (August, 2000; Denkler, 2007; Meo, 2000; Steffens, 1987), physics (Grumbacher, 1987; Jensen, 1987), chemistry (Meese, 1987), art (Thaiss, 1987), and geography (Baltensperger, 1987; Haigh, 2001; Hooey, 2005; Park, 2003).

The ubiquitous use of journals in the classroom has its roots in the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement of the 1980s and 90s. The WAC movement grew from the synthesis of works that explored the connections between language and learning, among them Bruner (1966); Vygotsky (1962); Emig (1977); Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, and Rosen (1975); and Moffett (1968). Toby Fulwiler (1987) summarizes those connections in an NCTE position statement entitled “Guidelines for Using Journals in School Settings”:

- When people articulate connections between new information and what they already know, they learn and understand that new information better (Bruner, 1966).
- When people think and figure things out, they do so in symbol systems commonly called languages, which are most often verbal but also may be mathematical, musical, visual, and so on (Vygotsky, 1962).
- When people learn, they use all of the language modes—reading, writing, speaking, and listening; each mode helps people learn in a unique way (Emig, 1977).

- When people write about new information and ideas—in addition to reading, talking, and listening—they learn and understand them better (Britton et al., 1975)
- When people care about what they write and see connections to their own lives, they both learn and write better (Moffett, 1968). (p. 1)

The above provided a compelling impetus to emphasize writing across educational contexts, and because journal writing proved “versatile enough to fit almost any pedagogical model,” it became “a principal export” of the WAC movement (Autrey, 1991, p. 74). Simply put, journals provide a quick and easy way to inject writing into practically any course.

### Chapter Outline

In chapter two, journal writing is contextualized within the field of composition studies. A dominant theme in the literature about journals is their function as a bridge between the internal and the external. Journals are envisioned as tools to help bring the interior expression of students into the public forum. To that end, journals are often cast as pre-writing heuristics that facilitate the move from personal expression to academic discourse.

As composition shifted to a post-process paradigm that was influenced by social constructionist epistemology and postmodernism, the idea of a stable, fixed self became the subject of intense criticism. The result was journals employed in ways that emphasized dialogue with the self, dialogue with peers, and dialogue with teachers.

Recent scholars, notably Alcorn (2002) and Berman (1994), have envisioned journals as mediums that promote healing and therapy. Supported by research into the therapeutic functions of expressive writing by Pennebaker (1991, 1997, 1999) and Smyth



et al. (1999, 2008), journals are used to help students cope with traumas.

Chapter three provides the design of the study. It describes the methods used in this investigation, which were inspired by the human science research of Max van Manen (1990). This chapter also describes the procedures employed to analyze the data.

Chapter four presents a phenomenological description of my participants' experiences of journal writing. It attempts to evoke the lived experiences of this study's participants by use of narrative, excerpts from the interviews, and excerpts from the journals of this study's participants.

Lastly, chapter five provides reflections on the descriptions presented in chapter four and concludes the dissertation. It reintegrates the scholarship about journal writing presented in chapters one and two, and it discusses the possibilities for pedagogies of personal journal writing in composition. In doing so, it takes a decidedly pedagogical perspective.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE RELEVANT LITERATURE

The film *Freedom Writers* (DeVito, Shamberg, Sher, & LaGravenese, 2007), which stars Oscar-winning actor Hillary Swank, puts journal writing at the center of the plot. The film depicts the experiences of Los Angeles high school teacher Erin Gruwell, played by Swank, as she begins her teaching career in a classroom full of troubled students, students who struggle with abusive home lives, poverty, drugs, and gang violence. Committed to helping her students, Gruwell turns to journal writing.

Whereas she had been unsuccessful at engaging her students, spending more class time refereeing fights than teaching, a breakthrough comes when she gives her students composition notebooks and instructs them to fill them with personal writing. She describes the assignment thusly:

Everyone has their own story, and it's important for you to tell your own story, even to yourself. So, what we're going to do is, we're going to write every day in these journals. You can write about whatever you want, the past, the present, the future. You can write it like a diary, or you can write songs, poems, any good thing, bad thing--anything. But, you have to write every day. Keep a pen nearby whenever you feel inspiration, and they won't be graded. How can I give an A or a B for writing the truth, right? And I will not read them unless you give me permission. I will need to see that you've made an entry, but I will just do this (flips through the pages of the composition notebook) to see if you wrote that day. Now, if you want me to read it, I have a cabinet over here that has a lock on it. I will leave it open during class, and you can leave your diary there if you want me

to read it. I will lock this cabinet at the end of every class.

A scene later, at open house, Gruwell sits at her desk in an empty classroom, disappointed that not a single parent attended. She decides to check the cabinet, and to her surprise its shelves are loaded with journals. She sits at her desk and begins reading.

As she reads, the film dramatizes the experiences of her students with a series of flashbacks. The viewer sees violence, drugs, and abuse. Gruwell begins to understand the challenges and hardships facing her students. In turn, that newfound understanding allows Gruwell to formulate classroom activities that do more to engage her students, specifically selecting Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952) as a core text. Her idea is that her students, who faced tremendous hardships, would make a connection to the suffering of Frank and in how Frank expressed her suffering in her diary.

At the end of the film, a note states that many of Gruwell's students finished high school, some becoming the first in their families to do so, and some of them went on to attend college. The students' journals became a book, *The Freedom Writers Diary : How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them* (The Freedom Writers, 1999), and Gruwell founded the *Freedom Writers Foundation*, which has the mission of "replicating the Freedom Writers' success in classrooms across the country by equipping teachers with the tools they need to reach and empower their students" (<http://www.freedomwritersfoundation.org>).

*Freedom Writers* is an inspiring story that speaks to the liberating power of writing, specifically the power of journal writing to help students cope with their problems within the context of the classroom. As depicted in the film, journal writing gives students the freedom to write about what matters to them, and the results are

nothing short of miraculous. The students become engaged, politically active, and empowered.

Yet, one might wonder what was omitted from the story to make Gruwell's story marketable, to give it the requisite Hollywood happy ending. One might ask, did journal writing yield those powerful, liberating results for all of Gruwell's students? If not, what about the students for whom journal writing was not liberating, who, after writing about their problems in their journals, returned home to find it the same oppressive place? What about those students who did not finish high school, much less make it to college? What about the students who, for whatever reason, did not find empowerment or liberation in journal writing? What happened to those students?

Gruwell's students were, as the film firmly established, oppressed. They were victims of and participants in all manner of violence and abuse, immersed in poverty and violent gang culture. Further, they were oppressed by administrators and teachers who wrote them off as unteachable, as lost causes unable to meet the demands of academic literacy, doomed to lives of squalor.

The relationship between literacy and liberation has long been discussed in the field of composition studies, especially since the importation of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), a text which influenced critical composition pedagogies, such as those described by Shor (1992), Berlin (1988), and many others. Freire (1970) argues for the liberating power of literacy education. Literacy gives underprivileged people the power to recognize, and ostensibly overthrow, their oppressors.

On the other hand, the idea that literacy yields liberation has sustained criticism, powerfully in Stuckey's *The Violence of Literacy* (1991), which argues that literacy

education often fails to deliver on its liberatory promise. The problems of oppression, Stuckey argues, run much deeper, and are far more complex, than a simple matter of expanding literacy can possibly hope to ameliorate. Literacy itself is an ideologically situated phenomenon steeped in cultural mythology. It is often cast as a gateway to middle-class life and success in a country that is permeated by the cultural narrative that opportunity is equally granted to all people. The pernicious effect of that belief, Stuckey argues, is that it holds as deficient, either in desire, ability, or willingness to work, those who do not achieve middle-class success. In other words, if one does not find success through literacy, it is his or her own fault. Stuckey argues that literacy is complex, situated socially, historically, culturally, and some forms of literacy are privileged while others are not. For Stuckey, the problem is economic reality, which literacy education often deliberately obscures with the rhetoric of liberation.

Stuckey provides a counterpoint to the belief that literacy offers liberation, an belief that, as noted by Victor Villanueva (1987), many scholars and teachers of literacy hold as almost sacrosanct. *The literature about journals demonstrates that belief with unusual clarity.* Journals are often cast as a solution to the problem of literacy acquisition. The literature is teeming with anecdotal accounts that paint with the same Hollywood gloss of *Freedom Writers*. Those anecdotal accounts, called by Lowenstein (1982) and Anson (1995) *testimonial*, are accounts of teacher lore about the near miraculous benefits of journal writing from the perspective of the teacher. The religious connotations of that term should not be lost on the reader. The anecdotal reports about journal writing are frequently characterized by an unmistakable evangelical zeal.

For instance, Shafer (1996), who teaches composition at a community college

where a majority of students are of ethnic minorities, finds that journals work wonders by helping students connect their home discourses to academic discourse. He sees journals helping his minority students transition from discourses of the home to discourses of the academy. Further, he argues that journals work because they allow students to explore language in a non-threatening personal space within the institutional context. Berman (1994) sees “astonishing” (p. 5) results in his classroom. Hammond (2002), in a course about environmental education, sees his students using journals to take “steps on a personal journey which integrates us with the magic ways of the natural world” (p. 69). Many more testimonial pieces are available, but suffice it to say, the anecdotal reports about journal writing tend to describe it as an educational marvel. Journals are described as an educational “panacea” for what ails students (Gannett, 1992, p. 19). Journals are universally beneficial. Journals liberate.

Much literature about journals in composition studies is centered on journals doing two things that help students achieve empowerment. The first is that journals give students a personal space within an academic context that enables them to explore language free of academic constraints such as correctness and formality, just as when Gruwell found that when she gave her students that personal space and lessened academic rigidity they had much to write about. They flourished.

The second is that journals are thought to create a bridge, as put by Shafer (1996), between home and school, or as stated variously by other scholars, between the inner and the outer (Trimbur, 1987), the private and the public (Gannett, 1992), the subjective and the objective (Fulwiler, 1987). Whereas Gruwell had been unsuccessful at stoking her students’ interest in the required canonical texts, journals formed a bridge between her

students and Ann Frank. Likewise Shafer (1996) uses journals to bridge the gap between his students and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In both cases, journals are used to generate interest in a canonical text among students by fostering a personal connection to that text. Journals are envisioned as mediators between the student and his or her interior knowledge and the knowledge that lies out there, in the world.

#### Journals Pre-Process: Continual Rediscovery

Articles about journal writing in English courses date back to at least 1900 (Gannett, 1992). Gannett notes that it seems as though writing teachers have continually rediscovered the journal, especially as a means to bridge the gap between personal expression and academic formality. For instance, Magee (1919) describes the use of journals in a freshman writing course. Though she views expository writing as the primary purpose of the composition course, she finds that her students have little interest in expository writing and “lack training in logical thinking and writing” (p. 429). Her solution is to begin her courses with journal writing, using journals to *bridge the gap* between personal and academic writing. Concurrent with journal writing, she recommends having students read Samuel Pepys and “Marjorie Fleming’s little works” which “makes a deep impression on the mind of the freshman (at least the feminine freshman. I’ve never tried Marjorie on boys, though many men find her delightful)” (p. 430).

Brown’s “Creative Expression via Student Journals” (1940) is likewise permeated with a tone of discovery, and the theme of journals as mediators between the personal and the academic is again emphasized. Also, the essay confirms that journals used in the

classroom are journals, not diaries. Describing her journal assignment, she emphasizes that “these journals are far more than diaries” (p. 582), mainly because the journals have an educational purpose, to serve as a space for students to experiment with writing and cultivate an “individual” style (p. 582).

Another example, much like the two discussed above, is Furman (1942), who, like Magee in 1919, finds that her students enter her classroom with an exceedingly negative attitude about academic writing. And again, like Magee, Furman discovers that journals are the solution. Journals, and the personal writing they facilitate, help students get more enjoyment out of writing. Furman differs from the previous two examples in her emphasis on the no-nonsense benefit of just getting students to write. She sees journals as a “practical” (p. 59) way to get her students busy writing.

Magee (1919), Brown (1940), and Furman (1942) seem to support Gannett’s (1992) observation that writing teachers continually rediscover journals. Notable is the idea that expository writing is the proper domain of the composition course, and also that students do not seem to particularly enjoy expository writing, something that many, if not most, composition teachers would agree about to this day. Also, the familiar theme of journals as mediators between the personal and academic writing is already well-established.

Also striking in Magee (1919) is the gender differentiation. Of course, in most contemporary classrooms it would be unthinkable to separate men and women in such an explicit way, yet it is important to note that in 1919 the gender differentiation between the terms *journal* and *diary* is very much a part of Magee’s awareness. For Magee the activity is called a *journal*, never a *diary*, and Fleming’s diaries, assigned only to women,



are described as “little”, implying a certain frivolity, which is also implied by Brown (1940). And again, for all of the above teachers journal writing is envisioned as tool used to move students from the personal to the social, from the private to the public, from the expressive to the expository.

### Journals in Process Composition

Journals, as vehicles of personal expression that bridge the gap between the personal and the academic, are connected to sweeping changes in writing instruction that occurred in the middle to late 1960s and extended into the 1970s. Autrey (1990) and Gannett (1992) trace the origin of the contemporary pedagogical journal to Rohman (1965), who recommends the journal as a prewriting tool in process-approach composition. Also, Rohman is often credited with writing the seminal article of the process movement, which gives journals a place in process-approach composition instruction right from the beginning. As shown above, journals are discussed, albeit sporadically, previous to Rohman, but Rohman is unique because his discussion about journals is much more informed by process theory. The dividing line, for Autrey and Gannett, is about the journal’s discussion in the context of the burgeoning process movement in composition studies.

This more theory-oriented discussion of journals coincides with the “paradigm shift” (Hairston, 1982) in composition from product to process; the journal is recommended as a useful tool in composition instruction because it enables pre-writing. Put another way, in the prewriting stage of writing, students are envisioned as struggling to bring the inner to the outer. They are tasked to bring what they want to say into the public forum. Rohman (1965) describes journals as an informal space for students to

practice writing and to develop fluency with more formal academic writing. Macrorie (1970) envisions the journal as a “seed-bed” for the germination of ideas (p. 123). Peter Elbow (1973) recommends journal writing for freewriting, which he calls a “freewriting diary” (p. 9), and Elbow, with Clark (1987), presents the journal as a powerful tool for writers because it provides a safe place to work out ideas and to come to understand what one wants to say before his or her writing comes under the scrutiny of an audience.

### *Journals and Personal Expression*

In *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, Joseph Harris (1997) begins his historical sketch of composition studies by showing how the conflict between the scholar and the teacher fueled the genesis of composition studies. According to Harris, the 1967 conference at Dartmouth was a watershed in English studies in that it fostered an unusually open and honest dialogue about the role of English in the academy. The conference brought together teachers and scholars from England and the United States, and much of the dialogue centered on defining English studies as a discipline.

The British contingent emphasized the role of teaching, that English was a discipline set apart because its subject matter was not easily nailed down. They preferred an expansive view of English studies, a view perhaps best represented by James Britton with his jelly tart metaphor: After the tarts are cut from the rolled-out dough, there is leftover dough. After the disciplines claim their subject matter, there is left-over subject matter. English is “what was left”. English is “the rest of it” (Harris, 1997, p. 4).

That expansive view of English studies was criticized by the Americans, whom Harris terms the scholars (as opposed to the English, who were teachers), and who, counter to Britton, wanted to narrow, to cut out, to define, a clear subject-matter for

English. Whereas the American position emphasized the question of English studies' proper domain of inquiry (where should scholars of English devote their professional attention?), for Britton, the question was, as English professionals, what should we be doing? Perhaps a more important question, a question more illustrative of the difference in views, was Britton's query: What should our students be doing?

Harris (1997) goes on to argue that this conflict runs deeper, that it is a fundamental conflict within the academy, a conflict between teacher and scholar, between teaching and research, between the personal and the professional, and the Dartmouth conference was a site at which those tensions "were dramatized with unusual clarity" (Harris, 1997, p. 3). Despite that clarity, Harris laments that the conference had little impact on the day-to-day affairs of the classroom, which continued "as it had before—marching lockstep to the demands of fixed school curriculums, standardized tests, and calls for improved skills and cultural unity" (p. 2).

It should also be noted that the Dartmouth conference reflects the larger historical context of 1960s and early 1970s, a time particularly rife with social unease and violence. During that period, conflicts such as the war in Vietnam, the riots during the 1968 Democratic convention, the civil rights struggle, the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the massacre at Kent State, among other events, brought social inequities to the fore. It was no coincidence that it was during that period that books challenging the traditional writing curriculum, notably Murray's *A Writer Teaches Writing* (1968) and Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), were published. Both books are imbued with a desire for change, and each, to varying degrees, is explicitly political, and it is clear that the opening up of writing instruction to include and to take much more seriously the

expressive functions of language played no small part in nurturing the growth of the process movement in composition studies.

That change is demonstrated in Kinneavy's *A Theory of Discourse* (1971) in which he notes, "If this book had been written a number of years ago, there would be no chapter on expressive discourse" (p. 393-394). At that point, in 1971, it was no longer possible to ignore the expressive and personal elements of writing, which Kinneavy defines as "the personal stake of the speaker in discourse," and he notes that "there is naturally an expressive component in any discourse" (p. 393). For Kinneavy, expressive discourse is:

. . . psychologically prior to all the other uses of language. It is the expressive component which gives all discourse a personal significance to the speaker or listener. Indeed, the expressive component of discourse is what involves a man with the world and his fellows to give him his unique brand of humanity. The ignoring, by the disciplines of speech and English, of the very kind of discourse by which an individual or group can express his personal or its societal aspirations is clearly a symptom, if not an effect, of the impersonality of the university machines of the present day . . . ignoring the study of expression begets rebellion, sometimes justified, sometimes irresponsible. A democracy which ignores expression has forgotten its own roots. (p. 396)

The claim that expressive discourse is "psychologically prior to all the other uses of language" was supported by the research of Britton et al. (1975). Britton and his participants identify three functions of language: the expressive, the poetic, and the transactional. The expressive function, for Britton, is language that is "close to the self"

(p. 141), which draws on personal experience, which “invites the listener to enter into his world and respond to him as a person” (p. 141). Echoing Kinneavy, he goes on to hypothesize that “expressive writing may operate as the matrix from which differentiated forms of mature writing are developed” (p. 144). Building on Vygotsky’s (1962) ideas that inner speech works as mediator between writing and meaning, Britton (1975) sees the expressive function of writing as the anchor and enabler of all writing. The other functions identified by Britton, the transactional and poetic functions, are linked to, or held together by, the expressive function. The expressive function, in other words, forms the basis from which other functions spring. That view is also supported by Emig (1977), who notes that “all student writings emanate from an expressive impulse” (p. 37).

The widely-cited works of Peter Elbow (1973) and Donald Murray (1968) demonstrate the shift in focus to the personal expression of the student as a legitimate focus of the composition course. For those two scholars, students are no longer seen as deficient or as in need of remediation, but as legitimate writers who have something important to say. Murray and Elbow place the focus on the individual writer and his or her self-expression and personal growth. They oppose the traditional product-centered model of composition instruction on the grounds that it stifles personal expression. Specifically, Murray (1968) sees traditional writing instruction, with its emphasis on the final product of writing instead of the process(es) by which that product is written, failing to account for the writing as a creative, often messy, process in which students learn a great deal about themselves by engaging in writing. He finds traditional writing instruction too rigid, too focused on rules and the avoidance of error. Murray wants the student writer to be active and engaged with his or her own learning. He wants his

students to be active writers, using writing to makes sense of their lives.

Elbow (1973), by dispensing with the teacher altogether, echoes that sentiment. Writing is an essentially creative act, an act of self-expression, and Elbow dedicates the lion's share of *Writing Without Teachers* to providing detailed heuristics, such as freewriting exercises, and working through the writing process by “cooking” (p. 48) and “growing” (p. 22). Elbow emphasizes personal growth and expression, writing with verve and vigor. He challenges what he calls the “old, wrong model” (p. 70), calling traditional school-taught writing “boring and obvious” (p. 72).

Murray and Elbow see writing as the act of an individual whose goal is personal expression, a direct affront to schooling that tends to emphasize conformity and group-think. Gone are assigned topics, formulaic essays, and five-paragraph themes. In their place, students are taught to engage the world and trust their personal experiences, drawing on those experiences as the primary source for their writing. Students make the decisions. *Put in its simplest terms, for Murray and Elbow, student writers must write, and teachers must loosen their control over that writing.* In a Murray/Elbow style writing course, the teacher seldom if ever issues an assignment sheet or a writing prompt. Instead, the students decide what to write about.

It should come as no surprise, then, that both Murray and Elbow advocate for journals. Journals are where the writing process begins. Murray describes his *daybooks* as most closely resembling the commonplace book. His daybooks are storehouses for ideas, and aide-memoire, and writing “rehearsal[s]” (p. 22). Murray's daybooks are where his writing originates. Elbow, too, has his freewriting journals.

*Research*

Though the work of so-called expressivists like Murray and Elbow play no small role in ushering in the process movement in composition studies, it is the cognitive research executed by Britton (1975), Emig (1971), and Flower and Hayes (1981) that seems to have had the greatest impact on composition's transition into a legitimate scholarly field. As recounted by Petraglia (1999), research into the composing process(es), influenced by interventionist-minded "social scientism" (p. 49), yielded a body of knowledge that made theorizing the field of composition possible. Previous to that research, the discourse about composition was very different. The pages of *College Composition and Communication* are devoted primarily to what North (1987) calls "lore" (p. 23), or anecdotes about teaching experiences. Much of that discourse occurs in the form of staffroom interchanges and anecdotes about assignments and activities. The new emphasis on methodologically rigid approaches borrowed from the social sciences changed composition, gave it an "academic profile" (Petraglia, 1999, p. 51), and thus the credibility to become an academic discipline in its own right.

Previous to its ascendance to disciplinary status, composition was long plagued by its status as a "teaching subject" (Harris, 1996) that Connors (1991) traces to Harvard University in 1874, when administrators, in response to anxiety among the educated classes that student writing lacked "propriety" (p. 66), gave the first entrance examination. When half the students who took the test failed, much "to the horror of professors, parents, and the intellectual culture as a whole" (p. 66), administrators created course in remedial writing, which were the "first experiments in required basic writing instruction at the college level" (p. 66). So, from the beginning, composition was based on remediation, the idea that students needed that remediation so they could write in the

academic modes most valued by the academy. From the beginning, composition was about academic discourse, which is perhaps what Harris (1996) means when he claims that little has changed as a result of the candid dialogue at the Dartmouth conference. Though there was a flurry of discourse about expressivism and personal expression, again, it was arguably the cognitivist research approaches of Britton et al. (1975), Emig (1977), and Flower and Hayes (1981) that had the most impact on composition instruction and gave it the momentum to make a paradigm shift. Composition raised its academic profile not with scholarship about student expression but with hard research into the composing processes of students, which yielded theories of the composing processes that could be easily packaged and disseminated across institutions.

#### Journals Across the Curriculum

Before continuing to trace the evolution of the journal in composition studies, it is important to note here that as composition raised its academic profile with research and increased its theoretical sophistication, it began to have an impact across academic disciplines. The journal played an important role in that expansion because the journal had “proven versatile enough to fit almost any pedagogical model”; it had become “a principal export” of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement of the mid 1980s and 1990s. (Autrey, 1991, p. 74). The journal was a quick and easy way to inject writing into practically any course.

Because of its soaring popularity from grade school to college, journal writing soon attracts criticism from cultural critics of the political right. An important feature of journal writing, and a significant source of its pedagogical utility, is that it encourages students to engage at a personal level, yet it is precisely that personal component of



journal writing that, for some critics on the right (and the left), makes the journal problematic, even unacceptable, in classroom settings.

Critics on the right objected to journals on the grounds that journal writing represented an invasion of privacy of students and their families. Schafly's *Child Abuse in the Classroom* (1985) devotes considerable attention to journal writing. Centered on journal writing in grade schools, her criticism is steeped in outrage that teachers would require students to write about their personal thoughts. Of particular concern for Schafly is how such private writing might reveal aspects of students' home lives that might cause embarrassment to the parents. Also, journals are criticized because they do not emphasize the so-called three Rs; in journals students are free to write about what they want. Grammar and mechanics are usually deemphasized. Underscored in such critiques is the idea that writing, and schooling in general, should be about rules, not personal development. Also implied in those criticisms is that journals might lead students to think critically about their religious experiences, a sentiment discussed by Macrorie (1987), who notes that from certain religious perspectives, the journal, with its emphasis on personal growth, might raise the individual's estimation of himself or herself over that of his or her god or gods. Macrorie notes that, from that perspective, "[j]ournals are dangerous" [emphasis added] (p. ii).

On the academic left, journals were criticized for being academically soft or lacking in intellectual rigor. Notable proponents of that view are Bartholomae (1986) and Bizzell (1986). The essence of those criticisms is that journals, which tend to emphasize the personal, fail to give students the necessary experience and practice with academic discourse. Further, the burgeoning emphasis on social constructionism casts journals as

problematic because they tend to privilege the individual person over the community (Berlin, 1988).

In response to those criticisms, compositionists, most notably Toby Fulwiler (1987), Chris Anson and Richard Beach (1995), began a concerted effort to reign in the journal and to clearly specify and define its proper use in the classroom. The NCTE called on Fulwiler to issue a defense of journal writing, which yielded his “Guidelines for Using Journals in School Settings,” a document that “demonstrates a powerful effort to recuperate the school journal by deliberately distancing it from the diary, or the personal journal; in essence, to keep the diary at bay” (Gannett, 1992, p. 39), Fulwiler writes, “The problem for teachers is how to encourage students to write personally and frankly about subjects they care about without, at the same time, invading their private lives” (p. 5).

Fulwiler carves out a moderate position for the journal, as shown in the following diagram:

<u>Diary</u> (Subjective Expression)	<u>Journal</u> (I/It)	<u>Class Notebook</u> (Objective Topics)
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*Figure 1:* Fulwiler's Spectrum. Fulwiler (1982, p. 17) places the classroom journal in the center between objective and subjective expression.

That moderate position seems to have calmed much of the criticism, and journals gained widespread acceptance and continued to spread across the disciplines. And again, its positioning in the middle, in this case between the subjective and the objective, as a mediator between those categories, is a dominant theme. Journals are theorized as a balancing of opposites and that between-binaries status characterizes many efforts define the form as employed in academic contexts.

Autrey (1991) reiterates Fulwiler's (1982) classification of the classroom journal, arguing that it has evolved into its current form by a merging of two writing traditions, the commonplace book (one of the historical pre-forms discussed above) and the personal journal/diary. The commonplace book represents the more objective, public side of the dichotomy, while the diary represents the more personal, subjective components (p. 76). In another article, Autrey (1990) elaborates on that theme, arguing that journals sit on the dividing line between Britton's (1975) transactional and expressive discourses and between process and product. For Autrey, the classroom journal is neither wholly transactional, nor wholly expressive, but a little bit of both. And the journal blurs the

lines between process and product because journal writing is an ongoing process without a clear beginning, middle, and end, and the finished journal, perhaps a filled blank book, is the product. It is a form that requires no prewriting, no revision, so the process of journal writing is very different from the process(es) used to create formal essays. The journal writing process is continual.

Anson and Beach (1995) note that, even though the journal is a versatile and highly adaptable classroom assignment, the private and personal uses of journal writing should be mitigated, with more emphasis placed on their public uses. They write, “we must strive for a unifying, integrated approach that guides how we assign them, what and how students write in them and how we should read and respond to them” (p. 5). That sentiment, that drive to control and constrain the form, demonstrates Gannett’s (1992) observation that the journal, in much of the literature about them in composition studies, is likened to Pandora’s box. Whether it is the charge that journals invade privacy or that journals water down academic rigor, critics fear that if instructors allow their students to use the journals as private and personal documents, all manner of ills will be unleashed in the classroom.

#### Journals Post-Process

The movement of the field toward the social aspect of writing seems to have originated with Trimbur’s (1994) review article in *College Composition and Communication*. Reviewing works by Bizzell (1992), Knoblauch and Brannon (1993), and Spellmeyer (1993), Trimbur notes that the unifying thread among those works is that they are not focused on the processes by which students write, but rather they “represent literacy as an ideological arena and composing as a cultural activity by which writers

position and reposition themselves in relation to their own and others' subjectivities, discourses, practices, and institutions" (p. 109). In other words, post-process composition expands composition studies, and therefore composition classrooms, to include far more than student remediation in academic discourse or giving attention to the process(es) by which students write. It seeks to place the student, to respect the student, within his or her cultural and social context.

The trend toward emphasizing the public and social dimensions of journals reflects the disciplinary conversation of the time when postmodernism and social constructionism came to dominate, a trend that continues, more-or-less, to the present. This shift was heavily influenced by the work of Kenneth Bruffee (1986), whose "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographical Essay" is often cited as the article that introduced composition studies to social constructionism. According to Bruffee, composition to that point had been about cognitive and expressive theories that emphasized writing as the act of a singular person, an individual. Social construction complicated that state of affairs with its emphasis on writing as a social act and its insistence that the individual as a stable, fixed entity was a fiction.

In his widely-cited essay "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class," James Berlin (1988) attacks "cognitive rhetoric" (p. 480) and "expressionistic rhetoric" (p. 484) on the grounds that both privilege the individual over the community, neglecting the social dimensions of writing. Berlin charges that expressive pedagogies isolate students and "refuse to account for the social dimension" (p. 486). For Berlin, the superior alternative is "social epistemic rhetoric" (p. 488), which emphasizes that all knowledge is grounded in social relationships. Berlin sees writing as a social act, and he sees the job of

the writing teacher to facilitate social change.

The social turn had an impact on journals as more attention was given to their social uses. Scholars began to emphasize dialogue, of taking the journals out of the realm of the private and personal and using them to foster public discussions between students and teachers and students and their peers. Often referred to as *dialogue journals*, they are “a responsive form of writing in which the student and the teacher carry on a conversation over time, sharing ideas, feelings, and concerns with writing” (Staton, 1987, p. 47). Demonstrating that the individual had become not a singular entity, but a collection of multiple voices, Berthoff’s (1987) “dialectical notebooks” (p. 11) emphasize conversations with the self in which students respond to their own writing with “meta-comment,” the goal of which is to get students “thinking about thinking” (p. 12).

The idea that journals are social is a point developed by Trimbur (1987) in his “Beyond Cognition: The Voices of Inner Speech.” In that article, Trimbur criticizes the well-worn idea that a mediator is required to bridge the gap between the inner and the outer, a criticism that has clear implications for the use of journals as that mediator. Trimbur looks at the inner/outer metaphor that had so permeated much cognitivist and expressivist discourse about writing and notes how the inner world, from that point of view, is often viewed as a sort of mental prison from which language must escape to reach an audience external to the writer. In that view, there is a chasm between the inner and the outer, a gap that is often theorized as being bridged by journals. Trimbur, citing Bakhtin (1984), envisions the interior not as one singular voice, but a “polyphony” (p. 219) of voices. He writes, “language . . . is already and simultaneously inside and outside of its users, and thus there can be no metaphorical box separating an inside from an

outside, private thought from public discourse” (p. 219). He illustrates that by showing how his students, in their learning logs, seem to employ a host of voices in their personal writing, channeling their parents, their teachers, their friends, and other voices that have been internalized from their social interactions. Far from a stable monolithic *I*, inner voices are a mix of many different voices, a polyphony.

So while much of the early expressivist/cognitivist-fueled process scholarship about journal writing seems to privilege the individual person and his or her struggle to give his or her thoughts a public expression, bringing into the public the private inner voice thus liberating it from the interior prison, Trimbur (1987) suggests that it works both ways. The inner voice is itself constituted by the voices of others, so the movement is not only from inside to outside, but also from outside to inside, a process so complex that Trimbur finds the entire inner/outer metaphor a completely inadequate representation. Put a different way, language is not locked inside the student. Language is inside and outside the student writer simultaneously, permeating his or her very existence, a totally immersive and encompassing experience. In a postmodern framework, just as there is no stable inner individual, there is no stable world *out there*; the two are essentially intermingled. The traditional metaphors crumble.

This crumbling of the old metaphors is a symptom of a much larger problem. In his survey of the field in 2005, Richard Fulkerson notes that the field, since 1990, has become more diverse, more splintered, to the point that composition studies today suffers from an identity crisis, making the role of the composition teacher “deeply problematic” (p. 655), which he attributes to the influence of the “social turn” and the growth of cultural studies. The problems facing the composition teacher in a post-process climate

are rooted in the influence of postmodernism and its anti-foundationalist epistemology which questions if knowledge is possible. There is no foundation upon which knowledge is built. Applying that to composition instruction, Thomas Kent (1989, 1999) argues that there is no fixed set of rules that can be taught to students that will enable them to write effectively. For Kent, all contexts are different, and to communicate in any given context people must employ “interpretive guess[ing]” (1989, p. 27) strategies. Sometimes those guesses are successful, sometimes they are not, but there is little that writing teachers can do in a writing class that will improve the chances of success; therefore, in a view argued by Kent and supported by Dobrin (1997) and Vitanza (1991), writing instruction, at least traditional writing instruction, is deeply problematic. What is needed, as put by Vitanza, is a letting go of the “pedagogical imperative” and an embracing of the messiness of writing: “What we want, then, is a *pedagogy other(wise)*, what we want is a pedagogy without criteria, what we desire is a counterpedagogy” (p. 161).

#### *Audience*

Post-process is seen by Breuch (2002) as calling attention to the indefinite, uncertain nature of writing. She finds three dominant themes in post-process scholarship: Writing is public, writing is interpretive, writing is situated, all of which have implications for journal writing in the classroom. First of all, that writing is public means that “meaning making is a product of our communicative interaction with others rather than a product of an individual. Acknowledging the public nature of writing means acknowledging a reading audience—people to whom the writing matters—whether that audience is *oneself*, another person, a group of people, or any other reader” (p. 110) [emphasis added].



The post-process emphasis on public audiences, even the conception of the audience of oneself as a public audience, has important consequences for the journal in the composition course, especially the personal and private journal writing that is the subject of this study. At the heart of this issue is the effect of audience on students' writing.

If the teacher reads and responds to the journals, the student will address the teacher, more-or-less, in his or her writing. In effect, the teacher becomes the journal's audience. But, if the teacher does not read the journal, the issue of audience becomes more complicated. Forecasting this problem is Walter Ong (1975), who argues that the writer's audience, whether public or private, is fictional. In written language, the audience is almost always separated from the writer by space and time. In that sense, a certain amount of guessing is required to address that distant audience. But in the case of the journal or diary, the audience is present and not-present, as put by Walter Ong, whom I quote at length (1975):

The audience of the diarist is even more encased in fictions. What is easier, one might argue, than addressing oneself? As those who first begin a diary must find out, a great many things are easier. The reasons why are not hard to unearth. First of all, we do not normally talk to ourselves—certainly not in long, involved sentences and paragraphs. Second, the diarist pretending to be talking to himself has also, since he is writing, to pretend he is somehow not there. And to what self is he talking? To the self he imagines how is? Or would like to be? Or really thinks he is? Or thinks other people think he is? To himself as he is now? Or as he will probably or ideally be twenty years hence? If he addresses not himself but

“dear Diary,” who in the world is “Dear Diary”? What roles does this imply? And why do more women than men keep diaries? Or if they don’t (they really do—or did), why do people think they do? When did the diary start? The history of diaries, I believe, has yet to be written. Possibly more than the history of any other genre, it will have to be a history of the fictionalizing of readers.

The case of the diary, which at first blush would seem to fictionalize the reader least but in many ways probably fictionalizes him or her most, brings into full view the fundamental deep paradox of the activity we call writing, at least when writing moves from its initial account-keeping purposes to other more elaborate concerns more directly and complexly involving human persons in their manifold dealings with one another. (p. 73-74)

Ong shows that the issue of audience is not a simple matter of writing to oneself, but presents the writer with difficult challenges. Those challenges are taken up in depth by Stover (1999) in her autobiographical case study. For Stover, journal writing is an inherently risky activity. She prefers speaking to herself rather than writing to herself. She finds the ephemeral nature of spoken language preferable to the fixed nature of written language. Journal writing, and the often sensitive and deeply personal writing that it fosters, fixes those thoughts, and if they were read by someone without the writer’s permission, that sensitive information has the potential to do damage to the writer. In spoken language, the target audience is well-known and present and the words themselves can linger only in the mind. With regard to the fixed nature of written language, Stover dislikes how journals preserve bits of her emotions, feelings, actions, that she would rather forget. She writes that her childhood journals would surely make

her seem like a “bratty girl” (p. 125), yet all persons are much more complex than a cultural stereotype. Written language cannot capture the fullness of human experience; invariably, something is lost, and Stover finds that realization discouraging when it comes to journal writing. It is a personal document, yet it cannot fully represent the person. Further, Stover (1999) feels stifled by the idea of producing a chronicle that will be read by some nebulous future reader. The solemnity or the “weight” (p. 122) of recording events is too much for Stover to bear, but at the same time, she is struck by the triviality of journal writing. She wonders why anyone would care to read her journals.

Lastly, Stover (1999) feels stifled by the freedom of journal writing, and she explicitly links that function of journal writing to freewriting in English composition courses. For Stover, writing is always aimed at an audience, always focused on a purpose. In journal writing, the audience may be difficult to define: is it a future reader? Is it oneself? Is it God? She can never get a firm handle on whom she is writing to:

When I write in a diary, the balance is off. I feel that I am supposed to write things that aren't meant for *any* audience save myself. But in my mind *writing* is for *readers*. If I truly want to be private (in the sense of not sharing with anyone else) I don't write at all. While I can successfully invent an entirely public or entirely private audience in speaking, I find it impossible to do in writing. (p. 139)

Both Ong (1975) and Stover (1999) make clear that journal writing and the issues of audience that come with it have the potential to pose students with a significant challenge as they puzzle about whom they are writing for. Far from being a simple matter of writing for oneself, the journal calls into question exactly who that self might be.

### *Post-Process Pedagogies*

Efforts to resolve, or at least mitigate, the problematic nature of composition instruction in a post-process environment have tended to repudiate the traditional, stable pedagogies that characterized much of the process movement and to instead emphasize the guessing that occurs at the point of interaction, which places an emphasis on the dialogue that occurs at the point of interaction. In her *Literacy, Ideology, and Dialogue: Toward a Dialogic Pedagogy*, Irene Ward (1996) presents a composition pedagogy called “functional dialogism,” which is a sort of everything-but-the-kitchen-sink pedagogy that attempts a synthesis of cognitive, expressive, and socially constructed views of writing. Simultaneously, Ward attempts to account for postmodern conceptions of a destabilized, fragmented self as well as radical critiques of authority argued by Freire (1970) and his principal American counterpart, Shor (1992). The aim of Ward’s synthesis is explicitly diplomatic: She believes that compositionists need to come together for the sake of their students. She calls for compositionists to break out of ideological containers and see their views as complementary; all have value and make important additions to a robust composition pedagogy.

At its core, functional dialogism is based on a social constructionist epistemology. In the classroom, that means collaborative learning activities, borrowed directly from Bruffee’s (1973) pedagogy, which he designed to put students in a variety of dialogues with a variety of potential audiences. Bringing expressive theories into the fold, Ward adds the self to Bruffee’s potential audiences by incorporating ideas about the importance of writing in personal development. In practice, the expressive component of functional dialogism assumes the form of journal writing, which Ward describes as follows:

Students can be asked to write synthesis journals in which they are asked to explain ideas presented in the reading to themselves in their own words—engaging in a dialogue with another’s written text—making connections among ideas and relating them to what they already know and their everyday lives. In journals or in more formal written assignments, students could construct dialogues in which they place themselves and their own points of view in dialogue with the experts on a particular subject . . . to extend the dialogue further, these dialogues could be shared with classmates, so students could also understand how students in turn situate themselves in relation to knowledge, perhaps deepening their own understanding of their situation. (p. 177-178)

Ward sees the journal as a highly structured and public document, meant to help students connect course material to their “everyday lives” (p. 178). It is meant to be shared with classmates to facilitate dialogue. The journal serves an explicit social function. The self is not locked inside, but composed of multiple voices, always in dialogue with each other: “The self in a dialogic pedagogy is not autonomous and solitary but multiple, composed of all the voices or texts one has ever heard or read and therefore capable of playing an infinite number of roles in service of the internal dialogic interaction” (Ward, 1996, p. 172-173).

The impact of the social turn on journals is well-illustrated by Summerfield (1987), who notes that all communicative acts are social in nature, even if those acts are written to oneself in a personal journal. For Summerfield, it is impossible to write without a social dimension in that writing, a move toward an other. Summerfield argues that while journals immerse students in a private world of their own thoughts, feelings,

and emotions, it is precisely that retreat into privacy that leads to better, more precise, more thoughtful, public expression. Journals are not anti-social, but profoundly social documents.

### Journals Reinvigorated

As articulated by Fulkerson (2005), expressivist pedagogies, or pedagogies that emphasize “helping students mature and become more self-aware, more reflective,” have continued to persist in composition studies despite a “groundswell of cultural/critical pedagogies” (p. 666-667). Within expressivist pedagogies Fulkerson notes an emphasis on challenging patriarchy by incorporating feminine viewpoints that provide females with “a safe place to share and explore experiences and viewpoints” (p. 666). He also notes a trend toward writing for therapeutic and healing purposes (p. 667). Indeed, under the expressive umbrella, it seems to be more and more acceptable to embrace feminine ways of knowing and to focus on writing as therapy.

### *Feminism*

In a post-process landscape feminist perspectives offer an overt criticism of patriarchy and the rejection of the discourse of mastery (Olson, 1999). Applying a feminist perspective to the history of composition studies, Susan Miller (1991) argues that the traditional teaching, service-orientation of composition defines it as “largely the province of women . . . [who] occupy the lowest hierarchical status by virtue of their association with composition teaching itself, typically characterized as elementary teaching that is a service tied to pedagogy rather than theory” (p. 41). Composition’s ascendance as a discipline is a move to shun its feminine identity and embrace masculine values, values that reinforce hierarchies, competition, and a strong emphasis on the

individual (Flynn, 1991, p. 141). It is the difference between the teacher (the feminine) and the scholar (the masculine). And though the desire for the professionals in English composition to improve their working conditions is understandable, the move does nothing to challenge the values of the academy, but rather reinforces the “patriarchal hierarchy” and “signifies acceptance of values that ignore the beginnings and contradict the purposes of current composition teaching and research” (Miller, 1991, p. 41).

Moreover, the demand to replace *soft* teacher lore and classroom-grounded, narrative-based research with *hard* research highlights the rejection of feminine in favor of masculine “disinterested methods” that “discover self-contained ‘meaning’ in the act of writing apart from its contexts” (Miller, 1991, p. 50). In that research orientation, the gender parallels are striking. The feminine is soft, personal, and subjective, while the masculine is hard, academic, and objective.

Such binaries are oversimplifications, and Miller (1991) acknowledges that the feminine identity is complex, or “intricately blurred” (p. 46) because that identity, in addition to requiring teachers to nurture and guide students, also requires teachers to maintain rigid standards of correctness and practice gate-keeping; nevertheless, the binary provides a useful, if convenient, conceptual framework for understanding a long-standing conflict in composition studies. In the disciplinary context of composition studies, the journal perhaps exemplifies that conflict between the academic and the personal, the masculine and the feminine.

With regard to the journal, such criticisms are taken up by Gannett (1992) in her study of the journal in composition courses from a feminist perspective. Gannett takes the position that the classroom journal sits on a fault line between genders. The journal

blends public and private discourse, academic and personal discourse, and masculine and feminine discourse, or as put by Autrey (1990) the journal represents a “convergence of dichotomies” (p. 40). The classroom journal is a place where the “friction” between the academic and the personal “become[s] explicit” (Gannett, 1992, p. 27). Gannett cites Bizzell (1986) and Bartholomae (1986), two prominent composition scholars who champion academic discourse in composition. Both criticize the journal for being too far removed from academic aims, which they view as the proper domain of the composition course; journal writing does little to cultivate the habits of mind that academic discourse requires.

Gannett (1992) argues that the journal is a manifestation of gender inequalities that have characterized composition from its inception, and that continue to characterize it today. Echoing Miller’s (1991) argument that composition turned away from teaching to a more masculine research-based agenda, Gannett views “[t]he issues surrounding the role and place of the journal in the university are representative of the larger question of whether we are continuing to reify the traditional, primarily male-generated, academic discourses and privilege primarily agonistic ways of knowing the world” (p. 198).

As previously noted in this text, the journal, in relatively recent usage, is seen as a feminized form, and the journal in the classroom has long been haunted by its association with the feminine. Scholars have sought to mitigate the charge that journals are too academically soft, are too feminine, by describing them with decidedly academic purposes, shifting attention away from the personal and instead casting the journal as a mediator between the personal and the public. Sitting between the masculine and the feminine is the journal, a form that must be contained, restrained, held in check. Without



those constraints, the classroom runs the risk of becoming too soft, too subjective, too personal. *The turn toward the feminine in composition studies has opened up possibilities for journals in the classroom that have long been resisted and often harshly criticized.*

### *Therapy*

In the anthology *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice* (Anderson & MacCurdy (2000), T. R. Johnson notes that in a postmodern world in which the old foundations have been eroded, little has changed in writing classrooms that might replace those foundations with pedagogies that utilize the power of writing to heal, to process identity, to give students the cure of writing. He sees classrooms that continually devalue experiential knowledge, a topic about which “many compositionists, and the university in general, have had little to say” (p. 109). He goes on to note that it has been the expressivists in composition that have given the most attention to the experiential, an emphasis which he applauds. It seems that in much of the literature about journals in the classroom before the turn of the century, the therapeutic function of journal writing is ignored, deemphasized, or given short shrift. One reason for that might be the previously mentioned fear of making the classroom too soft, too bereft of academic rigor, but another reason is the criticism that personal writing done privately as assigned by the teacher runs the risk of invading the privacy of students. Yet another reason is the idea that such writing is acceptable only within the scope of psychology and counseling and has no place in the composition classroom. For instance, teachers such as Singer (1990) wonder if their lack of training in psychology and counseling would lead them to damage students by requiring personal writing (p. 73), a concern that on face value seems quite

valid, yet given studies show that therapeutic writing has benefits that far outweigh the risks, Singer's concerns may be overstated.

Among those who argue that personal and private journal writing has the potential to invade the privacy of students is Jenkinson (1989), who calls for teachers to avoid assigning prompts that might elicit what he feels are disturbing responses, such as prompts about sexuality, drug use, and religion (p. 29). That view seems to be supported by Hollowell (1982), Heath (1988), and Singer (1990), who are troubled by their students' journals. All three wonder if assigning journals that elicit personal responses from students crosses boundaries that make teachers unable or unqualified to adequately address journals. What is the teacher's responsibility if a student writes about rape? They wonder if personal writing is "damaging" to students (Singer, 1990, p. 73). They wonder if they need education in psychology and counseling. And, they feel uncomfortable reading their students' personal responses, as put by Singer: "Do we inadvertently acknowledge drug use, premarital sex, homosexuality, shoplifting, abortion, even suicide, as if it is all 'OK'?" (p. 73).

While the above concerns are very real for a high school teacher, who teaches minors, college teachers, who generally teach adults, do not have the same responsibilities with the exception of cases involving self-harm or threats to others. Gannett (1992) notes that such criticisms are striking because they hardly seem to contain a pedagogical attitude, but are rather focused on the teacher and his or her comfort; they fail to account for students, who are surely much more disturbed by the hardships they experience (p. 39). Further, those criticisms are examples of the sort of mentality that has been criticized by feminists, social-constructionists, and liberatory educators alike for the

belief that students enter the classroom divorced from social, cultural, and historical contexts, that they are deficient, asexual beings, blank slates to be inscribed upon, or empty vessels to be filled. That is a pedagogical attitude that Miller (1991) sees as “sentimentalized” (p. 47). Students are “preeconomic, presexual, prepolitical children” (p. 47).

That attitude is seen by Johnson (2000) as the most plausible resistance to the personal journal in the classroom: Many compositionists cannot seem to let go of the notion that students are inferior and deficient. Johnson rejects that notion, arguing for the healing power of writing and the power of writing to foster agency, to give people an assortment of tools with which to cope, and to hope (p. 111).

Nevertheless, using journals for therapy raises complex questions about the role of the composition teacher. How the teacher should intervene in their students’ journal writing is a common thread in the literature. Should teachers read and respond to students’ journals? That is a question of the teacher’s goals with his or her journal writing assignment, if he or she is looking to foster prewriting, personal growth, reflection, or critical thinking, or any combination of the above. For the expressivists who tend to emphasize freewriting and personal growth, reading and responding to journal entries has the potential to inhibit the range of students’ journals. Boud (2001) notes that private journals “can release creativity and a flow of thoughts and feelings that can always be censored and shaped for others to read” (p. 16), and he implies that the privacy of journals, perhaps more than any other factor, can liberate or constrain what students write in them. Given the above ideas, that the reader(s) of a journal—especially the instructor—has the power to influence how it is used, there seem to be good reasons

for the instructor to take a hands-off approach to the kind of journal Elbow and Clark describe as a private place for “explorations of language and thinking” (p. 20).

Still, the question about students writing about painful topics is a valid question, which calls attention to the intersection of the public and private and the structured and unstructured. Journals assigned in an unstructured, private configuration, such as those that are the subject of this study, would seem to avoid the invasion of privacy charge. If teachers do not read the journals, they cannot invade students’ privacy or be called on to practice lay psychotherapy. If teachers give students the assignment as a private, personal activity without leading prompts, the student and the student alone decides what to write about. That position is bolstered by Pennebaker (1997), who shows that even when people write about disturbing and painful topics, they report that the writing experience was good. If teachers are prompting students, Jenkinson’s (1989) call for teachers to avoid assigning prompts that might elicit what he feels are disturbing responses should be considered.

Peter Elbow (1991) recognizes the therapeutic benefits of journal writing as he used a journal to work through a difficult time in his life. Recounting that experience, he writes:

First, I was using this private writing to allow myself kinds of discourse or register I couldn’t otherwise allow myself (public language being rather controlled). The basic impulse was to find words for what I was experiencing; somehow it helped to blurt rather than to try to be careful. Second, even in this ranting I see a kind of drive toward analysis that the reader might not notice: by letting myself rave, I help myself catch a glimpse I hadn’t had before of the

crucial pattern in my inner life—helped myself admit to myself, ‘I *insist* on cutting off my nose to spite my face. And I refuse to do otherwise.’ (p. 191)

In his journals, Elbow found the freedom to write about his struggles in ways he would never have shared in public, and in that writing he found relief. He mentions importing Progoff’s (1992) intensive journal writing into his writing courses, an approach explicitly about therapy and healing.

Burnham (1994), who is a most vociferous advocate of personal journals in English composition, makes journals the centerpiece of his courses. His “Journalworks” system utilizes two forms of journal writing, the learning log and the personal journal, which explicitly separates the public, academic journal from the personal journal, or diary. His learning log is akin the commonplace book. It is public, the teacher has access to it, and it can be used to collect prose and poetry that the journal keeper finds interesting. The personal journal, on the other hand, is private. In Burnham’s system, the student decides what the teacher can read. He or she has complete control over the journal. Further blurring the boundaries between the popular and the academic discussed in the previous section about therapeutic journals, Burnham, like Elbow, imports Progoff’s (1992) Intensive Journal System and uses many of Progoff’s recommendations. He does not shun the therapeutic function of journal writing. He embraces it.

Another prominent advocate of therapeutic journal writing in English courses is Jeffrey Berman (1994, 2001), whose work on personal writing emphasizes therapeutic writing in literature and composition courses over the course of three monographs. Berman’s descriptions of his therapeutic pedagogy are by far the most developed treatments of therapeutic journal writing in English studies. For Berman, therapeutic

journal writing fits into the composition classroom because it can lead to growth, emotional development, self-discovery, and he emphasizes that it can also lead to improved, more confident student writing. He situates therapeutic writing within the context of a traditional composition course that emphasizes the “rhetorical elements of writing, including figurative language, point of view, irony, and ambiguity” (p. 37), and he notes that he spends “at least a third of the class on writing drills” (p. 37). Yet, rather than academic discourse, Berman emphasizes personal discourse and self-disclosure, prompting students to write about painful and traumatic experiences. He shows that the composition teacher who is keen to use personal journals does not necessarily have to make a choice between soft personal writing and hard academic writing. The two can be blended into the same course without opening Gannett’s (1992) Pandora’s box.

He describes such pedagogy as a balancing act between the needs of the student to feel safe and protected in his or her disclosure and the important benefits students potentially realized through doing such writing. He recommends respecting professional boundaries and resisting the urge to play the part of psychologist, but to remain the writing teacher who works with students to give their personal writing its best possible expression. He gives students freedom to choose what they write about, as well as the option to keep their personal writing anonymous, and if the situation warrants it, he makes referrals to counselors. Students are not required to write about traumatic topics, but are free to write about them if they choose. Citing the work of Pennebaker (1990), Berman finds powerful justification for using “risky writing” in his classroom because of the health benefits of such writing, but more than that, he believes that journals teach good writing by exposing students to a long-standing tradition of self-disclosure in

writing such as that by Virginia Woolf, Anne Sexton, and Ernest Hemingway. On that very practical level, he sees his students investing in the writing, improving their writing, when they write about personal topics. In his *Diaries to an English Professor*, Berman (1994), in the context of a “literature-and-psychoanalysis” course, finds himself literally astonished by the power of personal journal writing. (p. 3). Students made “breakthroughs” and felt the writing was beneficial, that it was “therapeutic” (p. 3). He acknowledges that the course itself with the focus on psychoanalysis was particularly conducive to such revealing and powerful writing, so therapy was part of the foreground of the course.

Especially interesting in Berman’s journal writing activity was its balance between the public and private aspects of journal writing. He encouraged students to write about painful and traumatic experiences, yet he made it clear that he would share those entries with the class unless the student wrote at the end of the entry “do not share”. He also gave them the choice to remain anonymous. Berman read, but never graded, the diaries, and he kept the diaries under lock and key. And some students, working within that framework, reported that “writing the unspeakable was a turning point in their lives” (p. 3).

One should not overlook the parallels between Berman’s descriptions of his journal writing pedagogy as a virtual educational miracle to the literacy-as-liberation idea in *Freedom Writers* that began this chapter. What we find in Berman that was underdeveloped and underemphasized in *Freedom Writers* is that journal writing cannot liberate students from their economic conditions, nor can it offer the kind of class-ascendency so harshly criticized by Stuckey (1999). The liberty engendered by journals

is therapeutic in nature. Put simply, it helps students deal with their problems, with their traumas, with their painful experiences. It helps student grow and heal. It does not make those problems go away. Instead, it helps them become more manageable.

Berman's work with therapy in the classroom is held up as an exemplar of a course that teaches the whole student, not only within his or her social context, but that also takes into account the students' unique subjectivities, his or her complex identities, and his or her position as an agent of change, by Alcorn (2002). Alcorn notes that the cultural studies pedagogies that have become prominent within the discipline represent a sea change in writing instruction. In cultural studies courses, student do not study writing so much as they study cultural texts and artifacts, learning how to interpret them the *right* way, which, it is hoped, leads them to become politically active. The problem with those pedagogies, Alcorn argues, is that they fail to account for the students' broader humanity, his or her emotions and desires, and it is only in exploring the full range of humanity that a student can hope to gain agency, control, and affect political change. In other words, cultural studies pedagogies are strikingly similar to what Freire (1970) criticized as banking education. Students are ignorant and deficient. It is up to the teacher to fill them with the *right* perspectives.

In Berman (1994), Alcorn (2002) finds a pedagogy that, through an emphasis on therapy, self-discovery, and personal growth, stands as the embodiment of a postmodern pedagogy that finds its foundation not in external truths, but in the students themselves. The subject becomes the student, not what the teacher has determined to be the correct political stance to which students must kowtow. In bringing their own desires and emotions into the classroom, the teacher can then be a part of an organic dialogue in



which every person in the classroom learns from each other, and for Alcorn, change inevitably flows from that dialogue. Journals are no longer conceived as a vehicle to move students from their internal prisons to the external world of public, academic discourse. Journals are valued in and of themselves. Journals have a legitimate claim to a prominent position in the composition classroom. As put by Christopher Burnham (1994):

Students must understand that writing is more than using language to communicate. When they write they use language to create meaning and significance, to clarify values and understand emotions, to create knowledge and to make a contribution to the world. Providing students a thorough introduction to journal writing is not a sneaky way to foster written fluency or to teach prewriting and invention. Rather, as a locus of the writer-coming-to-be, journals are an initiation into a tradition. (p. 2)

Recently, Sirc (2005) uses excerpts from the journals of Kurt Cobain (2003) to show how personal journal writing captures real voice, real description, real writing, and he suggests that it is that kind of writing that we should be teaching in our composition courses. He throws out the academic goals of traditional composition, which he claims are based on reading and then responding to that reading, on the grounds that it is “infantilizing” and “degrading” (p. 13) to students. Invoking the expressivist tradition of Murray (1968), Moffett (1968), and McCrorie (1970), who emphasize *real* or authentic writing generated by the student, Sirc envisions journals as a centerpiece of composition courses because they teach students to “craft a compelling expression” of their lives, but he admits that “in the context of contemporary composition, that seems like a project

from another world” (p. 16). Put quite directly, Sirc asks, “Does Official Composition want journals?” and the answer comes back, “[O]f course not” (p. 19).

Nevertheless, expressivist pedagogies that emphasize the personal in academic contexts continue to persist in composition studies, even if they are more of an undercurrent compared to the mainstream focus on cultural studies and rhetoric. These scholars insist that journal writing is more than a means to do prewriting or a mere triviality, or a distraction from the proper academic emphasis of composition, but a way that writers practice writing. For Burnham (1994), journal writing in the classroom exposes students to a viable, venerable tradition of personal writing, which implies that, in a writing course, personal journals have a place. Nevertheless, the tensions between academic discourse and personal discourse remain, and pedagogies that incorporate personal writing are, arguably, still seen by some critics as marginal classroom activities, or as put by Yagelski (2006) “radical” (p. 531). Yagelski argues that in an educational culture that is more authoritarian and standardized than ever, obsessed with assessment and measurable outcomes, the need for expressivist pedagogies, pedagogies that engage the student on a personal level, are more important than ever.

### Configuring Journals for the Classroom

Surveying the multidisciplinary literature about journals in the classroom, one is struck with the vast array of possible configurations and educational objectives to which journals are put to work. In educational contexts, journal writing has been shown to offer many benefits to students, among them personal growth and development (Chew, 1992), improved critical and ethical thinking (Grant, 2007; Shor, 1992), stress reduction and improved health (Pennebaker, 1997), reflection (Moon, 1999; Spalding & Wilson, 2002),

metacognition (Arredondo & Rucinski, 1994; Berthoff, 1987; Dart, Boulton-Lewis, Brownlee & McCrindle, 1998; Hearn, 2005), and overcoming writing blocks (Hiemstra, 2001).

Given that broad assortment of benefits, employing journals in the classroom presents teachers with many choices. The configuration of the journal can have a tremendous impact on how the student approaches his or her journal and the benefits he or she realizes (Boud, 2001; Dymont & O'Connell, 2003; English, 2001). Journals are adaptable and versatile, and they may be configured in many different ways depending on the subject being taught, what the teacher hopes to teach with journals, and the teacher's level of comfort with students' writing about personal topics, among other considerations.

In teacher education, a field rich with journal writing theory, journals are often theorized as *learning journals*, which are distinguished from other forms of journal writing by their focus on reflection (Boud, 2001; McKenzie, 1998; Moon, 1999). For Moon (1999) classroom journals, or learning journals, are a "vehicle of reflection" (p. 4). Students who write in journals are asked to consider their experiences and bring them to the fore of their thinking, and that "involves taking the unprocessed, raw material of experience and engaging with it as a way to make sense of what has occurred" (Boud, 2001, p. 9). The practical application of learning journals might be in nursing education or teacher education in which reflective practice is encouraged in hopes of developing professionals who are careful and thoughtful about what they do.

Langer (2002) notes that studies that attempt to ascertain reflection in journals often fail to account for myriad factors that influence reflection apart from the journal

itself. He writes, “[u]nfactored into this unilaterally motivated assignment, however, is an awareness or appreciation of the student’s domain of assumptions: how student goals, expectations, and perceptions of the same assignment can impact the pedagogical goal of achieving critical reflection (p. 347). Langer’s own study found that journals indeed facilitated what he called “knowledge transfer” (p. 345) in his students, that the personal connections journal writing provided allowed students to make the course’s content their own, but he did not find a significant growth in students’ “critical reflectiveness” (p. 347), instead finding that students had difficulty understanding the concept of reflection. Langer goes on to lament the lack of studies that focus on the student perceptions of journal writing, and he calls for better descriptions of the students’ experiences with journals.

Yet, the potential benefits of journal writing are about more than reflection, which, according to English (2001), raises questions about the “intersection of the personal and professional” (p. 29). She wonders, is it better to teach students to separate those identities, or is it better to encourage a “holistic” (p. 29) thinking about those identities? Further, is it acceptable to allow students to use journals in ways that incorporate the more personal benefits of journal writing, such therapy and personal growth? She wonders where the teacher should intervene and where the teacher should take a hands-off approach.

Important design considerations include the structure of the journal, the journal’s audience, and how the journals will be assessed. With regard to structure, journal writing may be highly structured, which means the instructor determines the topic of journal entries; semi-structured, which means the instructor often, but not always, determines the

topic of journal entries; or unstructured, which means the instructor rarely, if ever, determines the topic and instead leaves that decision to the student (Langer, 2002, p. 340-341). They may also employ a mixture of all of the above, termed the “mixed method” approach by Daily (2002). Dymont and O’Connell (2003), studying students’ perceptions of structured journals, find that students did not like the mandatory nature of the journal writing assignments. Many students wanted more personal writing in their journals rather than the requirement to record observations and other teacher-prompted content. Students saw journal writing as an independent project that gave them self-determination in the course. It was something they did by themselves, on their own. That would seem to challenge the findings of Dailey (2002) and Corley (2000), who found that students most appreciated the mixed method approach, a combination of structured and unstructured journal writing.

With regard to the reader(s) of students’ journals, journals may be configured as public, semi-public, or private, which is about who has access to the journals or who will read them (Boud, 2001, p. 15-16). Boud notes that private journals “can release creativity and a flow of thoughts and feelings that can always be censored and shaped for others to read” (p. 16), and he implies that the privacy of journals, perhaps more than any other factor, can liberate or constrain what students write in them. Dymont and O’Connell (2003) found that audience has a profound impact on what students write in their journals. Students use their journals as they perceive the instructor wants. If the teacher emphasizes more creative entries, they do more creative entries, and so on.

Elbow and Clark (1987) extol the virtues of “ignoring audience” (p. 19) in journals, implying that for journals to reach their potential, the fears of them being read

must be mitigated. They argue that an awareness of audience is always on the mind of the writer, yet audiences are different. Some audiences are friendly, “inviting or enabling” (p. 19), while others are hostile or “threatening” (p. 19). There are also audiences between those extremes, the awareness of which “disrupts writing and thinking but does not completely block it” (p. 19). Given the above ideas, that the reader(s) of a journal—especially the instructor—has the power to influence how it is used; teachers must carefully consider how they intervene in the journal writing of their students.

### Assessment and Grading

Closely related to the issue of teachers’ reading students’ journals is how those journals will be assessed and ultimately graded. Dymont and O’Connell (2003) note that while students like to receive a grade for their journals, they may be uncomfortable with assessment, wondering how an instructor can fairly assess personal writing. Students wonder “how can you get a grade on your feelings?” (p. 30). Nevertheless, the formal assessment of journals may be necessary in certain contexts, to meet certain educational objectives, such as in courses devoted to “preparation for professional practice in which the use of case notes and commentaries on them is part of normal work” (Boud, 2001, p. 16).

Teachers might also consider the very practical problem that the ubiquity of journals means that students might be assigned journals in multiple courses, resulting in the feeling of being “journalled to death” (Anderson, 1992, p. 306).

The adaptability and versatility of journals is at once their greatest strength and a potential source of frustration for a teacher because little consensus exists about how to configure journals to achieve the desired educational outcome. Teachers intent on

fostering critical reflection in their courses might wonder, should I read every entry? Should I prompt every entry? Teachers focusing on personal growth and development might ask, if I read the entries, will students fully open up and get the most benefit from their journals? How much should I intervene?

The literature provides no simple answers to those kinds of questions, and by-and-large teachers must use their own trial-and-error research to figure out what works for them in their own particular contexts. There is widespread agreement that whatever configuration is chosen, whatever assessment method is chosen, instructors must be clear about what they want from their students' journals. The instructor must be clear about what he or she expects.

#### Implications for Research

In the discussion of the film *Freedom Writers* that opened this chapter, we see that journals are deeply connected to the cultural theme of literacy and liberation, a theme that also finds its expression in composition studies. From the point-of-view of composition teachers and scholars who advocate the use of journal in the classroom, journals are envisioned as a powerful form of writing that offers students a wide range of benefits. Whether they are seen as liberating inner expression, bridging the gap between the academic and the personal, or generating therapeutic self-knowledge and agency, the power of journals is a common thread that unites much of the scholarship about journal writing.

Journals have tracked shifts in the discipline of composition studies, going from a relatively stable format meant to emphasize prewriting free from the judgments of others and to foster the liberation of the inner from its prison, to a much more complex

conception that values journals as legitimate in their own right without imposed criteria or constraints. The move toward the postmodern, the turn to the social, has called into question the journal as a genre paralyzed by its inward emphasis and has instead conceived of the form as a public document that has the potential to explore the multiple voices that constitute the individual. Moreover, journals, often cast as femininized documents, have become more and more acceptable as the discourses of mastery, and academic modes of learning have been criticized by feminist scholars.

All of the above, combined with the post-process idea that a neat and tidy pedagogy of composition is virtually impossible, has opened doors for instructors of composition to employ journals in their personal and private and therapeutic variants, all in a decidedly experimental framework that casts the individual as much more than a singular, knowing self and instead as a person who is doing his or her best to communicate with others in his or her social and cultural framework. Journals are no longer constrained to be mediators between the academic and the personal, but they are valued as important in their own right.

In composition research, these shifts have taken the field away from cognitivist-inspired research into the composing processes and into the realm of researching lived experience. The narrowly defined realm of cognitive research that sought to shine a light on how students produced their texts has fallen out of favor, replaced by a fervent interest in investigating the worlds in which students produce those texts.

This study takes up the plea of Langer (2002), who, frustrated by the difficulty of picking out one feature of journal writing, in his case reflectiveness, and isolating it from its context, calls for research into the student experience with journal writing. Langer, in



short, wants to know more about what students experience when they write in journals in the classroom. This study answers that call.

It should be emphasized yet again that this study looks at a journal writing assignment that was assigned as a small component of a composition course that had as its primary emphasis research writing and the avoidance of error. The therapeutic journal-based pedagogies described by Alcorn (2002), Berman (1994), Burnham (1994, 2001), Elbow (1991), and Sirc (2005) were employed by tenured professors who had a great amount of job security, a great amount of freedom to experiment in their classrooms. In particular, the journal-based courses taught by Berman that contained great depth and range of emotion, the solemnity of healing, and the powerful therapeutic experiences his students found under his guidance literally astound me. That level of experimentation, however, was not available for me nor my students, so a prominent question this study addresses is how effective the journal writing assignment was in this particular context. This is a question highly relevant to a discipline in which thousands upon thousands of freshman composition students are taught by temporary instructors, graduate assistants, and adjuncts, most of whom face similar constraints as workers in the academic basement.

In that framework, and given the disciplinary context described in this chapter, any number of questions might fuel the researcher's agenda. Looking at the lived experience of journal writing in the classroom, one might wonder, *how do students experience the multiple voices that constitute the one in personal journal writing? How do students negotiate the complexities of audience? What specific therapeutic benefits do students realize in their journal writing, if any? If students experience a sense of*

*liberation in their journal writing, and how does that come about? What does that feel like? How do the experiences of journal writing compare between women and men?*

But this study will not explicitly address those questions, preferring, in the spirit of phenomenological inquiry, to bracket them away in favor of one larger question stripped of theory and preconceptions in the effort to, as fully as possible, describe the students' experience of journal writing in one particular context. The research question this study will address, then, is this: *What do students experience when they are assigned to keep personal, private journals in a composition course?*

CHAPTER THREE  
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The Design of the Study

As I walked through the hallways and observed my students writing in their journals, I wondered what they were doing. By design, the journal writing assignment afforded me little access to the journals of my students. The usual methods of assessing writing, especially reading and responding, were unavailable. This study grew from a desire to ask my students what they were doing with their journals, what they thought about their journals, in short, what they were experiencing. *I was asking questions about the lived experiences of my students with journal writing.*

To address the questions of experience, this study relied primarily on interviews. Nineteen former students were interviewed about their experiences with journal writing in their English composition course. A total of 48 former students who met the selection criteria were invited to join the study. Nineteen of those 48 agreed to join the study. Twelve participants were women. Seven participants were men.

Interviews were conducted in a public library that was easily accessible from campus. The venue was chosen to take both the teacher and former student outside of the university context in the hope of putting the researcher and the participants on a more equal footing, as two people having a conversation as opposed to a teacher, an authority figure, demanding answers to questions. Interviews were conducted strictly one-on-one, and each interview lasted approximately one hour.

The only criterion for the selection of participants for the study was that they had successfully completed the course, and successful completion was defined as finishing

the course with a grade of D or better. Only students with passing grades were chosen because the few students who failed the course tended to have poor attendance and missed many of the in-class journal entries.

In arranging the interviews, I asked my participants to bring their journals, which proved to be beneficial in a way that was unanticipated: Many interviewees referenced their writing to illustrate and elaborate on their experiences. At the conclusion of the interviews, I asked each participant if he or she would loan the journal to me for use in this study, which yielded some interesting reactions, from those who had no problem loaning the journal, to those who had to mull it over, to those who outright and emphatically refused. At the end of the interviews, all nineteen participants were asked to submit their journals to the study. Seven participants submitted their journals.

The nineteen interviews were transcribed and analyzed to find the themes that were essential to the journal writing experience. The method of analysis is described in the Data Analysis section of this chapter. The journals were used to find examples of the themes that emerged from interview analysis. That method is described in the Journal Analysis section of this chapter. The ten essential themes that emerged from analysis are presented in the next chapter, chapter four.

### Choosing a Method

Previous to this study, I conducted a pilot study designed to explore methodology and to gain experience in interviewing. In the pilot study, I employed a conversational interviewing model inspired by Rubin and Rubin (2005). Even before I had settled on a method, I recognized that it was important to let the dialogue about journal writing follow the directions chosen by the participants. I was interested in their experiences, which

meant I had to explore what they deemed important. Using the Rubin and Rubin model, an interview schedule was devised as an aid to ensure that, if the interview got too far afield, I could bring it back to the topic of investigation, and that in turn would help ensure the interview would be useful. The interview schedule in the pilot study, then, was something of a road map that highlighted places I hoped to go.

As I moved from one interview to the next in the pilot study, the interview schedule was modified. Probes and questions were revised as I gained experience and insight into the interviewing process. The interview process of the pilot study was an ongoing learning process for me as I sought to refine my approach and to improve my interviewing skills.

The following is the interview schedule from the pilot study:

1. Describe your experience with journal writing in Mr. Wester's course on English composition.
2. What do you think about writing in journals as a part of a course on composition?
  - a. When you were taking the course, what did you think about it?
  - b. How did you feel about the activity of journal writing?
3. Did the journal help you in the course?
  - a. (If yes) How did it help?
  - b. (If no) Why not?
  - c. (Either answer) Did writing in the journal help you develop as a writer?
4. What did you learn from writing in the journal?
  - a. How do you know you learned what you learned?
5. Overall, how did you use the journal?

- a. What did you write about?
6. Have you written in the journal since the course ended?
  - a. If yes, when, where, why?
  - b. If not, why not?
7. Had you ever written in a journal prior to taking the course?
  - a. If yes, describe your experience.
8. What are the benefits and negatives associated with journal writing?
9. What changes could have been made to the activity to better address your needs as a student?
10. Did the quantitative method of assessing the journals (counting the number of entries rather than assessing based on content of the journals) influence how you approached the journal writing activity?
  - a. If the instructor chose to assess the journals by reading the content, how do you think that would have changed, if at all, how you approached the activity?
11. What question should I have asked that I didn't?

A significant change from the pilot study to the full study was the scuttling of the interview schedule all together. In the pilot study, despite my conceptualizing of the interview schedule as a roadmap of potential avenues for exploration, when I reviewed the transcripts I realized that across all the interviews the questions on the interview schedule were exerting a tremendous influence on the responses of the interviewees in that they read like questions and answers rather than conversations. In the larger study, having at that point settled on phenomenology as my method, I opened each interview

with the following prompt:

*Let's talk about your experience with journal writing in our course.*

Another important refinement from the pilot study to this study was a matter of employing the human science research method described by Max van Manen (1990). Human science research is a phenomenological method, meaning it attempts to describe and interpret human lived experience as closely as possible to the point of experience. Originating in the work of Husserl (1931), phenomenology seeks to get “back to the things themselves.” According to van Manen (1990), phenomenological research begins with a researcher asking questions about the “way we experience the world” (p. 5). The phenomenological researcher wants “to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5).

Its emphasis on lived experience makes phenomenology well-provisioned to address the question about the experiences with journals of my former students, yet for the researcher to come close enough to the experience of a phenomenon to offer a description of that experience presents difficult challenges, some of which are impossible to overcome. Chief among those challenges is the problem of the researcher's own consciousness, which encompasses all of his or her biases and preconceptions, his or her *natural attitude* (Husserl, 1931). The natural attitude, as defined by Husserl, is the realm of the taken for granted, which is precisely what the phenomenological researcher wants to bring into the light; therefore, the natural attitude must be suspended, placed in check, so that the primacy of experience may enter the researcher's consciousness unobstructed, as it is. To do phenomenology, then, one has to bring his or her assumptions about the world, assumptions that are usually taken for granted, into the light of his or her

consciousness. Once those assumptions are identified, they are then set aside, or bracketed away, so as to experience the phenomenon as close as possible to its original form. That practice is called *reduction*, or *bracketing*.

Bracketing, though, as a complete casting aside of the natural attitude is impossible, according to Merleau-Ponty (1945). It is not the achievement of a perfect bracketing that defines the phenomenological method, but the practice of making the attempt, of practicing bracketing, so that over time one gets better and better at it. That emphasis on phenomenology as an ongoing practice that one never really masters is emphasized by van Manen (1990), who insists that one cannot achieve a rounded understanding of phenomenology without “actively doing it” (p. 8). To aid in putting phenomenology into practice, van Manen offers six methodological themes as a guide. Each of the themes served as a foundational guide for the methodology developed to address the question of my former students’ lived experience with journals. The themes are:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole. (p. 30-31)

The first theme, turning to the phenomenon, and the fifth theme, maintaining an orientation to the phenomenon, are closely related. My research orientation is important



to understanding the construction of the research method, and that orientation includes how I chose the object of investigation, how I, as the researcher and teacher, created and conducted the research, how I formulated my research question, and ultimately, how my pedagogical orientation informed the sort of research I wanted to do.

The orientation of this research is grounded in my vocations as a scholar in the discipline of composition studies and as a teacher of composition. Composition is a field with a healthy mix of research concerns and pedagogical concerns. Much scholarship in composition studies centers on the often complex interplay between those concerns. In composition studies, I found a space in which my identities as a scholar and a teacher were not necessarily mutually exclusive, but rather complemented each other.

Composition studies gave me a space to continually question my pedagogy in the ongoing attempt to connect theory and practice. This dissertation, even in its earliest conceptual forms, was always intended to be strongly oriented to the teaching of writing, and that meant a strong orientation to students of writing and their experiences with writing. In short, this dissertation has a strong pedagogical orientation, which made van Manen's pedagogical approach to phenomenology particularly applicable. As put by van Manen (1990):

. . . being-given-over to some quest, a true task, a deep questioning of something that restores an original sense of what it means to be a thinker, a researcher, a theorist. A corollary is that phenomenological research does not start or proceed in a disembodied fashion. It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of a particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence. (p. 31)

To become oriented toward the phenomenon, and to maintain that orientation throughout data collection and data analysis, I incorporated phenomenological reduction, or bracketing, into multiple phases of those processes. For instance, at each interview of this study I arrived to the interview site thirty minutes early so I could, *in my own journal*, write down as many of my preconceived ideas as possible so that I could bracket them away. My task was to put aside all of my theoretical ideas about journal writing and to orient myself toward the phenomenon of journal writing as described by my participants. The following is an excerpt from my research journal in which I practiced phenomenological reduction before an interview:

Many ways to mess up an interview. I worry about how much I'm missing, that I'm not attentive enough, and things pass me by. Being insightful, being attentive, is maybe the most difficult part of interviewing. Certainly, I have a newfound respect for the art of interviewing. I am learning a lot from this process. I don't think I'm a terrible interviewer. I am, though, very conscious of trying to get better.

In that example, I had to bracket away my own nagging insecurities about my ability as an interviewer. In the following example, I had to bracket away my attitude about the soon-to-be-arriving interviewee:

He always struck me as a middling student, a student who just wanted to get by. Nothing about his work in the course was especially remarkable, just middle-of-the-pack. He never really stood out in the classroom, never really spoke, so he sort of slipped through the cracks. He didn't get a lot of my attention. Honestly, I was surprised that he joined the study.

In each of the examples above, the thoughts, the prior knowledge I brought to the interviews, had the potential to cloud my attentiveness to the phenomenon of personal journal writing and my students lived-experience with it. Writing about those assumptions brought them to the fore of my thinking, brought them into the light of my consciousness, and once brought into that light, I was able to set them aside.

Bracketing was practiced in my explanations about the study to my participants. In the attempt to help my students bracket away their impressions of me, in my explanation to them about the interview process, I explained that I would like for them to view me as an equal, no longer their teacher in a position of authority, but instead as simply another adult who was interested in learning more about their experiences. By and large, I would suggest that these efforts to bracket assumptions were successful, especially as the initial anxiety about the interview faded as the interview progressed. Participants were remarkably candid in their responses, with some even offering pointed, yet polite, criticism of my teaching.

As the interviews progressed from interviewee to interviewee, my research orientation, especially the pedagogical component of that orientation, grew stronger. My connection to the experiences of my participants, and my attentiveness to their descriptions of the phenomenon, became better as I came to understand my own natural attitude and to, as best as I could, put it aside.

van Manen's (1990) remaining themes of balancing the research context by considering the parts and whole, reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon, and describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting, as employed in this study, are closely related by their emphasis on writing as a central

component of the research. In this study, all research, from collection to analysis, involved writing.

Writing helps the researcher maintain a conversational relation to the phenomenon, helping to maintain the researcher's orientation toward the research question. Writing was a central component of the method employed in this study. At all stages, whether practicing reduction before interviews, or practicing reflective writing during analysis, responses after the interviews, to the dozens of drafts and rewriting that ultimately produced this text, to the continual relating of the parts to the whole that characterized much of the analysis of the interviews that is presented in chapter four, the act of doing this study involved writing.

For instance, in addition to the bracketing I practiced before interviews, I also jotted down my thoughts about what had just occurred after each interview. I reflected on the elements of the interview that resonated with me. For example, I wrote about the tone of the interview, the level of conversational rapport, the interesting anecdotes or themes that came out of the conversation. The following is an example of one of those after-interview writing sessions:

I just completed the interview with Bobby, and it went well. He was very nice, very sincere. I think the depth was good in the interview. We explored his experiences, and he had no problem talking about his life and how the journal fit into his life. He talked about the insights into life that happened while writing in his journal. He saw the folly of some of his behavior. He saw that some things in his life were more important than others, and some of that was painful to see, such as the partying and drinking and drug use that often takes precedence over his

studying. I enjoyed talking to him, and I feel very good right now, like I'm doing something worthwhile.

Writing and rewriting are also vitally important to the analysis of the data, the uncovering of themes, and the textual expression of the research. Though the procedures employed in data analysis will be described in the next section of this chapter, it is important to note here that those procedures required intense reading and writing in the form of reflection.

It should also be noted that as a novice interviewer, I found the art of interviewing much more challenging than I anticipated. A particular difficulty was in asking questions that would prompt the participant to speak about his or her experience without putting words in his or her mouth. To illustrate what I mean, take the example of the use of the word *reflection*. One participant, Cindy, described an experience of looking back and contemplating past choices and actions, and that led her to consider how she could have better approached a similar situation in the future. My mind, quite unthinkingly, connected this to the act of reflection, and so I followed up, “so, how much of your journal was devoted to reflection?”

As soon as I said it I realized my error. And the rest of the interview demonstrated my error. From that point forward she described that kind of writing as reflective, whereas previous to my saying reflection she never used the term.

That example represents my failure to keep my preconceptions properly bracketed, so in every subsequent interview my efforts to bracket, and to maintain that bracketing, were doubled. From that point forward, I used only the words that were used by my participants.

As I reflected on the interviews I was struck by the nature of my relationship with my study's participants, my former students. I recognized that I had a special pedagogical relationship with them, a responsibility for them and their learning, and that responsibility transcended our former teacher/student relationship. I began to see them as more than students, but as people. From my perspective as their teacher, my view of my students was quite narrow and limited. My relationship with my students was more often than not a transactional relationship. As teacher, I told them what I knew, assigned tasks, graded papers, etc., but seldom, if ever, did I consider the broader range of humanity of my students. At the interviews, with that transactional relationship set aside, I found myself genuinely interested in what they had to say, genuinely interested in knowing more about them.

#### Data Analysis

In the analysis of the interviews, I employed a modified version of Hycner's (1985) phenomenological analysis method. The following procedures were used:

1. *Transcription of the interviews.* The interview recordings were converted to verbatim transcripts using Express Scribe transcription software. After transcription, based on the advice of Moustakas (1994), I created the extra step of asking participants to verify, review, and edit the transcripts. I mailed each participant, including Carol and Rachel from the pilot study who had interviewed a second time, a copy of the transcript with a self-addressed stamped envelope and a red pen with the note that they could correct or add to the transcript where they felt it was necessary.

All participants mailed back the transcript. Only one participant, Rachel, made changes to the transcript in the form of additions written in the margins meant to clarify

elements that she thought were under-explained. Those changes were treated as if they were the part of the interview. Every other participant wrote a small note stating that the transcript looked fine, or they wrote nothing at all.

2. *Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.* Before working with the recordings and the transcriptions, and at all stages of the analysis, I used my own journal to practice phenomenological reduction. With almost religious zeal, I attempted to bracket away my preconceptions in writing with the aim of putting aside all thoughts and preconceptions that could potentially interfere with my view of the phenomenon under study.

3. *Listen to the interview for a sense of the whole.* I listened to the interviews at least five times each. I needed to know the interviews like the back of my hand.

4. *Delineating units of general meaning – the words, phrases, etc. that express “a unique and coherent meaning”* (Hycner, 1985, p. 282).

In uncovering the units of general meaning, I used WeftQDA software. In my evaluation of qualitative data analysis software, I tried several applications, but it was WeftQDA that was the most useful for this study because it did one thing very well: It enabled the sorting of the transcriptions into general meaning units, or to *cluster* related units. The other programs I tried were quite robust, containing many features, yet it was the simplicity of Weft and how it enabled me to be close to the text of the interviews that made it so useful.

WeftQDA required that transcripts be converted from rich text (.rtf) to simple text (.txt) files, which was a matter of cutting and pasting them from Microsoft Word into Microsoft Notepad. Once the interviews were in the form of simple text, they could be

directly imported into WeftQDA. Then I read the transcripts and culled the themes line-by-line. Weft enabled both the creation of categories for each theme and the clustering of text that expressed the same theme under that category. At the end of the process, I had a list of themes and the text that expressed the themes in the form of a cluster. Each theme could then be selected with the cursor, or highlighted, which displayed all of the text connected to that theme.



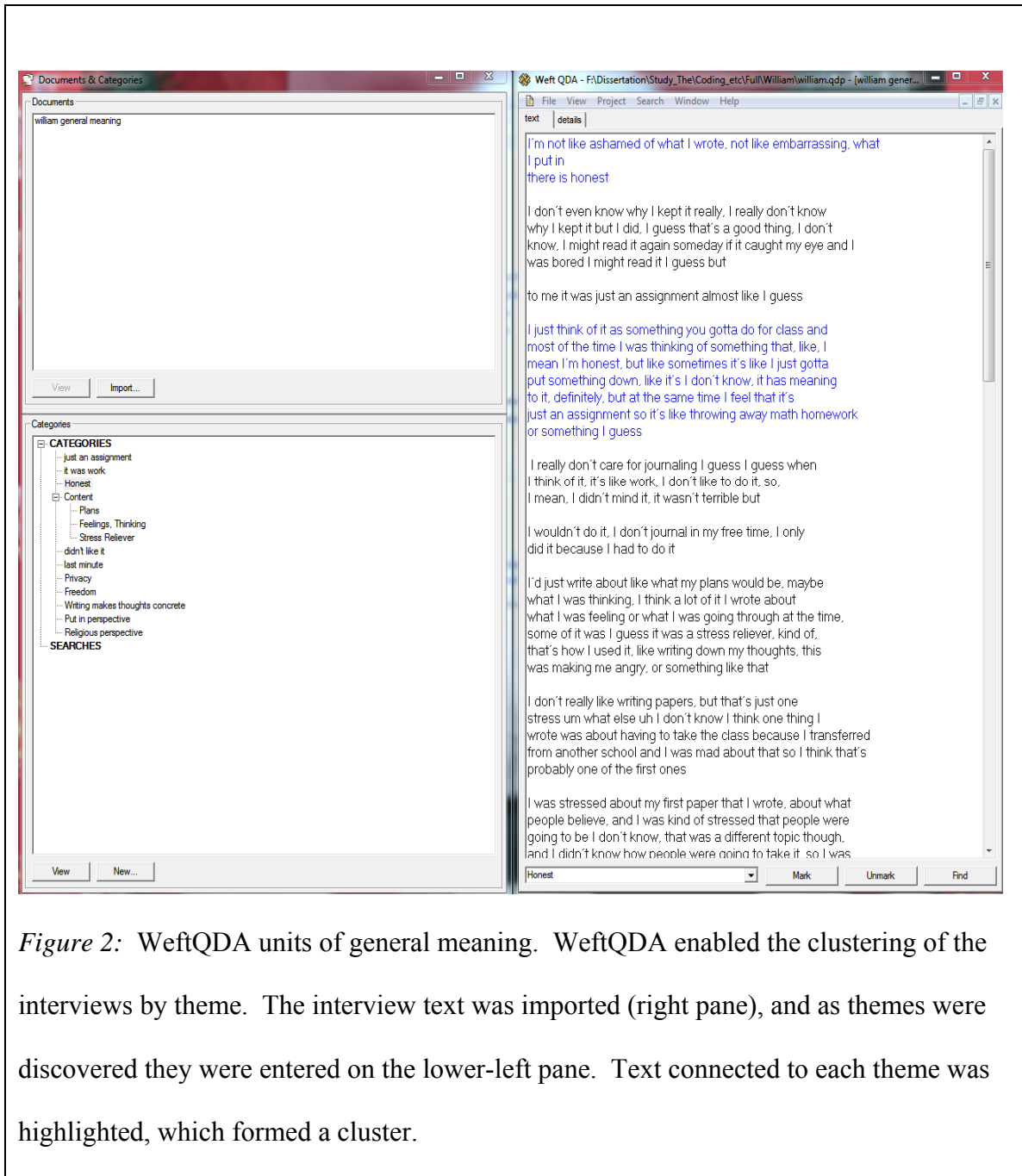


Figure 2: WeftQDA units of general meaning. WeftQDA enabled the clustering of the interviews by theme. The interview text was imported (right pane), and as themes were discovered they were entered on the lower-left pane. Text connected to each theme was highlighted, which formed a cluster.

5. *Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question.* In this phase of analysis, all units that fell outside the bounds of the research question were discarded. This step meant lifting out the substance of the interview that related to the research question and discarding that which did not relate to the research question, or separating

the wheat from the chaff.

6. *Training judges to verify the units of relevant meaning.* This step helped ensure what Moustakas (1994) calls *inter-subjective reliability*. Dr. Leah Chambers, my friend and peer in the IUP Composition/TESOL program, served as judge for this phase of analysis. I sat down with Leah, provided her with five excerpts from the transcripts from five different participants, all necessary software, and I trained her to conduct the analysis in steps 1-5.

When she completed the analysis, we had a conversation about our findings, compared our themes, and reconciled any discrepancies. Our analyses aligned rather closely. All differences in our analyses were subtle, and the dialogue and reconciliation of those differences added to the richness and the reliability of the analysis and confirmed my interpretation of the interviews.

For example, an important theme to emerge from the analysis was that of rereading. Participants found the journal to be a project that immersed them in reading and writing, often in the form of responses to previous entries. In my analysis, I believed that the theme of rereading was exceedingly strong, and that belief was confirmed by Dr. Chambers.

With regard to differences in the analyses, in several instances Leah used different terminology than I used, and the dialogue about those differences yielded useful insights and ways of thinking about the themes. The following is an excerpt from one of the email exchanges between us concerning the interview data. Leah writes:

I was interested in how when Anne was in class, she would revert to this kind of generic "to-do list" type of writing. Even though she was not required to share her

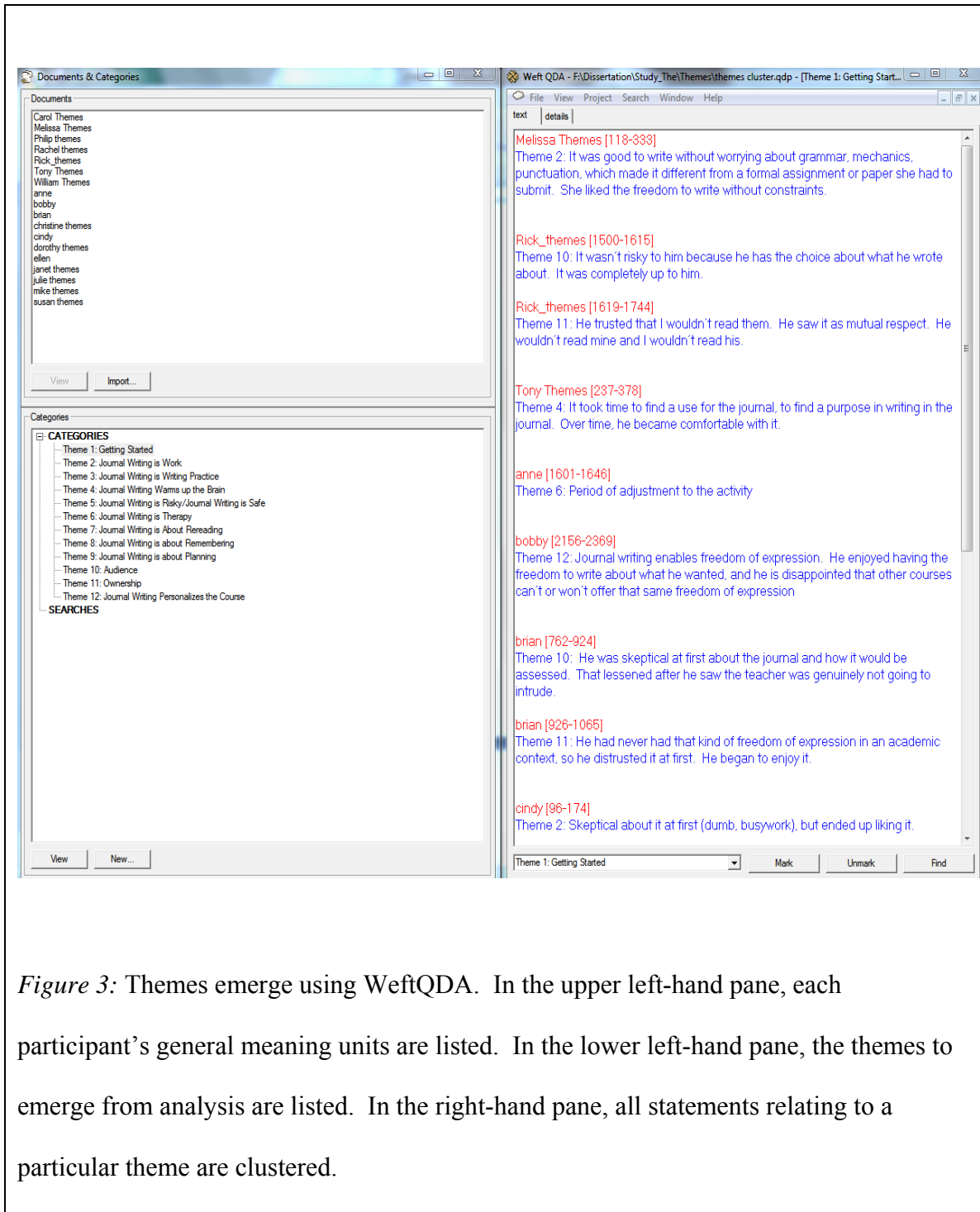
journal with class mates, she still views the class as a public space and treated her writing there as such. I also think that her topic choices in class could have something to do with the "point of need"; at class time, she notes that she was in a "good mood", so she would not feel the need to be "catty". I think this speaks to the value of out of class writing. From your conversation with her, Ann appears to have really used the journal to figure out why negative things were happening or to work through feelings that she does not want to verbalize. Clearly, she valued this. In both cases, re-reading seems to be absolutely essential. It's as if the text lacks truth until it is re-read, and it appears to be that in the re-reading, both Rick and Ann were able to use the journal to reflect on their behavior and even to correct it, as Rick notes in talking about the fight with his girlfriend.

As previously mentioned, Leah and I agreed about the importance of rereading to the experience, but Leah's insight that Ann had difficulty doing personal writing in a public classroom was particularly insightful and helpful; it was a concept that I did not see so clearly. Leah was keen to note how the space in which students wrote seemed to affect what they wrote about and how they approached their journal entries. Leah helped bring that theme into focus.

7. *Eliminating redundancies.* By counting the number of times the same meaning was repeated, I ascertained which themes were dominant, which could indicate the importance of that meaning; however, because phenomenology focuses on the individual, any theme to emerge from the analysis was useful. That principle is called *horizontalization* by Moustakas (1994), which means all themes are treated equally. All themes are relevant.

8. *Clustering units of relevant meaning.* Using WeftQDA, I put together related units of relevant meaning. At this stage of the analysis, the themes that fuel the next chapter began to emerge. All of the relevant units of general meaning from each individual participant, created in steps four and five, were imported into WeftQDA. Then, the process described in step four was repeated. I read the text line by line and culled themes as they emerged. Weft enabled me to cluster together all the interview statements by theme. In other words, this step allowed me to take the separate interviews and the general meaning units from each interview and put them together into units of relevant meaning.

9. *Determining themes from clusters of meaning.* Having pulled together all of the interviews and relevant meaning units in step eight, at this point the themes emerged. Each thematic label, which to that point had been a working label, was renamed to express the essence of the theme. Those themes are the basis of the next chapter.



*Figure 3: Themes emerge using WeftQDA. In the upper left-hand pane, each participant's general meaning units are listed. In the lower left-hand pane, the themes to emerge from analysis are listed. In the right-hand pane, all statements relating to a particular theme are clustered.*

10. *Writing a summary for each individual interview.* This step was about relating the parts to the whole. I went back to each individual interview, listened to it again, read it again, and I wrote a 1-2 page summary of the interview. (Examples of the summaries

are included in the appendices of this dissertation.) This helped me to employ writing, a central feature of my methodology as described by van Manen (1990), to begin to come to terms with each participant's experience with personal journal writing. After writing these summaries, I began to see how the themes were expressed by each participant, and I began to see how I would include each participant in my description of the themes in the next chapter.

11. *Contextualization of the themes.* With the themes in hand, I reread the transcripts and listened to the interviews yet again. Next, I read the summaries I created in step ten. In relating the parts to the whole, I ensured that the themes were a true expression of the interviewees and in-line with the spirit of the interview.

12. *Write a composite summary of the themes.* In this last step before the writing of chapter four, the themes were distilled into a summary that gave each theme a textual expression (examples are included in the appendices). At this point, I knew which participant was connected to which theme.

### *Journal Analysis*

The secondary method of data collection for this study was the journals themselves. A revision of the study between the pilot study and the full study was the attempt to collect journals from participants. Participants in the full study were asked to bring their journals to the interview.

In total, seven participants submitted their journals. The seven journals were then photocopied and returned to the participant by mail or by personal delivery.

The primary purpose of this study, to describe participants' lived experience with personal journals, was grounded in how they described their experiences, what they

deemed important about the experiences of our journal writing assignment. That meant the interviews, which were centered on the experience, were the primary mode of data collection. The journal writing assignment itself, as well as the journal writing done by participants, was never intended to address the question of the experience of journal writing; therefore, the journals were treated as artifacts, as the product of the journal writing experience.

By the time I reached the journal analysis stage, the analysis of the interviews had been completed and the themes from the interviews had been uncovered. Those ten essential themes then guided the analysis of the journals as journal entries were marked according to theme. Once those connections were established between the theme and the example of that theme in the journal, a second composite summary (from step twelve in the interview analysis) was written for the participants who submitted journals, using excerpts from the journals to illustrate those themes and to add depth and richness to the summary.

For example, one theme to emerge from analysis, which will be described in the following chapter, was how the journal facilitated a looking back and a looking ahead, a complex theme that entailed a conversation with multiple selves through gaps in time, a channeling of the voices of others, and the evolution, or change, in perspectives from one entry to the next. That theme was present in Rachel's interview, but her journal added depth and richness that the interview alone did not. Rachel's journal provided a vivid example of the complexity of that process of looking back and looking ahead as she expressed the desire for a romantic relationship. On September 7, 2007, she wrote:

I really enjoyed talking to him yesterday. We got along really well. Sometimes I

wonder if I'm ever going to meet someone, but maybe (hopefully) I will. Who knows? Maybe something will transpire.

In that entry, Rachel remembers talking to a man named Mark, and she looks ahead to the possibility of a future encounter with him. One entry later, we learn that something did in fact transpire. Three days later, on September 10, 2007, she wrote:

So, Saturday night I went out with Mark. I was so nervous, but I had a really good time. I like him, but I don't want to rush anything, especially since he is older than me. I don't know if he would expect more from me than I'd be willing to give. We got along great and I really like talking to him. I don't know if we are going to lunch today or not. I kinda hope so, yet I am still a little nervous. Hopefully, everything will go smoothly.

Again, we see Rachel looking back at her date with Mark and simultaneously looking forward to having lunch with him sometime in the future. In that entry, she seems quite hopeful that a romance is beginning, but a few days later we see a drastic change in Rachel's feelings about Mark. She wrote this entry on September 14, 2007:

So things aren't going to work out with him. He just has too many things going on that I don't approve of. He is way too into himself, and I need someone who cares about me, too. I still feel kind of guilty about ignoring him the past two days. I still do like him, and I wish it could have worked out, but I know my mom is right about him.

In that series of journal entries, we see Rachel progress from the hope that a man will notice her, to her going on a date with him and having a good time, to her ignoring him and hearing the voice of her mother, who apparently had a low opinion of Mark, and,



reading not too deeply between the lines, we see that the voice of her mother exerts great influence on Rachel. That series of entries illustrates an important and complex theme to emerge from this study, which is, in essence, how time and the voices of others play an important role in journal writing, how over time we see things differently. That theme will be further developed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of my investigation into my participants' lived experience of personal journal writing in our English composition course. van Manen (1990) cautions that meaning "is never simple or one-dimensional," so from the beginning of this fourth chapter it is important to mention that the essence of an experience, any experience, is far more complex and nuanced than any textual expression of that experience can show. Any experience, from the most exhilarating to the most mundane, contains multiple layers of meaning, and invariably, when a writer attempts to present those layers of meaning in the form of written language, something is lost. Language can do many things, but it cannot fully capture the rawness, the primacy, of an experience. At best, it can point to the experience, offering hints and glimmers.

The written expression of an experience, then, is a simplification. The goal of this chapter is to provide for the reader some glimpse, some feeling, some sense, of the lived experience of personal journal writing as experienced by this study's participants. It will do that, in part, by describing the layers of the experience in the form of the *essential themes* uncovered in the analysis of the data. But once pulled apart, we no longer have the fullness of the experience. Experiences are always greater than the sum of their parts.

That seems like a contradiction, that phenomenology in its ideal form is most interested in the fullness of experience, yet it is precisely that fullness that is impossible to capture with language. As discussed in chapter three, a complete phenomenological reduction is impossible; therefore, I used themes, in the words of van Manen (1990), to

bring order to the experience (p.79). In giving it that order, this chapter will describe the experiences of this study's participants as faithfully as possible.

In total, ten essential themes emerged from the analysis of the interviews. Those themes are named as follows:

1. *It is Hard to Get Started.* This theme involves the challenge faced by many participants as they acclimated to the assignment. The freedom to control the journal without the instructor's intervention was very different from the previous educational experiences of almost all participants, and it took time for them to get used to it and find a purpose for their journals.
2. *Journal Writing is Work.* This theme speaks to the loathing of journal writing that was expressed by a minority of participants. They saw journal writing as nothing more than another arduous and pointless classroom task that they had to do. It was work as opposed to fun. For these participants, journal writing was pure drudgery.
3. *Journal Writing is Writing (in) Practice.* This theme was expressed by participants who saw journal writing as tightly integrated into our composition course as a means to learn that writing was not exclusively about the final product they submitted for grading, but instead that writing was a continual process that one could never really master. As they practiced writing, many participants found that their confidence expanded and translated to improved writing in other assignments.
4. *Journal Writing Personalizes the Course.* Participants saw the journal writing assignment as a means to make the course their own, or to personalize it. For

those participants, journal writing made the course feel more like they had a stake in the course.

5. *Journal Writing is about Looking Back and Looking Ahead.* Many participants described a process of remembering their experiences and then looking ahead to how they could make better decisions in the future. Journal writing facilitated reflection.
6. *Journal Writing is Risky/Journal Writing is Safe.* This theme speaks to the double-edged sword quality of journal writing. On one hand, the journal was a safe place to write about one's deepest, most intimate thoughts. On the other hand, recording those thoughts in writing posed the risk of them being discovered by an interloping reader, thus exposing the journal writer to the possibility of conflict.
7. *Journal Writing is Therapeutic.* Journal writing made some participants feel better about their problems. They described journals as a place to let out negative emotions and to lay down burdens.
8. *Journal Writing Involves Rereading.* Reading previous entries and then responding to those entries was a prominent theme of this study.
9. *Journal Writing and Audience.* Who is the audience of the journal? For the participants of this study, the audience was most often described as oneself, yet that self was multiple, imbued with the other voices that participants channeled in their writing. Participants also addressed an audience of God in their journals.
10. *Journal Writing is about the Ownership of a Journal.* Many participants

described a sense of owning their journals, which they defended with intensity. That sense of ownership meant that some participants could not give up their journals for study. The journals had value and were worthy of saving for some use in the future.

#### Theme One: It is Hard to Get Started

“At first I thought you were nuts,” said Anne.

“At first I wondered why he’s not going to grade these. That doesn’t make sense. Why even put the time and effort into it?” said Ellen.

It took time for participants to get used to journal writing. They struggled to discover what to write about. They struggled to overcome their resistance to doing the assignment. They struggled with the freedom to write about whatever they chose. Little in their previous educational experiences prepared participants for a teacher who took a deliberate hands-off approach. Participants found it hard to believe that their teacher was serious.

So at first, participants distrusted the journal writing assignment. They distrusted the teacher’s claim that he would not read their journals. They resisted personal writing for fear that if they were too personal, and if their teacher changed his mind and read their journals, they would be exposed, their privacy invaded.

The assignment was too good to be true. It was too easy, according to Anne. There had to be a catch. Even when participants had some experience with journal writing from their high school careers, teachers exercised much more control over those journals. According to Melissa, it worked like this:

She gave us a paper, it had the most stupid stuff, like, if I was a superhero, I

would . . . If I lived in the refrigerator I would . . . those are two that I remember because they are so dumb and then we'd turn them in at the end of the week and she'd grade them, but like, she put comments on stuff, like, like the superhero one, like well why would you do that, what would you do? Blah blah blah like this is what I wrote for you like if you wanted something else you should have asked, put that in the prompt or whatever. I hated it. It was a chore to write them. It wasn't like writing whatever I feel. I had to go along with this, and I had to write for fifteen minutes and I had to write two pages, and I had to meet all these requirements. It wasn't my writing. It was what I thought you wanted to hear like by the end of it. So I don't, I don't think you can go about it that way, like to force someone to write about something so dumb. If I wanted to write about being a superhero I would have. I don't want you to tell me that I have to.

Some days the teacher would issue a freewriting prompt, telling students to write what they wanted, yet students knew it wasn't really free: Students knew, without a doubt, that they could not trust the teacher to respect their privacy. If they used their journals to write about their problems, they risked being publicly exposed. They risked humiliation. They wrote with that fear in the back of their minds.

Melissa remembered an incident from high school in which a friend had her journal turned over to the guidance counselor. "They made a big huge deal about it," she said. Our journal writing assignment, however, was different for Melissa:

I was never like in fear that you'd read it and I'd end up in the guidance counselor's office or you know it would never be made a bigger deal than what it was to me personally. You weren't going to read it and show it to somebody else

and their brother and whoever, my mom, you know, nothing like that, so it made it easier to write like what I truly felt.

Brian, at first, didn't believe it. For Brian, teachers were authority figures who sought, more than anything else, to control their students. Assignments were always narrowly defined. Topics were assigned. But as time went by, he realized the journal assignment was "for real," and he began to loosen up. He realized that that the assignment was exactly as described, and once he had that realization, he poured himself into his journal. It just took time. He described being "into" the activity, so much so that the twenty minutes we spent on journal writing was almost never enough. After class, he would sometimes grab a sandwich at the student union and head back to his dorm room, where he would finish that day's journal entry.

Participants who did journal writing activities in high school had to write with the teacher in mind because the teacher always collected and read their journals. The pressure to write correctly, not only about the *right* topic, with the *right* content, but also with good grammar and good technique and good mechanics, was their primary concern. They described previous educational experiences with journal writing as highly structured and constrained by the demands of the teacher. That a teacher would refuse to interfere was new. The journal assignment under study broke the mold that had been solidified in twelve years of formal schooling, and it took them time to adjust to the novelty. The mold had to be revised. And over time, as they were dismissed to write without the teacher's interference, they realized it was "for real."

And the journal, for participants like Ellen and Melissa, marked for them the difference between being a high school student and being a college student. It was the

difference between being treated like a child and being treated as an adult. The realization that the game had changed, that the expectations were different, struck Ellen when she realized that part of her difficulty adjusting to the journal was that her attitude, her mentality, was still stuck in high school. Her initial skepticism about the journal writing assignment, she said, was grounded in a high school, child-like mentality that everything should be decided for her. As she wrote in her journal in our composition course, she realized that she had to change her thinking:

There has to be a line somewhere. Like in high school they do everything for you and in college you're on your own. You have to do it and you just do what the professor says and then like after college there's no one there to tell us what to do and you were kind of like not telling us what to do but giving us an opportunity to do what we wanted to do instead of what you wanted . . . I learned to be myself and not what you wanted us to be. A lot of teachers, again, they tell you everything to do and they make you out to be who you are and you kind of brought us to be ourselves and write everything that we want to write and not what you wanted us to write and um I just think it taught us, it taught me not to assume there's always going to be someone there to tell me what to do so I mean, thinking on my own, not that I never thought on my own before, just like when you're in school you always think the same thing because the teacher thinks it and I think now I look at college completely different um I don't see it as a high school like I used to see it and I think of like my emotions which brought out in the journal, like my feelings um more so than I used to. I never used to think of my feelings, they never mattered, but like they really do matter to yourself and um



it just taught me that you don't always have to be like degraded with grades so just, I really think you brought out like to be yourself and write what you feel and don't always write what you're told to write and stuff like that.

### *Freedom to Write*

Freedom brings the need to make decisions, and sometimes it is hard to make decisions. Sometimes it feels much better to give up that responsibility and let someone else do the deciding. Sometimes it is easier to be told what to do. One doesn't have to think about it. He or she just has to do it.

Since so much of schooling is exactly like that, the teacher telling students exactly what to do, many participants found that newfound freedom nothing short of stifling, even paralyzing. Some participants described a sense of frustration at the beginning of the semester, a sense of paralysis because the freedom to use the journal in any way they wished was, as put by Anne, "a shock," far different from the academic work they were used to. It took some time to get used to that freedom. It took some students longer than others, and some students never got used to it and found our journal writing activity highly frustrating and "pointless," as put by Mike.

In the following, I have categorized participants as those with "little resistance," "medium resistance," and "high resistance" to journal writing.

### *Little Resistance*

Melissa and Dorothy best represent those participants who adjusted to the assignment relatively easily. For Melissa, the freedom to write about what she felt, what was on her mind, was liberating and welcome. At first, the "it's too good to be true" thought stalled her, but only for a millisecond. It didn't take her very long to realize that

the assignment was, in fact, “true.” Like Ellen described above, it was the different between being treated like an adult versus being treated like a child, and she had been looking forward to that sort of treatment for a long time. When it finally came, she embraced it almost instantaneously.

She enjoyed journal writing. Some days, she said, she would look forward to coming to class just because she had something she wanted to write about in her journal, and some days she was disappointed when we didn’t write in the journals, and right after class she would write in her journal. For Melissa, the journal was about the freedom to choose, which was part of being an adult.

Dorothy, a skilled writer who had recently won a college-sponsored contest for an essay she wrote about Shakespeare, found journal writing useful almost instantly, even saying that starting a journal had been on her mind for some time and that the journal writing assignment was just the push she needed to get going.

Dorothy took full advantage of the freedom to write and use the journal in any way she chose. She described keeping a journal of diverse content and multiple purposes, from collecting her thoughts, to collecting bits of poetry and quotations that she found inspiring, to sketching her surroundings, to writing snippets of fiction and poetry of her own creation, to clarifying her ideas about texts assigned in her courses.

She described herself as a lover of language and learning. The journal, for her, was a playground, a place where she could have fun with language. Like a jazz musician improvising on a theme, Dorothy’s journal writing was a free-flowing, uninhibited experiment with language.

For both Melissa and Dorothy, we find that the responsibility to do the journal

writing assignment on their own, without interference from the teacher, was an almost ideal assignment because they could use that freedom to play with language and express themselves. Further, for Melissa especially, the journal marked the difference between high school and college.

Both Melissa and Dorothy continued to keep journals after the course had ended. Melissa started a new journal when she worked a summer job at a daycare. She used it to write about the children in her care and to reflect on her job performance. Dorothy continued to keep her journal in the ways described above, as a place to write and store anything and everything that she found interesting, as a place to play with language.

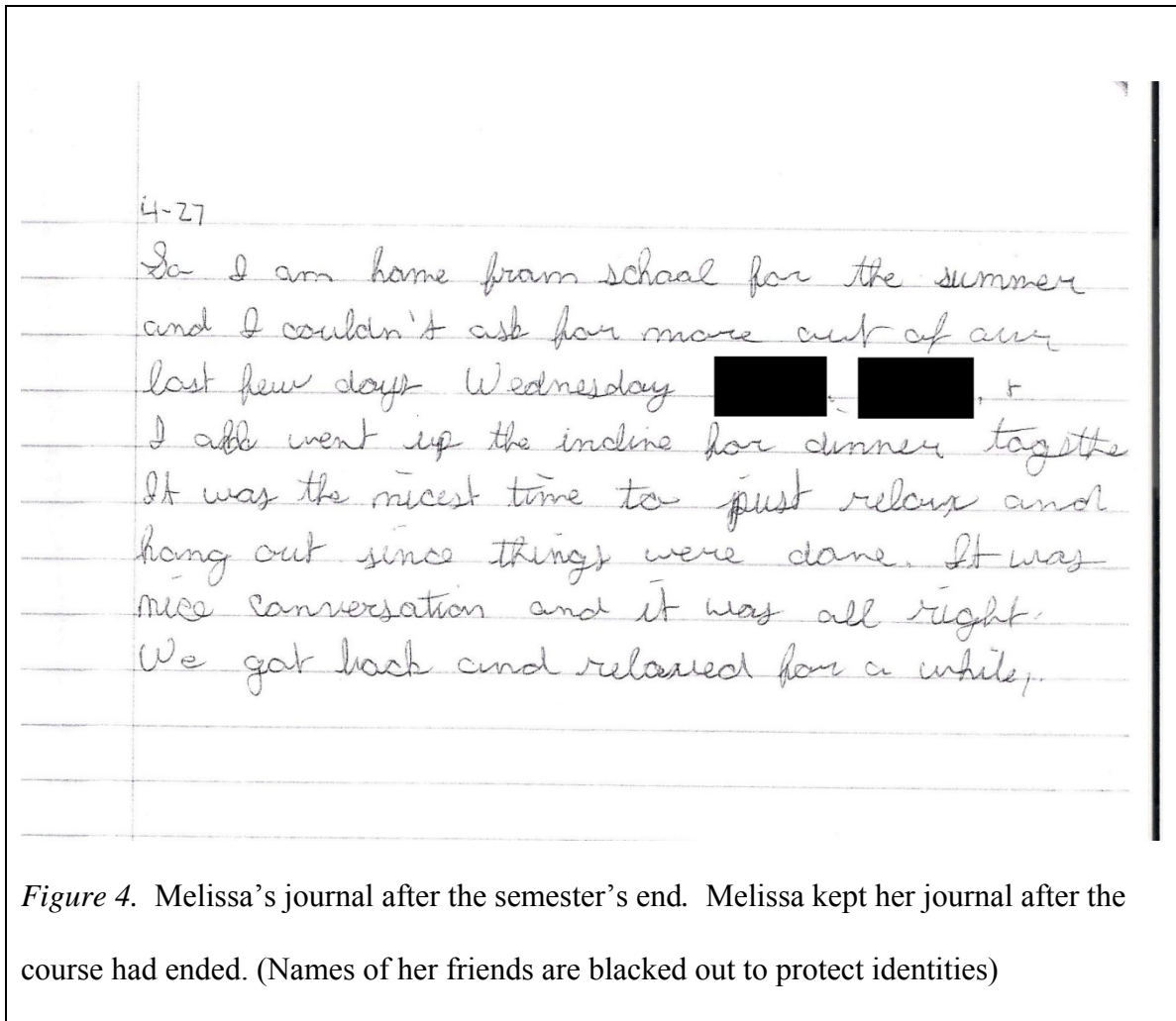


Figure 4. Melissa's journal after the semester's end. Melissa kept her journal after the course had ended. (Names of her friends are blacked out to protect identities)

#### *Medium Resistance*

Of those participants in the middle of the pack, those who took a bit more time to acclimate to the assignment, Ellen stands out. She took both of my composition courses, Composition I and II, and in both courses she was required to keep a personal journal. She described a process of evolution through those two semesters. In her first semester, she began her journal writing experience by writing things that didn't matter to her, such as jotting down her chores or making to-do lists. As time went on, she found herself opening up and writing journal entries that, to her, had more substance and depth. Those

entries focused on her thoughts and feelings and on coping with her problems and worries. Still, it wasn't until the second semester that she felt her journal began to reach its potential. She believed her second journal contained more emotionally charged writing. It was so personal that, when asked to submit her journals for this study, she considered submitting the first journal, but not the second:

Ellen: I think in the second one I got more into detail because the first one, it was like brand new to me and I didn't really go into . . . I went into detail but it wasn't like the deepest I think. In the second journal I actually like went there and that's like every journal entry I did was pretty like emotional and deep so I don't know. I don't know if I want people to read that just because of that

Jason: why?

Ellen: I don't know it's kind of like, not a secret, but like it, you can interpret it as a secret because I don't want other people to know, but they kinda already know it. It's just different, like they can see my feelings from just looking at me, but they don't how I really feel because I wrote it down.

Also, the awareness that college was different from high school came up with Ellen. While she had the same struggles with trusting the assignment and creating a new mold in which to understand the unrestricted nature of the assignment, she came to see it as a means to learn writing on her own terms. In high school, she was never given that opportunity.

Ellen's experience with journal writing was one of continual expansion and growth. Much like other participants, at first she thought she would dislike journal writing, which she equated to someone saying that he or she hates a kind of food before

he or she has even tried it. Her initial feelings were illustrated when she said, “If he’s not going to grade them, why do them? That’s stupid.”

Once she pushed through her initial resistance, she found that she enjoyed writing in her journal. The more she thought about grades and how she was conditioned to do work because it was graded instead of for the sake of becoming a more educated person, the more she realized that “grades are degrading.” The journal, for Ellen, became much more than a school assignment that she did because she had to. In the journal writing activity, Ellen was released from the pressure of grades. It was about improving herself. It was about doing something because it was worth doing in and of itself.

She made that realization when she began writing about her emotions and her problems and using writing to puzzle through them, to gain perspective on them, and to feel better about them. When asked to elaborate about the difference between the first journal and the second journal, she revealed that much of the second journal was centered on her father, who was a member of the military and who had recently been dispatched to Iraq. She was worried about him. Actually, I think *worried* is the wrong word. She was mortified, terrified, that her dad would get hurt, or worse, killed, that she would never see him again. She loved her dad and considered her relationship with him to be very close and special, describing herself as a “daddy’s girl.” Her dad, in her view, was the ideal man. He was strong, loyal, a dedicated husband and father, a provider, and he loved with intensity, qualities that she tried herself to emulate, describing herself as a “lover,” which for her meant that she loved people intensely and gave freely of herself to family and friends. The very notion, the very thought, that her dad might never return from Iraq was detestable to her, yet it continually haunted her thinking. She missed her dad. She was

worried about him. All she wanted was for him to return in one piece.

Having discovered, or grown into, that sort of journal writing, her journal became her constant companion. She took it with her when she travelled to Texas on a school-sponsored trip and recorded the details of her travels, including the people she met and the things she did. She loved Texas and the people of Texas. They were very different from the people of Western Pennsylvania in terms of their hospitality. People in Texas were nice, far nicer than Pennsylvanians. She liked that. By exploring these issues and topics in her journal, Ellen “discovered that I had something to say.”

At the beginning of the semester, Tony, like Ellen, spent his time writing about things he thought were trivial or insignificant, such as listing what he had to do that day or planning his work week. That kind of writing, for Tony, was a waste of time. He was doing it only because he had to. He was not invested in the writing in the least. Like some kind of mindless automaton, he moved his pen, but he didn't care what his pen produced. That ambivalence bothered him. It was a part of his character that he didn't like and wanted to change.

He knew that journal writing had benefits. He knew that it could help him work through his problems, and organize his life. Once he overcame his ambivalence. He wrote about his problems at work, his problems with family, his problems with school, among other topics:

When we first started doing them I wasn't sure what to write, and I struggled with it at first because I wasn't sure what information I wanted to put in it, or what I was thinking about, but once I started coming across these small problems that I was having um with the swim team, with my family and whatnot, um, I decided

that that's what I needed to be writing. If that's what's bothering me the most, if that's what's on my mind the most, that's what I need to be writing about. And you know, whether my reaction was good or bad, if it was okay, and what I could do to improve it next time if I you know, if that same problem arises . . . I got the best use out of it that way.

I asked him how long it took for him to make that transition. He said:

I would say almost a month, and that's doing two entries a week, so that's eight entries in a month, and it just seemed like, you know we would do it in class you know and I, at first, I would just write you know I had chemistry this morning, you know I had physics, I ate breakfast, I let my dog out, um, you know stuff like that, and then I would read it and think, this is senseless; this is pointless to write this down because I know what I did that day, but I think to view something more important like a problem I was having would have more of an effect on me writing that down versus, you know, I woke up at five-thirty, I ate breakfast, I watched the news, I came to class, um, I don't understand chemistry, you know, stuff like that, which, I think is pointless to use it that way. If it helps somebody then so be it, but it didn't help me. It didn't. It didn't do me any good to do that.

At first, he found it difficult to commit to journal writing. It nagged at him that he wasn't getting anything out of it. That nagging feeling that he was wasting his time and getting no benefit from an activity that he realized could help him work through his problems eventually pushed him to write about things that were important to him. Once he pushed through that initial resistance, the journal became a very personal document for him, but it took time, and he had to reach a kind of breaking point to get there.



### *Total Resistance*

Mike was a memorable participant because he interviewed solely to tell me how much he hated journal writing. After a semester of continual frustration, he had finally found a use for his journal, he joked: He was using it to prop up his laptop.

Whereas the medium resistance group described above at first had difficulty finding the purpose of journal writing, yet eventually found that purpose, that never happened for Mike. He could never see the point of journal writing. He could never discover its purpose.

He hated journal writing.

During our interview, Mike confessed that he often came to class late to avoid writing in his journal. But rather than take an F on the journal writing assignment at the end of the semester when it was time for me to count their entries, Mike took advantage of his teacher's refusal to read them. He cheated. The day before it was due he logged onto facebook.com and copied text from that web site into his journal. He passed off that text as legitimate journal entries.


Mike believed he lacked the disposition that one needed to write in a journal. In fact, several participants made that point. They believed some people like to write. Some people just naturally have an artistic/creative side; some don't. Some people can tolerate solitude; others fear it like the plague. Mike did not want to sit and write. He wanted to be out in the world, talking to people and doing things. For Mike, being forced to sit alone and write was tantamount to punishment.

Mike explained that he loved class discussions and group activities. Sitting alone, writing in a journal, seemed pointless to him. He wondered what he was supposed to be

learning. What was he supposed to get out of it? Mike wanted structure and specific topics. He wanted the teacher to tell him what to do, precisely, letter-by-letter. With regard to the journal, the teacher relinquished his role of authority and deferred to the students to make their own decisions about their journals. Mike was unwilling to make those decisions.

That desire for structure was evident in his description of the parts of the course he enjoyed, especially the research papers. He said that he enjoyed the research papers because the task was narrowly defined, the structure formal, and he didn't have to think about it. He just had to gather his sources and spit out a paper. He believed that writing research papers would help him succeed in his other classes. The journal, on the other hand, offered him nothing in that regard. It was a colossal waste of time.

But, Mike said, if his teacher had assigned prompts, if he had read and responded to the journal entries, he would have done them. Perhaps he would not have liked doing them, but he would have done them to make a good grade. This, too, is about freedom. Mike exercised his freedom to not write in his journal. He wanted his education to be practical and useful. He didn't see the point in writing about his feelings.

January 11, 2008 - Friday 

This is kind of difficult and awkward, in a sense, for me because it's been so long since I've done anything like this. It reminds me of my English class in high school which was the first time I had to keep a journal, and I thought the idea of having to write in one was so odd and ridiculous. Needless to say, I dreaded having to write in it. I will have to admit though, I argued with my professor about how writing like this can make you become a better writer. It's something I have to force myself to do. If I have the idea that "journaling sucks" and "I hate this class" then I will never grow, and the class will be miserable for me. My dad once said that it's good to do something in a while that you don't like because eventually in life you are going to come across situations in which you are forced into that you don't like. So will you respond to them? So I think and hope that this class will be a growing experience for me. Also, as a believer in Christ, I am called to do everything for the glory of God, so that means I need to be giving it my best, whether I like it or not.

Figure 5: William's resistance. William connected his journal to what he was assigned to high school. He wrote that he hated journal writing in his very first journal entry.

## Theme Two: Journal Writing is Work

Many participants described feeling intermittent bouts with a lack of motivation to write in their journals. Melissa said that while she liked journal writing overall, some days it felt like a task. Bobby said the same thing, and so did Brian. Even participants who were excellent students and who liked journal writing sometimes had off days in which they just didn't feel like writing. Then there was Mike, who never wanted to write in his journals, and William, who never felt motivated to write in his journal.

His ambivalence, his struggle to find motivation, is apparent in his very first journal entry in which he writes that he recognizes that journal writing could have benefits, but he cannot find the motivation to do it (see Figure 4.2).

School, as described by William, was mere obligation and duty. It was a means to an end. With regard to journal writing, he made no bones about it. He did not like to write. For William, writing was work. He would much rather play video games. On one hand, he recognized that journal writing had some value, some potential benefits, but no amount of benefit was enough to motivate him to write in his journal. He saw journal writing as a task, as work.

He said, "No one wants to do work. Work is something you have to do."

For William, there was a strict binary of fun and work. Fun was the opposite of work. One works because he has to. One has fun when he does what he wants to do. One has fun when he pursues his passions.

William brought that attitude with him to all of his academic studies. Nothing about school stoked his passions or captured his imagination. According to William, school was about getting a credential that would enable him to earn a living, and all of

that was work, things he would never choose to do if, say, he was a millionaire. For William, journal writing was not fun, and if it wasn't fun, it was work.

For most participants, journal writing was not categorized as *fun*. Not one participant used that word to describe it. Like most writing, journal writing requires concentration and effort to give order to the thoughts that swirl around in our minds. Journal writing requires focus. It requires that we bring our thoughts to textual expression. In addition to that requirement to focus, we also have to wrestle with words, with sentences and grammar and punctuation and syntax and paragraphs and . . . to Hell with it. William would rather watch television.

Writing is difficult and demanding. It is taxing, both physically and mentally. It is often slow-going. That is what made the experience different for participants who enjoyed journal writing and those, namely Mike and William, who didn't. As put by Bobby, "You get out of it what you put into it." For Mike and William, they didn't care to put anything into it because they could not see what they would get out of it that was worth the investment of time and energy. They wrote only when a teacher told them to, or perhaps when writing can help them get something they want or need.

Just like Mike, William described being engaged with the research papers. For his research paper, he conducted a survey of students about their religious beliefs and presented those findings, supplemented with secondary research, as his final paper. I remember the paper because it was good, and William clearly had enthusiasm for the topic. With the research paper, there was nowhere to hide. I was going to read and grade those papers, and that environment gave Mike and William the push they needed to do good work. Without the threat of a grade, and with an easy way to get out of the work,

they opted for the easy way out.

Given structure, both students did well, but without it, neither of them cared. Journal writing, personal, private, unstructured, violated what they wanted from school, violated their ideas about their roles as students, and under those conditions, neither would invest themselves in journal writing.

### Theme Three: Journal Writing (in) Practice

#### *Warm-Up Lap*

The journal makes one think. The journal “warms up the brain.”

Bobby described that benefit. Bringing his athletic sensibility to his description, he called journal writing a “warm-up lap” before the main topic of that day’s class was covered. For an eight o’clock class, he said that he frequently dragged himself into the classroom groggy, sometimes hung over, and certainly wishing he could get one or two more hours of sleep. Journal writing woke him up. It helped him focus on the subject at hand, which was always, always writing.

#### *Writing Practice*

Perhaps it was because she was an English major, a lover of language, an artsy type, but for whatever reason, from the word go, she took ownership of her journal and used it to grow into a better writer. For Dorothy, much of her previous educational writing experiences had been stifling because they were so formal and rigid. Seldom was her creativity encouraged by teachers, and seldom did she write what she wanted to write. Instead, her academic writing to that point had been primarily centered on placating the demands of her teachers. Dorothy had wanted to start a journal, and our journal writing assignment was the kick she needed to get going.

Her journal was, in a word, experimental. In it, she toyed with language. She had fun pushing her language use beyond what she had done before. She experimented with poetry, narrative, nature writing, and description. In her writing experiments, Dorothy began to develop her own voice, her own style. And interestingly, she began to realize that her previous approach to academic writing had been wrongheaded. Formal writing, she realized, didn't have to mean sterile, robotic prose, but instead could be creative, stamped with her own identity and sense of personhood. In other words, she discovered that formal writing was creative at its core.

Dorothy used that realization to change her approach to her formal papers. She wrote a paper about Shakespeare that she described as creative and fun, but still formal in the sense that it was aimed at an academic audience. She submitted that paper to a writing contest sponsored by the English department, and she won first place. She credited the journal writing she did in our course with making the winning of that award possible.

For Rick, journal writing made sense because it was writing practice. He realized very quickly that to improve as a writer, he had to write. In his view, journal writing was an ongoing practice for him that helped him grow into a better writer more than the more formal essays because journal writing was continual and voluntary.

Likewise Philip appreciated the journal because it gave him a chance to practice writing without the encumbrance of grammatical worries. He said, "It felt really good because I didn't have to learn about the rules, of course you learn the rules, but it was more about you writing and learning like your strengths and what things you can do to make it better."

Before journal writing, he didn't like writing and had almost no confidence in his ability to write; after journal writing, he experienced a transformation: "I basically love writing and right now I'm a marketing major but I'm going to change it to communications and I might look into journalism or something like that because I just love writing."

Likewise, Bobby experienced a change in his attitude about writing, which he linked to journal writing. He explained, "I was very pleasantly surprised. I never had a teacher tell me that you can write about whatever you want you know just within these guidelines . . . that was the first time that I ever enjoyed writing."

Journal writing is a continual process without a clear end, which differs from most writing assignments in that regard. For Rick, that meant that there was no end to focus on, so the focus was placed on the writing itself. He found that the more he wrote the better he became at writing and the more he learned about writing. He wasn't thinking about the finish line. He was thinking about running the race.

For Philip, the personal nature of our journal writing activity meant that, with no teacher sniffing out grammar mistakes, holding his or her red pen at the ready, he didn't have to worry about correctness as he wrote. Freed from that pressure to write correctly, he wrote and discovered his strengths and weaknesses on his own. He believed that practice helped him with his more formal assignments. He was able to more freely express himself in those papers, and he described gaining confidence in his ability to write. In gaining that confidence, he learned that writing was about more than correctness, yet correctness was a sort of side effect of gaining that confidence and different understanding of what writing is about. He saw a direct link between his journal



writing and his more formal research papers. It was the practice, the doing of writing that yielded those positive results.

As part of the voluntary nature of journal writing, participants could choose to ignore convention and correctness; they could also choose what to write about. As we saw earlier in this chapter, discovering what to write about took time and adjustment, but in struggling with that discovery, participants like Ellen came to a critical realization, best put in her own words: “I discovered that I had something to say.”

She didn’t have to play it safe in her journal, and in the process of letting go, of being herself, she discovered that she had things to say. In life, she realized, no one would be standing over her, telling her what to write about. It was up to her. So, for Ellen, journal writing brought out her voice and led her to a more mature conception, a more mature practice, of literacy and writing.

For participants, journal writing was a practice, and that practice was continual and voluntary. It was writing itself, and practicing writing was about getting better at writing. Getting better at writing meant that one gained confidence in his or her ability to write in terms of better correctness and usage, and in terms of knowing that one has something worthwhile to say. All of the above, in turn, made at least some participants come to appreciate writing.

#### Theme Four: Journal Writing “Personalizes” the Course

Participants were aware of the places they chose to write. Though the places were still located in the same building as our classroom, participants chose their places and returned to them each time they were dismissed to write. Those places became “comfortable” to them, as put by Tony. Participants liked their places, and they liked

getting the time, the class time, to forget about rules and authority and structure. Those places became *their* places. Those places became little homes, little bubbles within the institution in which participants could be themselves, outside the realm of authority that was the classroom, the instructor's domain.

The journal meshed well with that personalization of time and place because the journal was also a place of sorts, or perhaps a space, in which students could just relax and be themselves. They could exercise their freedom to choose what they wanted to do, just like they could choose the space they occupied and how they used their time. Taken together, according to Susan, it "made the class feel a little more personal."

Tony said, "I think that the course I had with you and the incorporation of journal writing I think it was more comfortable as a classroom setting for a student. It wasn't you're the dictator and I'm the student and I have to sit there and listen and do what you say."

Dorothy saw a contrast between journal writing and the classroom. For Dorothy, the classroom was "public and social." She described journal writing as "your own little private part of the world." The act of opening up the journal and writing was Dorothy's little home away from home, no matter where she found herself. She explained that she almost always carried it with her, and when she needed a little private time, she pulled out her journal and started writing.

Similarly for Melissa, journals were an "escape." She drew a contrast between the research writing (which was the primary focus of our composition course) and the journal writing:

The journals were a nice escape from it [the research writing]. Like, everything is

so formal like you gotta have your interviews, your sources, this formal paper, and you know, in the journal you could do what you wanted. No grammar. No misspelling . . . MLA format, blah, blah, blah, and then there was like, you know, we have time to do whatever for yourself too. I thought that it kind of balanced the course.

Philip appreciated that the time allotted for journal writing gave him the space to be himself:

. . . just sitting down and relaxing and being yourself for maybe a few minutes in the class period really helps because most in every classroom you're just used to sitting down and writing notes leaving class then going back to your dorm then you go to another class and do the exact same thing over. With this class you can go out and be yourself for a few minutes of class then you come back and learn.

Not all participants were able to use class time in a personalized way, nor did all participants find that the journal enabled them to transcend the institutional space of the classroom. Anne drew a contrast between her in-class entries and her out-of-class entries. In-class, she tended to write entries that were connected with school. She made to-do lists and used the time to plan her day and her week. She kept those entries very matter-of-fact, as in, I need to study for my chemistry test. I need to do my homework.

Outside of class, Anne used the journal very differently. Instead of planning and list-making, Anne used her journal to catalog her problems, her emotions, her frustrations with her roommates, and her worries about school. For Anne, the classroom context, the public nature of that context, had a direct influence on the way she wrote. In other words, in public contexts, her entries were focused on her role within that space as a student. In

private contexts, her entries were more private and personal, about her roles as roommate, as friend, as sister.

Across the board, participants were keenly plugged in to the influence of the places (spaces) in which they wrote. The inside-of-class and the outside-of-class journal writing worked together to give students a stake in the course that felt more personal, more intimate. The journal was a writing assignment for their use, and they decided how to use it. That many participants contrasted the more formal writing they were used to with the personal writing of the journal highlights that they perceived a difference between the two, and that difference, for many participants, made the course feel personal and unique, like no class they had taken before.

#### Theme Five: Journal Writing is About

#### Looking Back and Looking Forward

##### *Planning*

Participants like Anne and Carol found that the journal was useful for planning and managing the myriad responsibilities that came with being a college student. Participants had busy lives, juggling the academic responsibilities of a college freshman with the responsibilities of family and friendship, of being in a new place around new people, boyfriends and girlfriends, jobs and financial obligations, newfound independence to make decisions with regard to all of the above. In other words, their lives were complex. They were busy. The journal helped keep track of it all.

And having written down those responsibilities, those tasks looming on the horizon, participants felt that their responsibilities were more manageable. As put by Melissa, when responsibilities were shifting around in her thinking, she felt

overwhelmed. Those responsibilities seemed almost impossible to meet. When she delineated those responsibilities in her journal, she could see that they were manageable. They weren't as oppressive as she previously believed. Suddenly, she could drop some of the weight she was carrying on her back.

Oct. 29, 2007 - Monday (in-class)

I really wanted to write in my journal last night because I have a lot of random thoughts that I am worried or excited about.

I'll start with the exciting stuff:

- Pimp your pumpkin (Maple program) tonight  
I get to paint a pumpkin and make a candy apple!

- New York trip Friday @ 4 - Saturday @ 12 a.m. I think this is going to be a fun trip.

Now for everything that is stressing me out:

- My Psychology test that I have to take @ 10 a.m.

- The College Study Skill quiz, even though it is only 10 points

- Everything for Science, I don't understand the reading assignments, and there is a lot of new information

Figure 6: Carol's List.

that I need to study before Monday,  
Nov. 5

- I am not looking forward to the registration process of waking up early to stand in a line for hours.

I have a feeling that I'm not going to get any of the classes on my schedule, because I register on one of the last days - hopefully

I don't have to change the classes I picked because I won't know what to take. The classes

on my pink sheet are the classes I want and at the times I have marked.

- This volunteering at the elementary school is a waste of my time. I am a freshman and I don't have to observe a class yet, but that is

Figure 7: Carol's list, continued.

all I'm doing. I am going to talk to the guidance counselor & maybe tomorrow will be my last day.

- Last but not least, I am homesick again. It sucks! I miss my parents and the last time I went home, I barely saw them because of my uncle's funeral.

At least I have a few things that I can look forward to among all of my stressful events that are taking place in the next week or two. I actually find everything about college stressful, I guess it is a really good thing that I have great parents who keep me calm and help me through the tough situations in life.

Figure 8: Carol's list, continued.



### *Looking Back*

The day before his interview, Bobby had prepared by rereading his journal and he “almost cried.” Memories washed over him. He remembered the fights, the drunken stupors, and his abuse of over-the-counter medications. Those memories came rushing back. He felt ashamed. Tears welled.

He thought about his mother. What would she say? He saw her voice in his journal, channeled through his own handwriting.

It was all so unnecessary. He knew he was doing bad things at the time he did them, but he was swept up in the experimental spirit of the college experience, and he wanted to fit in with his friends, who also were experimenting with drugs and alcohol.

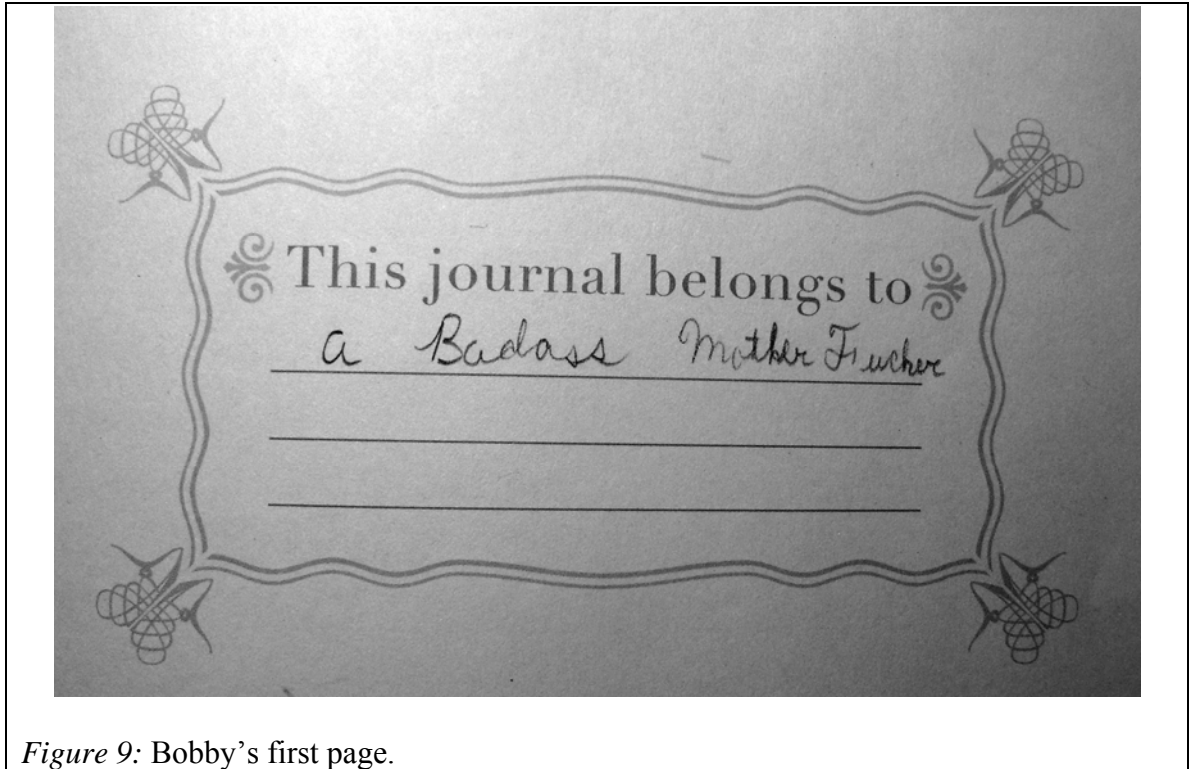
He read one of his entries during the interview, and he explained that rereading those entries knocked him down, floored him, and filled him with sadness because he had struggled so much with his ideals and what he was actually doing. He wanted to be successful more than anything, to be his own man, a good man, but he’d let those goals slip into the background while he emulated his friends.

### *Looking Forward*

Bobby sometimes thought about his grandchildren when he wrote in his journal. He was eighteen years old, and he didn’t yet have grandchildren, but he hoped one day he would. He loved his grandparents, and their love and generosity was one of the most positive memories of his childhood. His grandmother always had a piece of candy in her purse, and his grandfather had a habit of slipping him \$20 bills, claiming that he’d found the money on the side of the road and he didn’t have a use for it.

For Bobby, reaching that point in life in which grandchildren were bouncing on

his knee and his only job was to spoil them was something worth shooting for in life. It would mean that his life had been successful, that he had achieved comfort and stability and security. He wanted to be the loved and respected patriarch of his family, the Big Daddy. Grandchildren would be a testament to his goodness, his hard work, his love of family.



*Figure 9: Bobby's first page.*

Many of Bobby's journal entries were about questioning his behavior in that long-view context. He recognized his swilling Nyquil to get a buzz wasn't conducive to that long-term goal of becoming a grandfather. He recognized that if he wanted to get out of life those things that he wanted, he had better live more wisely.

By the same token, Bobby took a long view with regard to looking back and rereading his journal entries. He recognized that his college years, being in the midst of his youth and at the beginning of his adulthood, would probably turn out to be the best time of his life. He was healthy, his family was well-to-do, he had a girlfriend he cared about, and he was living his dream of being an athlete on a college sports team. He felt "blessed." Surely these were times worth remembering. In that sense, Bobby's journal was like a chronicle of events. He was keen to write details of his experience, such as the

things he did with his girlfriend, what she looked like, the people he spent time with, the things he did with his friends, because he understood that much of the richness of his experience would be lost otherwise. For Bobby, it was important to preserve those memories, and the journal provided that function.

Brian brought a similar awareness to his journal writing, but took it a step further in that he had an awareness of posterity, of the possibility that the journal could become a record of his life that could outlive him. He speculated that perhaps his grandchildren would read his journal and get a sense about who their grandfather was. That awareness permeated everything about Brian's approach to the journal. In his writing, he tried to give plenty of context. He would describe events and the context of those events in painstaking detail. He believed he had to consider how much things change over time. If his grandchildren were to read and understand his journal, they would need to know the context of events. Brian couldn't write as if he was the only reader of his journal. He had to consider the demands of an audience fifty years into the future.

Perhaps the following entry from Brian's journal will illustrate his attention to details and his efforts to provide context (transcribed because the copies of the original are of poor legibility):

Tonight was ridiculous. High school bull crap drama . . . I left Tina in her room while they drank. I think that Tina thought I was mad at her, so she drank more, causing her to become very drunk. I left and was unable to stop her because of high school crap. Long story short, I'm the responsible protector of those who drank, and I prevented them from drinking too much. Tina knows I don't like drunks and she thought I was mad at her. My friends wonder why I put myself

into that situation. First off, I care for people. I want to protect them from further harm. I believe Tina does not want to drink, but without me being there to stop her she will because she has nowhere else to go. She could go watch the guys play video games, but who wants to do that?

Bobby certainly looked up to his father and his grandfather. He saw that his father came from modest means and, in Bobby's words, through hard work and determination became a successful and wealthy businessman. Moreover, Bobby saw his father as the kind of man he wanted to become, a man who took care of those who needed him, who dedicated his life to making life better for the members of his family. Bobby idolized his father, and he wanted to one day walk in his father's footsteps, to meet and even exceed his father's example. He believed that if he was successful, his own sons, and eventually his grandsons, would look up to him just like he looked up to the males in his family, and if that was the case, they would want to read his journal.

Perhaps his grandsons would find inspiration in reading this entry from Bobby's journal (transcribed due to poor legibility):

I feel good lately about my dedication to athletics. I still have a lot of work to do, but I plan on really trying to buckle down next week and go balls to the walls and really try hard to do some damage at the next tournament, which is the last tournament of the year. I really want to push myself to excel in this tournament.

I want to see if the hard work pays off and if it is worth it in the end.

Melissa, when she looked to the future as she wrote in her journal, was optimistic and saw the future as the time in which she would realize her deepest dreams and desires. In one particular journal entry written by Melissa (Figure 4.7), we see her writing with an

eye to a future in which her dreams of having a husband and a family are realized:

3-24

In last night Cacie and I went for a walk down by the log cabin on the path over by the ball fields. My mom like then we walk through the woods over to the JJC. We took a water bottle of wine with us last night and we stopped several spots on our way. We stopped one spot behind the townhouses by a big fallen down tree and I started talking about how we can't wait for the future. It really is going to be fun to grow up, get married, and have kids. I think it will be so exciting to have somebody and share everyday with them. What I must say I am so excited about sleeping next to someone every night. I want to feel safe and loved in their arms off of the ~~the~~ subject of the future even though I'll get back to it. We continued our walk and the next stop would be over looking the fields and Cacie would put an image in my mind that would be so perfect I could not stop thinking about it all night long, and in the end I would just sleep over it. We walked away by the fields and had our drinks as we stood and talked just as we were about to leave Cacie said "I can see the love of us

Figure 10: Melissa's hopes for the future. Melissa hopes that her dreams about getting married, having children, and feeling "safe and loved" are expressed in her journal.

### *Past, Present, Future*

In Rachel's journals, which were mentioned briefly in chapter three, we see that the process of looking back and looking forward is a complex mix of remembering the past and hoping about the future, all captured in the language of the ever-shifting present. Rachel's journals illustrate that the looking back and looking ahead component of journal writing is not easily partitioned into one or the other, but each journal entry contains a mix of both as seen from the vantage point of the present. In one entry, she remembers going on a date with a man she liked very much. She remembers feeling nervous and uncertain. In the same entry, she looks forward to having lunch with that same man. She likes him, but she is uncertain if he is the right man for her; then, in an abrupt change in her perspective, and apparently influenced by her mother, she has decided to stop dating him and to ignore him. Then, having decided that he was not the man she was looking for, she again looks forward to the time when she will meet that right man for her.

#### Theme Six: Journal Writing is Risky/Journal Writing is Safe.

That the journal can help and hurt highlights the double-edged sword quality of journal writing. On one hand, the journal is a safe place to write things that participants would be loathe telling others. In that sense, journal writing is safe. On the other hand, writing in a journal fixes problems and frustrations on the page, gives them a physical representation that can be read by someone with or without permission, and in that sense, journal writing is risky.

A journal, filled with deeply personal thoughts, about difficult and stressful situations, provides a safe place for "getting out" those thoughts and feelings without the upsetting anyone. Journals do not judge, they do not talk back, and they will accept



those negative thoughts as if they were just there to listen to participants, as put by Julie, “vent.” Many participants thought of the journal as a close friend, as an ideal listener. Journals gave participants a medium for unloading negative energies, and that unloading made many participants feel better about their problems, their relationships, and their academic work.

### *Philip and his Mother*

Philip drove the two hours home on Friday after his last class. When he got home, he threw his books on his dresser, took a quick shower, dressed, and drove to his girlfriend’s house. When his mother arrived at home from work, she stopped by his room to see if he was there, and not finding him, she looked through his stack of books. She couldn’t resist picking up the journal with a silver cover. She read it cover to cover.

Philip came home late that night and went straight to bed. The next morning, he was sitting on the sofa in the living room watching *Sportscenter* on the television. His mother walked in, sat beside him, and asked him about the contents of the silver journal.

His heart jumped into his chest. He felt, suddenly, unexpectedly, vulnerable and violated. His mother had intruded in his most intimate thoughts without his consent, and those thoughts included bouts of severe anxiety and worry and homesickness. Angrily, he asked her why she did it.

His mother knew she had intruded, overstepped her boundaries, and she apologized for it, but she cared about Philip. She was interested in him and his experiences. She had no idea he was having so much trouble adjusting to college life, but while reading Philip’s journal and his accounts of struggling to make good grades in his classes, of the demanding schedule of a college athlete, of his homesickness, of being so

far from home, so far away from his family and his girlfriend that he often felt sick to his stomach, that he often laid in bed at night so full of despair that he came within a hair's breadth of shedding tears, she remembered her own first semester in college. She remembered the reams of homework, the tests, and the social pressures. She remembered homesickness. For Philip, at college, people were all around him, yet he felt lonely and overwhelmed and helpless. All of the people were new to him, and he longed for the familiar. The distance, a two-hour drive, seemed much larger than he had expected. His family and friends might as well have been in China. The modicum of independence that college life afforded wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

Philip was angry that his mother had read his journal, and he did not want to talk to her about it. He didn't see why he should. Those journal entries were his and his alone. He never intended for anyone to read them.

But his mother persisted, telling him that she'd been there, that he could talk to her about anything. She was worried about her baby. She cried. Seeing his mother's tears made Philip's resistance crumble, and they talked. It was a good talk. It made him feel better. He realized he was not alone. People cared about him.

#### *Rick and his Girlfriend*

Rick had a long-distance relationship with his girlfriend, and they struggled to make it work. She was still in high school, and their worlds, in just a few short months, had become vastly different. She was still under the thumbs of her parents. The distance between them, the physical distance, seem to correlate to the emotional distance. They were drifting apart.

She came to visit him on Fridays, and on one of those Fridays, she spotted his

journal on his bookshelf, and while he was in the bathroom, she scrambled to read as much of it as she could. When he came out and saw her reading it, he exploded. He grabbed it out of her hands, and they had a huge fight.

She was angry because he had written a lot about her, and it wasn't good stuff. She was making him miserable, he wrote. She was unreasonable, he wrote. Maybe he should just break it off, he wrote.

He was angry because she had invaded his privacy. If she had only chosen to avoid prying, this fight could have been avoided. He felt violated. He knew what he'd written in there, and now it was exposed. He knew he'd have to account for it.

Rick had to "talk his way out of it." That he was struggling with their relationship was now undeniable. It was laid bare in text for anyone to see. First of all, he said, she had no right to read the journal in the first place. He never gave her permission, so she had invaded his privacy. Secondly, journal entries may or may not be "truth." The truth of journal writing shifts, changes, depending on how the writer feels.

It was true that Rick felt frustrated with his girlfriend. They fought a lot on the telephone during the week, and when he saw her on weekends, they fought more. He came to a point that he knew it wasn't going to work out with her. It was also true that he cared about her, and he hated how their relationship was degenerating. He wanted to deal with those frustrations, so he wrote about them in his journal.

### *The "Truth"*

*Truth is a slippery concept.* Yes, it was true that Rick was sometimes frustrated. Yes, it was also true that sometimes he wasn't. Yes, it was true that there were things about his girlfriend that Rick didn't like. It wasn't one thing or the other. It wasn't an

either/or choice. It was more complicated than that. But people, when they read words, fixed on the page, tend to believe what they read. They tend to interpret those words as absolute truths, even when those truths are contingent on multiple factors, such as mental and emotional states, recent encounters and conversations, time and place. I might have felt frustrated yesterday, but today I feel quite content, yet it isn't contentment that tends to be written about in the journal. The journal is a safe place to write about problems and frustrations. If things are going well, there is no need for a journal, or as put by Anne, "When I'm happy, I don't feel the need to write."

And that tendency to write about negative things was true for all participants, across the board. All participants felt most compelled to write in their journals, especially in entries written outside of class, when they faced a problem, a frustration, a bad feeling, a stressful situation. Given that tendency to write about bad things, it is easy to see how the reader of that journal could get a distorted impression. It wouldn't be a false impression; people feel how they feel, and those feelings are "true," but that is only half of the picture. The good stuff is true, too, but it isn't on display in the journal as much as the bad stuff.

Rick learned from that experience that he could not leave his journal on his desk in the open for anyone to pick up and read. He learned that people are curious, and they have a tendency to snoop, to seek out information, especially if they feel they have the right to know that information, like Philip's mother.

Rick stopped taking his journal home. He left it in his dorm room.

Anne kept her journal with her at all times, either in her backpack or in her purse. She had learned in elementary school, when her sister read her private diary that people

will snoop if they have the opportunity. People can't resist knowing a secret.

#### Theme Seven: Journal Writing is Therapeutic

Anne said journals were good for “getting it out.” Janet said that she tended to “bottle up” her feelings, and the journal helped her by “letting it out.” Melissa called it “venting,” and she believed the journal was a “stress reliever.” Brian said the journal was good for “getting things out of your head.” Philip said the journal helped him “get things off my chest.”

In those expressions, two functions of journal writing come to the fore. Firstly, the journal helped participants get things “out.” There was movement from inside to outside, from the interior to the exterior. The journal was a release valve that allowed participants to release pressure that was building up inside.

The second function was to put down weight, to set aside problems and feelings that participants carried with them as if they were carrying a heavy load on their backs. The journal helped participants lessen the weight of problems and worries and feelings that oppressed them, or as put by Melissa, the journal helped when things were “bogging me down.”

#### *Getting it Out*

Janet described herself as a “backward” person, which for her meant that she had difficulty expressing her feelings to people, even people with whom she was very close, such as her mother. She didn't like that quality about herself. She wished she was more open and vocal about her feelings. Other people, it seemed to Janet, found it easier to talk about the most intimate details of their experiences and the things that bothered them, but somehow Janet lacked that kind of openness, a trait she believed she inherited

from her father. In that sense, she saw her inability to express her emotions as outside of her control. “It’s just the way I am,” she said.

Though she described herself as “backward” with regard to her ability to express herself, in the interview she was candid, admittedly liberated by the conditions of anonymity provided. She cried throughout the interview, and she revealed intimate details about her life.

In her journal, Janet felt like she was a completely different person. Her public persona was sweet and quiet, but in her journal, she said that she was the opposite. She was loud, and her language was often vulgar and emphatic. She held nothing back in her journal, but used it to “vent” her frustrations and struggles. She wrote things in her journal that she would never, could never, say to anyone else.

A few months into her first semester of college, Janet met Danny, and they hit it off and soon became boyfriend and girlfriend. She was crazy about Danny, and he was her closest confidant and lover. She thought about him much of the time, and much of her journal was devoted to writing about him and their romance. She had never felt like that before. She recognized, in retrospect, that he was her first love.

In her journal, she wrote about her experiences with Danny, who exposed her to things she’d never tried before, especially alcohol, drugs, and sex. Whereas in high school she did not go to many parties, with Danny she had a full slate of social engagements, and with those came experimentation with alcohol and drugs. She drank to drunkenness. She smoked marijuana. She and Danny had an active sex life. It was the first time in her life that she was sexually active.

She did not regret any of the above, but rather, she saw it as an essential part of

her coming of age, of being independent from her parents for the first time and having a romantic partner with whom to share those experiences. She found those experiences exhilarating. For the first time in her life, she was making her own decisions, doing the things adults do.

But due to her backwardness, she had no close friends with whom she could talk about those experiences, and that was why the journal became her confidant. In her journal, Janet wrote about her experiences with Danny as positive experiences. She was bubbling over with infatuation and happiness and exhilaration, and she wanted to “get it out.” She wanted to express her happiness. Danny was her most frequent topic.

The journal would not judge her and tell her she was making a mistake by pouring so much of herself into her relationship with Danny. It would not lecture her about the dangers of alcohol or marijuana. It would not spread rumors or call her names.

It merely listened.

Janet’s relationship with Danny ended badly, and the loss of that relationship hurt her deeply. True to form, she never shared that hurt with anyone. On the outside, she seemed okay, win-some-lose-some, but on the inside she was anything but okay about the loss. Whereas she had previously used the journal to express her happiness, she now used it to catalog those feelings of hurt. The journal was a shoulder to cry on.

The journal gave her a place to let it out.

### *Frustration, Anger, and Resentment*

Melissa was frustrated with her roommate because she was a “pig.” After her roommate brushed her teeth, she left spots of saliva and toothpaste on the mirror, and it seemed that it never occurred to her to wipe them off.

“Who does that?” Melissa wondered.

After her roommate ate a can of Chef Boyardee ravioli, she left the splotches of red tomato sauce on the wall next to the garbage can.

Her roommate never made her bed, never volunteered to wash dishes, never lifted a finger to clean up after herself. Melissa felt like she was a maid because the responsibility of cleaning the dorm room fell to her. Otherwise, it would never be cleaned. As the days and weeks wore on, Melissa found that her frustration turned into anger, and she confronted her roommate about it. After the confrontation, her roommate made half-hearted efforts to do better, but soon the same pattern of messiness returned, and Melissa’s anger became smoldering resentment.

Anne wanted to be close with her roommate Tammy, but Tammy preferred to keep to herself. She was very quiet, and her only interest was in finding a boyfriend. When she found a boyfriend, it was as though everyone else dropped off the planet. Soon, Tammy’s boyfriend was in the dorm room at all hours. Frequently, he spent the night, and Anne had to listen to them kissing and having sex. Anne felt like her privacy was violated, that she had no place to go, no place to call home. Tammy seemed blind to Anne’s discomfort, and like Melissa, her frustration with Tammy became anger, then resentment.



Participants often described frustration turning into anger, and anger turning into resentment. Those emotions prompted participants to write in their journals.

Anne put it this way:

I didn't hate her. It was just whenever I wrote I was frustrated with her. There were times when we were great friends, like we were best friends sometimes, but I didn't write about those times. More often than not it's the bad things. Because if it's a good thing don't you just say it to your friends? Like, you'll just tell people when something good is going on, but you don't tell anybody when bad things happen.

Julie described frustration, anger, and resentment for her boyfriend, who was doing drugs with his friends. Julie did not want him to do drugs, yet her pleadings with him to stop fell on deaf ears. In her journal, she wrote about being frustrated with him. She wished he would stop. He was good-looking, smart, funny, yet he seemed intent on wasting his time and his life on things that did him no good. He didn't seem to care about anything.

Julie wrote about those things in her journal. She found that it helped her to "get it out," and also it helped her organize her thoughts about her boyfriend, to lay out her arguments so that when she confronted him, she knew exactly what she wanted to say.

Neither Melissa nor Anne could control the actions of their roommates, and confrontations with their roommates did not result in permanent changes. Julie could not control the actions of her boyfriend. She was powerless to change his behavior.

From that powerlessness came frustration. When the wishes of participants were ignored or disregarded by others, they become frustrated, and if that frustration went

unaddressed, it soon became anger, and over time, like hot smoldering coals, resentment. The journal, then, provided a place in which participants could do something, and when they did something, when they took action, their powerlessness decreased, and they gained a measure of control.

In all of the above cases, journal writing revealed to participants that they were, in fact, in the right. Melissa was right to want her roommate to do her fair share of the cleaning. Anne was right to want a modicum of privacy in her own dorm room. Julie was right that drugs were doing nothing but dragging down her boyfriend and damaging her relationship with him. Having discovered that they were justified in those feelings, participants took steps to change, or ameliorate, their predicaments. Their frustration, anger, and resentment found expression, which felt like a release of pressure.

In Melissa's case, she sought and found a more agreeable roommate. Anne did likewise, and Julie broke up with her boyfriend. They did so without guilt or remorse, knowing that they were doing the right thing, and journal writing both prepared them for those changes and gave them the confidence to take action.

### *Laying it Down*

Participants described a lessening of weight, a lightening of load, when they wrote about upcoming challenges, such as next week's chemistry exam, tomorrow's job interview, and all of the things a college student must do in any given week. Those things feel heavy. They feel massive. They can crush one's spirit and fill him or her with dread and anxiety. Laying down those things in writing, whether it was simply listing the challenges that had to be done or making a plan to deal with those challenges, was beneficial to participants because once they wrote about those things, or laid them down

as it were, they experienced relief. They were able to get a more realistic handle on the challenges they faced. In other words, once they wrote down the upcoming challenges, those challenges didn't seem so daunting or heavy. They seemed manageable. The load seemed bearable.

Likewise, writing about choices that were made in the past fell under this metaphor. Anne described an instance that involved me as her teacher, a time in which she was angry with me because I graded one of her essays as an A minus. That is never a bad grade in my mind, but to her it was crushing because she had poured herself into the paper, done everything I had asked of her, and she didn't so much see an A as much as a qualified A. For Anne, the A minus meant her essay wasn't good enough. She left class that day fuming mad.

She wrote about it in her journal that night, cursed me up and down, and blamed me for grading her unfairly. She let me have it. But then, the next day when she reread that entry, she had calmed down and decided to reread her paper and the terminal comments I had written on it, and she realized that her paper wasn't perfect. She realized that she could have done better. Whereas her disappointment about her grade had been crushing her, journal writing alleviated some of that weight.

#### *Journal Writing Leaves One Alone with His or Her Problems*

In her journal, Rachel was writing about very real, very paralyzing problems. She was full of anxiety, negative self-consciousness, and a continual need to prove herself. She described herself as a perfectionist, as one who, no matter how hard she worked, could never quite meet the high standards she set for herself. Her primary hobby was dance, which she'd been doing since she was a little girl, and she was obsessed, literally

obsessed, with her looks. When she looked in the mirror, she saw a fat girl despite the fact that she was quite skinny. When she looked at her face, she saw nothing but ugliness.

Rachel had a different take on the therapeutic use of journal writing. She had been exposed to it before, in actual therapy with a psychologist. She had an eating disorder and was very particular about the food she consumed. She subsisted almost entirely on salads and vegetables. A slice of pizza was enough to make her feel guilty for a week, and to burn off those calories, she would double her dance and workout routines. She had been that way for as long as she could remember, and it was debilitating. One slice of pepperoni pizza, or one mistake on the dance floor, could send her into the darkest depression.

Journal writing only modestly helped her with those problems. As she described it, when she was in a depression or stifled by anxiety, writing about that depression and anxiety fixed those states on the page, and when she reread those entries at a later date, she saw how “unreasonable or inappropriate” they were, and that could send her right back into her depression. She would reread those entries and become filled with a sense of helplessness, hopelessness.

Writing about her problems didn't help her because “they didn't go anywhere.” In the end, she was still “stuck” with those problems. She was alone with those problems. Perhaps, in the act of writing itself, she would feel a modest sense of relief, as if, like other participants, she had temporarily laid down her heavy load, but over the long term she still had the same problems. And again, rereading those entries highlighted that she was still stuck.

The therapy that helped her the most was talking to someone, be it her mother or her therapist, because she had a real live person to interact with who could give her advice, empathize with her problems, or give her some constructive suggestions about how to deal with those problems. When she talked to someone about her problems, those problems “go somewhere.”

And because of her extensive experiences with depression, anxiety, and negative self image and her history of seeing therapists, she was very insightful, one might say pragmatic, about how therapy worked. She knew that therapy provided no magic bullet, no cure to her problems, but that she was locked in a continual struggle with those problems. The best she could hope for was to deal with them on a day-to-day basis in a process of managing her problems. The journal, for Rachel, was only one tool in her repertoire, and it was of limited usefulness. When she was in the throes of depression or riddled with anxiety, she was simply out of her depth. She lacked the resources to deal with her problems alone. She needed a real living person to coach her through.

#### *Coping with Homesickness*

Earlier in this chapter, we learned that Philip had severe bouts with homesickness that were the subject of much of his journal writing. Philip was not alone. Homesickness was a central problem facing many participants, no matter how far or how close they were from home. Their lives were in upheaval. They missed family and friends, they missed the familiarity and regularity of high school, they missed the way things used to be. They felt lonely and out of place in a new environment. They longed for the nurture and predictability of life at home.

In her journal, Melissa wrote about missing her family, and on the weekends she

visited, she wrote about those visits in her journal. For her, returning home, even for a weekend, anchored her and gave her strength to keep going. She wrote about how much she loved her family. She realized in her journal writing that being away at college strengthened her connections to her family, fostering a deeper appreciation for how much God had “blessed” her to have people in her life who supported her and cared about her. In her journal, she wrote about how she wanted to treat her family and friends with more respect, with more care, than she had in the past. She recognized that she a tendency to take them for granted, and she vowed to change that behavior.

Homesickness permeates almost every line of Carol’s journal. She described being physically sick, pained in the stomach, because of homesickness. We see in Carol’s journal a continual attempt to manage her homesickness, to feel better about being away from her family. In our interview, she emphasized that homesickness was a primary subject in her journal writing, yet she did not see how it helped her. In her words, “it usually made me feel worse.” Writing about her homesickness brought it to the foreground of her thinking, yet despite her insistence that it made her feel worse, in her journal we see a continual struggle, marked sporadically by entries that emphasize her successes and her determination to do well in school despite her homesickness, worries, and stresses.

Nov. 28, 2007- Wednesday (In-class)

There is so much that needs to be done before the week of finals. All my professors are piling a bunch of work that is due next week. It feels like there isn't enough time to finish everything. I must be able to finish it, if I've done it in the past. I wouldn't have

English- A      Science- 84%

Psych- 90%      Math- 90%

CSS- 88%      University Scholarship- 94%

if I couldn't handle the stress or do the work. My goal is to finish one task and then move on to the next. I'm only going to worry about one class at a time.

I probably shouldn't go home this weekend simply because I have to start studying for finals, but I don't want to stay this weekend. I'll just go home & make myself do work inbetween making ladylocks and decorating

Figure 11: Carol's grades. Despite her struggles with homesickness and the stresses of school, Carol's grades indicate that she was having success in college.

## Theme Eight: Journal Writing is About Rereading

### *Note about Rereading*

The reader may want to think about that initial reading/writing of a journal entry as the kind of reading that happens first. This theme is about the reading that happens after the writing is done, separated from the initial writing by a measure of time, and it will therefore be called *rereading*.

### *Short-term Rereading*

Almost naturally, as part of the journal writing process, almost all participants described rereading their journals as an integral, even natural, part of the process. Participants reread entries in two ways, which corresponded to the time that had passed between writing and reading. The first way was in the process of journal writing itself. Tony said that he often reread the previous journal entry and responded to it with a new entry. That sort of rereading was echoed by Anne and Melissa. Some days they wrote a fresh entry disconnected from the previous entry, but other days they responded to that previous entry, especially if things had changed in their thinking.

An example of that is when Anne wrote about being worried about an exam. In the next entry, after she had taken the exam, she wrote about how she fared on the exam. She wrote that it wasn't as bad as she thought, and that her worries, in retrospect, were out of proportion to the difficulty of the test.

Tony responded in a similar fashion. If, in the previous entry he had described a problem he faced, in the next entry he described how he had resolved that problem.



### *Long-term Rereading and the Cringe Response*

The cringe response is the dreadful feeling of being confronted with one's naïveté, one's pettiness, one's ridiculous lack of insight and wisdom. It is about being confronted with aspects of one's behavior, one's thoughts, one's feelings, which fail to confirm the ideal image of oneself as a competent, put-together, hard-working person.

Said Anne, "It was like a slap in the face," and "it was shocking."

Janet: "It was painful."

Anne saw that she was "catty." Catty meant that she gossiped too much, talked about other people too much, was far too concerned with the problems and misfortunes of others. When she reread those "catty" entries, she felt embarrassed that she wrote about other people in such unflattering ways, that she so readily descended into what she felt was undignified behavior. Seeing herself as "catty" was "shocking" to her, and it made her question that aspect of her personality. It was "like a slap in the face," she said.

Though the theme of therapeutic journal writing is treated independently in this chapter, the rereading of the journal overlaps with the therapeutic use of journal writing because rereading those journal entries was an important part of the therapeutic process. A couple of days before Janet met me for our interview, she reread her journal entries, and it was a powerful, gut-wrenching experience for her. Rereading her journal released a torrent of emotions, especially anger and sadness, because the pain she experienced from the loss of her relationship with Danny was described in detail. Rereading brought all of those emotions back, and it was "shocking" for her to see "how much it mattered." At that point in our interview, when she described confronting those feelings, she sobbed.

The relationship had ended, and rereading those entries in which she expressed love, in which all she could write about was her boyfriend and how happy she felt to be with him, was a painful experience. She could not hold back the tears.

She was so upset that I felt like I had overstepped my bounds with her. After all, if rereading those journal entries caused her so much pain, did I do her a disservice by requiring her to keep that journal? Was I harming her?

Her response to that question was an emphatic “No!” She insisted that the journal was an overwhelmingly positive experience for her despite the pain she felt. And, uniformly participant to participant, that response was always the same. Though the writing in the journal and rereading those journal entries could be painful, the effect of that process was positive. Participants insisted that they had the choice to write about what they wanted. They also had the choice to reread those entries. The process of journal writing had a beneficial, therapeutic effect. Janet reported that she learned a lot about herself from that process.

Rereading journal entries revealed when a participant was justified in a feeling or an action, or unjustified and felt or reacted inappropriately. Journal writing, and how it fixes thoughts and feelings on the page, enabled participants to analyze those thoughts and feelings at a later time, perhaps when they had cooled off and could think about things differently. Participants saw that process as providing them with different perspectives.

## Theme Nine: Audience

### *A Conversation with Multiple Selves*

Who is the audience of the journal? If I posed that question to random Joes and Janes off the street, surely most would respond, “Well, oneself, of course,” and that would be the end of it, simple as that.

The audience for the journal is indeed oneself, but what do we mean when we say that? Who is oneself? Why write for an audience of oneself? After all, don’t I know myself better than anyone else? I know my most intimate thoughts. I know what I think about any number of things. I am closer to my own thoughts than I can possibly be to anyone else’s. I am in direct contact with my own experience, with my own consciousness. When I am angry, I am aware of being angry. When I am sad, I am aware of being sad. I can’t hide those emotions from myself, but I can hide them from the consciousness of others.

But looking closely at the term oneself might reveal a problem. *Oneself* contains the word *one*, and it implies the singular *I*. Yet, as described earlier in this chapter under the theme about the risks that come with journal writing, that *I* shifts depending on when, where, who, how, and why. It depends on when we write, where we are, who we are with, how we feel, both physically and emotionally, and why we feel that way.

Emotions played a large role in shaping Anne’s journal writing. She tended to write more when she was frustrated and angry.

The *I* also shifts over time, be it short-term, long-term, or longer-term, as was described in the section about rereading.

It is also affected by space, the context in which we act. In class, participants like

Anne were students, and they wrote about school in their journals. Outside of class, they were friends and lovers, brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and their journal writing reflected those identities. Anne explained that idea well when she talked about how her journal entries varied according to where she wrote them. When she was in class, in the role of student, she tended to write about school. When she was in her dorm room, in the role of roommate and friend, she tended to write about her problems with her roommate or her own “catty” comments about her friends.

The one consistently dependable quality of the one in oneself, or the *I* in *I*, was that he or she was almost always a sort of ideal listener. He or she didn’t pass judgment or offer unsolicited or unwelcome advice. During the act of writing, most of the time the journal just *listened*.

The journal did not maintain utter silence, though. In fact, it had much to say, and much of that dialogue occurred in rereading and in the differing perspectives that journal writing created. The audience of the self, then, was not this monolithic, stable audience that always responded in ways that were predictable, but it was contingent upon time and place. The journal entry from last week differs from the journal entry from the week before in terms of the emotional state of the journal writer, and the rereading in the present, which is continually shifting to the future, also undergoes continual change. The *I* that spoke to participants in the act of rereading would tell them what they were right about and what they were wrong about. It would reach out to them through time and offer them varying perspectives.

In that way, the *I* was a kind of teacher. In the act of writing, the journal listened, but in the act of rereading, the journal had much to say about life, about problem solving,

about coping with frustrations and problems, about dealing with emotions, about handling other people. Participants who were attentive to the *I* described learning about themselves. They described gaining self-awareness and self-knowledge.

Tony comes to mind. Tony's problems were centered on his work as a coach at a local high school, his family, his girlfriend, and his performance in school. Coaching was difficult because it involved much more than teaching his students. He had to deal with principals and administrators, problem students and their parents, and he found nothing but frustration in trying to appease everyone. He just wanted to coach, and he believed he was good at coaching. The social obligations, though, were much more difficult for him.

When he was frustrated about his work as coach, his journal allowed him to write about his frustrations. Having poured those frustrations onto the page, he felt a little better about his problems. Days later, upon rereading those entries, he saw that he tended to be hot-headed and to overreact to situations. He would respond to those entries with a new entry, asking questions such as, "How could I have better handled that situation?" or "How can I be more calm and diplomatic in my reactions to difficult situations?" In asking those kinds of questions, Tony found that the journal was a powerful tool for problem solving. His answers to those questions helped him deal with those situations in a way that was more level-headed and sensible. He could see, with painful clarity, that he was ill disposed to deal with conflict. He would rather avoid it. But if he couldn't avoid it, at least he could handle it more diplomatically. The journal helped him see himself from multiple perspectives and therefore that helped him know himself better.

Sometimes those lessons were painful to hear. It was hard for participants to hear

that they were wrong about something or that they reacted poorly in a given situation. But even though it was initially an unpleasant experience, in the end participants believed it was a valuable experience, and one of the most important benefits of journal writing. Self-awareness and self-knowledge were gained by having that conversation with the multiple selves that comprised the journal.

### *Conversations with God*

Two participants, Christine and William, described an audience for the journal that was an *other*, an entity conceived of as outside of the *I*. That audience was God.

Christine had been introduced to that method of journal writing in church, where her pastor recommended that she keep a prayer journal. She described the prayer journal as a vehicle for prayer, but the prayers were written instead of vocalized or imagined.

Christine said:

It was all about God and I could just spill everything out you know spiritually what was going on stuff like that what I was learning so I did a little bit as far as keeping a journal but I'm trying to keep that especially the spiritual part because that's something that I'm learning more about . . . if there was something going on just sort of praying for people or praying for something going on or thanking God. I don't know. I remember when it snowed one of the first days last semester and it was absolutely gorgeous out and I was like thank you for the snow because I love snow and just things like that, just sort of giving God credit for things that have happened and going on in my life.

William, who earlier in this chapter was described as being ambivalent about journal writing, didn't seem ambivalent at all when his journal took a spiritual turn.

Rather, he seemed quite passionate, emotional, and sincere.

In his journal, William wrote the following:

Dear God, thank you for your Word.  
Without it I would be left in despair  
with no hope of salvation. I am encouraged  
when I read of your refuge and comfort,  
and of your attentive ear. I am comforted  
from the simple fact of knowing that  
you hear me and you know exactly  
what I'm going through and what I need.  
Tonight I read Psalm 142 of how David  
is trapped in a cave fleeing for his life  
from Saul. Sometimes I too feel trapped, not  
to the extent that David did, but I become  
filled with anxiety and sorrow. My prayer  
for tonight would be verse 7, "Bring me  
out of prison, that I may give thanks to  
your name." I feel these last couple months  
have led me to become mournful and sad.  
I want a reason to be thankful, God. I know  
what I ask for is much and I know I already  
have so much to be thankful for, but I  
am tired of not knowing what to do with my  
life, and I'm not satisfied with how things  
are right now. Maybe I'm wrong, but it  
seems forever since I've had a positive  
outlook in life. Open my eyes so I can  
see Your blessings and rejoice. Give me strength.  
Amen.

Figure 12: William's prayer.



In that entry, William appears to be struggling with his ambivalence, a strong theme in his journal. He seems to recognize that he is drifting, struggling to find purpose and direction in his life. He used the journal to reach out to God for help. Despite his insistence that he didn't care about journal writing, he seems to have found a use for it in prayer. Most of William's journal entries are addressed to the audience of the self, and those entries were mostly matter-of-fact descriptions about his school work. In his prayer entries William displays emotional intensity and openness and self-awareness.

#### Theme Ten: Ownership

At the beginning of our interview, after I explained the protocols of this study, as I'd done with all of my participants, I asked Janet if she would submit her journal for use in this study. Her eyes became as big and round as moons; clearly, the request caught her off guard. Quite unconsciously, she grabbed her journal off the table and hugged it close to her chest as she listened to my reasons for requesting the journal. Her response was a very direct and emphatic, "no."

When I asked her the reason for that no, she replied:

. . . because it is mine. I'm just, I guess I'm selfish in that respect. I do want to help you, but it's like, I don't want my feelings out. If I can't talk to someone else I don't want anyone else to know. I want it just to be my, it is my information.

And though I have no doubts that the personal nature of her journal was a big reason for her withholding it, her body language seemed to indicate another reason. For Janet, her journal was valuable.

Other participants reacted similarly to the request, expressing the same ideas of keeping the personal, but also that it was something that belonged to them and them alone. For Janet, Anne, and Ellen, the journal was a part of their lives. It was an extension of their very being, and giving it away, even under protection, even for the purposes of formal research, was unthinkable. Their journals had value. They were worth keeping and protecting from prying eyes, from loss or damage.

Even participants who submitted their journals to this study did so hesitantly, with trepidation. To pry the journal from Brian's hands, I had to repeatedly reassure him that I would cherish it as if it were my own, that he would get it back in a timely fashion and in perfect condition. The same assurances were offered to Bobby and Rachel.

And on the other end of the spectrum, quite predictably, was William, who handed over his journal and said, "Keep it." Given that every other participant refused or acquiesced only with extensive explanation, I was taken aback. I asked him why he could give it up so easily when no one else could. He said, "To me it was just an assignment."

So for William, handing over the journal was nothing more than handing over a research paper. It was just an assignment. He expressed no attachment to it, ascribed no value to it whatsoever.

But for everyone else, the journal had value. It meant something.

Intentionally, I saved this theme for last perhaps because it illustrates the importance of the journal better than anything else. Four of my participants, Janet, Ellen, Cindy, and Julie, cried during the interviews when they talked about their journals, and I'm not talking about trickling tears, but deep, heaving sobs. Janet cried all throughout

the interview. Ellen cried when she talked about writing about her father. Cindy cried when she talked about what she wrote about her mother. Julie cried when she talked about her ex-boyfriend.

Whether they loved it or hated it, most participants saw the journal assignment as an atypical, different from the usual fare to which they were accustomed. Mike and William hated it, but for participants Ellen, Cindy, Julie, and Janet, it mattered.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REFLECTIONS

Descriptions of the participants' lived experiences with personal and private journal writing in our composition course were provided in the previous chapter, chapter four. Those descriptions are tightly linked to the context of the assignment, especially the particular kind of journal writing that was assigned to participants, journal writing that composed only 10% of the grade in a composition course that had research writing and correctness for its primary emphasis. The journals kept by participants were unread and unstructured by the instructor, who took a deliberately hands-off approach to the assignment, leaving it up to the students to decide how they wrote. This study addressed the question, *what did participants experience in that context?*

In the preface of this dissertation, I described my personal and professional stake in this research, which detailed the behind-the-scenes journey that led to this dissertation. In chapter one, I provided a description of the assignment, the specific institutional context of the assignment, and the larger cultural context of journal writing, including journal writing as it has evolved through history and journal writing as it has been configured and assigned to students in classrooms across the disciplines.

In chapter one, I gave an overview of this study and a description of the activity that led to this dissertation. The study included nineteen participants who were interviewed about their experiences with journal writing in a Freshman Composition class. The journal writing assignment required students to keep a personal journal where they could write about anything they wanted without interference from the instructor, and was assessed only by the number of entries, never to be read. This assignment led me to ask

the question, *what are my students experiencing*, and ultimately led to this dissertation.

In chapter two, journal writing was contextualized within the field of composition studies. In a process-approach framework, a dominant theme in the literature about journals is their function as a mediator between the internal and the external, the public and the private, the subjective and objective. Journals are envisioned as a prewriting heuristic that helps transform the internal messiness of students' ideas into an external, ordered expression that is required in academic discourse. Journals are seen as freewriting mediums, places to write free from the pressures of correctness and protected from the judgments of an audience.

As composition shifted to a post-process paradigm that was influenced by social constructionist epistemology and postmodernism, a more socially-centered vision of composing emerged. Of particular relevance to the phenomenon of journal writing is the changing conception of the self. The idea of a stable fixed self sustained scrutiny, and journals, by virtue of their traditional connection to expressivist pedagogies, were criticized for their presumed tendency to overemphasize the individual student writer at the expense of the communal functions of writing. Post-process journals are envisioned as more public, social documents in which students are encouraged to enter into a dialogue with both peers and instructors.

Most recently, there has been a return to the private, personal function of journal writing as a means to promote student agency and healing. As the understanding about the expressive functions of writing has been deepened and better understood, personal expression, it is argued, does not preclude the possibility that the individual is a socially constituted entity, but rather that the individual is composed of multiple selves, multiple

identities, and journal writing is seen as a personal exploration of the multiple voices that constitute the culturally-constructed person (Trimbur, 1987). Put another way, all expression, all writing, can be seen as having a social function, even if that writing is not intended for an audience external to the writer. This turn back to the personal, bolstered by research into the therapeutic functions of expressive writing by Pennebaker (1991, 1997, 1999) and Smyth et al. (1999, 2008), seems to have fueled discourse in composition about the healing aspects of writing, and journals are a central component of that discussion. Alcorn (2002) and Berman (1994) have brought ideas about journal writing and healing into the mainstream consciousness of composition studies, expanding the possibilities for composition pedagogies that explore students' identities and lived experiences. This study adds to that discussion in that it seeks to describe the lived experiences of students who wrote personally and privately in journals within a specific pedagogical and institutional context.

Chapter three presented the procedures employed to gather the data about the journal writing experiences of the participants. Data collection was based primarily on interviews and to a lesser degree the journals themselves. In discovering the themes expressed by participants, I employed *phenomenological reduction* or *bracketing* in the interviews and in the analysis of the data (van Manen, 1990). Aided by the phenomenological method of analysis outlined by Hycner (1986), the interviews were converted into ten essential themes. All themes were treated equally via *horizontalization* (Moustakas, 1999).

Chapter four presented the descriptions of the lived experiences of this study's nineteen participants. Organized by the ten themes that emerged from data analysis, that

chapter employed concrete descriptive writing and narration as well as excerpts from the interviews and the journals to describe the experiences of my participants. The hard work of that chapter was to evoke the experiences of this study's participants as close to the actual lived experiences as possible, to give the reader a sense of the participants as people, imbued with consciousness, distinct personalities, desires, problems, and worries.

This fifth and final chapter is meant to reintegrate theory with the lived experiences of this study's participants, which will provide an interpretation of this study's results. Having, in the previous chapters, developed a theoretical framework with which to understand journal writing in context, and in chapter four having set aside that framework so that the study's results could take center stage, I will use this chapter to reintegrate that framework with the participants' lived experiences, providing an interpretation of the study's results in the form of reflections on this study's themes.

#### On Getting Started and Resistance

Is not one of the most difficult challenges of teaching writing, of teaching in general, acquiring the habit of knowing when to step in and when to get out of the way? As I reflect on what I could have done differently with this journal writing assignment, I question if my hands-off approach was the best choice. After all, the theme of getting started emerged in virtually all interviews, and I have found that particularly disquieting. Some participants, such as Dorothy and Melissa, found their sea legs sooner than others, but almost all participants described a process of acclimation to journal writing. Some, especially Tony, described nothing short of an internal battle. *Could I have mitigated that period of adjustment with careful intervention?*

This theme supports the observation of Cinthia Gannett (1992) that some students

soar when given a journal writing assignment while others struggle. Specifically, this study shows that the experience of resistance to journal writing arises from the freedom to choose clashing with previous educational experiences that were much more controlled, which led some students to distrust, at least initially, the motives of the teacher assigning personal journals. It comes from the paralyzing nature of freedom. When students have unlimited choices about how to approach journal writing they sometimes feel stifled and overwhelmed by those myriad possibilities. Little in their previous educational experiences had prepared this study's participants for an assignment that was so open-ended, so unrestricted by the teacher. They had to learn how to approach such an assignment.

The difficulty getting started also arises from a reluctance to write about things that are inherently personal and private. It is risky to write about things that could potentially expose one's deepest thoughts and emotions to others. Students who were unwilling to take that risk had difficulty finding another purpose for personal journal writing.

Gannett's (1992) recommendations about teaching journal writing seem applicable to the problem of resistance. She recommends that students read models so that they come to an understanding about the journal writing traditions and recognize that it is a genre with certain conventions, possibilities, and limitations. I would extend that by incorporating information about the nature of resistance to journal writing, using this study's findings as a basis. For instance, Mike's struggle with journal writing seemed to arise from the inability to see the point of journal writing. He found writing to and for himself rather pointless, and he much preferred assignments with clear objectives and a



well-defined structure. He much preferred assignments with an explicit academic purpose. This assignment was unlike any other assignment he had encountered in his educational career to that point. He was used to structure and clear boundaries and rules, none of which were provided to him.

Mike's habitual tardiness, arriving late to class deliberately to avoid journal writing, should have clued me in to his resistance, and if I had made that connection at the time, I would have spoken to him about his feelings about journal writing. I would also, perhaps, have offered him structure in the form of optional prompts, which would incorporate the findings of Dailey (2001), who found a mixed-method approach to academic journal writing seemed to work best if journals were to be useful for most students. Though personal journal writing is different from the more traditional academic journal writing that is the subject of most studies available about journal writing, the results of this study suggest that many students could benefit from the instructor's intervention.

Mike's attitude about school, that it is not so much about learning for the sake of learning and self-improvement but more akin to a hoop through which one has to jump, highlights how the group of high-resistance participants was unable to make the leap from a high school mindset to a college mind-set. William, the second member of the total resistance group, connected the journal writing assignment with the journal writing he was assigned in high school. He made no distinction between the two, and like Mike, he saw school as something he had to do.

On the other hand, scholars such as Alcorn (2002), Couture (1998), and Berman (1994, 2002) have endeavored to reclaim personal agency in the face of postmodern

antifoundationalism, which questions if writing can be taught at all. They wonder, could not part of recuperating agency be insisting that students make more decisions in the classroom? Is not part of agency one finding his or her own way? It strikes me that as participants struggled to acclimate to journal writing they were exercising their agency, their freedom to choose their own paths. They were finding their way. Freedom to choose can be difficult and overwhelming, but in that struggle most participants eventually claimed their journals as their own. In that sense, participants were learning to negotiate, with themselves, the best use of their own journals. Certainly, this study shows that the period of acclimation is an integral part of that process, and once the journal's purpose is realized, many participants described a sense of taking off, of soaring. The tone changed from frustration to one of confidence and exhilaration. This study suggests that struggling with journal writing is an essential part of the process.

Nevertheless, in a fifteen-week course in English composition, time is limited, and trade-offs must be made. On the question of intervention, I have no simple answers. Helping students acclimate as soon as possible, and thereby get the most out of their journals, would be ideal, yet the possibility that too much intervention would rob some students of their agency is an important consideration.

When I decided on a policy of non-intervention, I believed that it was a sound policy to promote students making their journals their own. This study indicates that some students flourish in that environment, while others struggle. It also highlights the fact that, even though many struggled, they eventually found purpose without my intervention. The struggle was different for each participant, indicating that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. The key, then, would be identifying, as early as possible,

those students who need guidance and those who need very little. In making that determination, the teacher would need to be more in-tune with what his students were doing in with their journals, which would necessitate talking to them, asking questions of them, creating a dialogue with them. This theme seems to indicate that, if personal and private journals are used in the classroom, a dialogue about those journals could be an ongoing part of the assignment.

#### On Warming Up, Work, and Practice

Is writing ever easy? Looking at the theme of getting started and resistance, of how students struggled with journal writing, certainly the idea that journal writing is too easy should be questioned. For the majority of my participants, journal writing was anything but easy, and some, particularly Mike and William, described it as *work*; it was that it was the opposite of *fun*. Journal writing, for those two participants, was something they would never choose to do on a voluntary basis, and in Mike's case, he opted to cheat rather than write in his journal.

These themes illustrate important characteristics about our journal writing assignment. Firstly, for participants Mike and William, the assignment never left, never transcended, its institutional context, and transcendence was an outcome I had hoped for when I designed the journal writing assignment. That word, *assignment*, says a lot. Journal writing, for Mike and William, was a chore. It was foisted upon them. It was work. The institutional context trumped everything else. Secondly, this theme illustrates that, at least in one sense, writing is writing. Writing is difficult. When faced with a blank page, or an empty computer screen, how does one begin to fill it?

Participants had differing views about the assignment's function within our larger

context of research writing, but they did not describe our journal writing assignment as writing in the sense of bringing expression from the inside to the outside. They did not describe a wide gap between personal expression and academic discourse. Instead, they saw the journal as a logical fit in a writing class. They saw writing, and the practice thereof, as connected to the overall aims of the course, which was to grow into a better writer. For the majority of co-researchers, the writing we did, from journal writing to research writing, was *of a piece*.

The majority of participants, once they broke through their initial resistance, saw the freedom to write without my interference in the form of grading or assessment to be a rewarding experience, one that they appreciated. Philip found that writing without the pressures of correctness gave him a confidence boost in his writing abilities. Ellen felt that grading degraded her, and she found that the practice of journal writing encouraged her independent learning. A comment offered by Ellen that had a most profound impression on me was that journal writing helped her discover *she had something to say*. Connected to the theme of resistance described above, Ellen had difficulty at first, but over time she discovered that she had plenty to write about. The key distinction here is to look at the assignments, journal writing and formal research writing, as complementary, as connected, because they are both writing. This finding affirms the observations of Berman (1994; 2001), who found that journal writing added to the depth of his writing courses.

The findings support the freewriting diary advocated by Peter Elbow (1973) and the virtues of ignoring audience argued by Elbow and Clark (1987). Participants found that writing without the pressures of an external audience was liberating, especially the

external audience of their instructor, who was required to emphasize formality and correctness; they believed that they grew as writers by writing freely in their journals. They did not, and this is an important distinction, think of that growth in terms of improved grades on their research papers. Grades were scarcely mentioned. In other words, they did not draw a line between academic writing and personal writing, so they did not describe journal writing as a mediator between the two. The views they expressed were much more holistic, as in, they believed their writing improved on the whole. And again, those findings would seem to challenge the idea that personal journal writing has little academic function. To the contrary, participants believed that journal writing had benefits that directly influenced the more formal writing they did on the course's required research papers because it helped them grow *as writers*. Writing, then, was experienced as a practice. It was about growing better, not mastering a skill. It is an ongoing practice. It is continual. Journal writing is about writing, about doing writing, about cultivating a practice.

Another challenge to the idea that journal writing is too soft for the classroom came from Bobby and Mike, who saw journal writing as a good fit for a writing class because, practiced in-class as the first activity of the day, it was a warm-up lap for their minds. Bobby was particularly keyed-in to the metaphor because he was an athlete on one of the college's athletic teams, and he recognized that, just like the warm-up lap that began each and every practice was intended to warm up the body, it was also intended to focus the mind on the practice at hand. It was important to *be there*, at the practice, mind focused and ready to work. Journal writing brought focus. Journal writing done at the beginning of class places writing front-and-center. It helped participants focus on being

students of writing, certainly a desirable outcome in a course on English composition.

### On Looking Back and Looking Forward:

#### Reflection and Metacognition

The results of this study show that participants, quite on their own, without interference from the instructor, practiced reflection and metacognition. They seemed to have come to those practices quite naturally. That would seem to at least call into question the ideas expressed in the literature that students have difficulty practicing reflection (Boud, 2001; McKenzie, 1998; Moon, 1999). I find it interesting, and perhaps telling, that in the gaff I described in chapter three, of using the word *reflection* during an interview when the word had not been used by my participant, the participant asked me what I meant by the word. *What is reflection?* I did my best to explain to her what it meant, at which point she said, yes, I was doing reflection. In other words, she may not have realized she was reflecting; she was just doing what came naturally to her. She did not need the word *reflection* in her vocabulary to practice it.

As stated in chapter one of this text, reflection is oft-discussed across the disciplines as the most important function of educational journal writing. Reflection is often cast as the highest order of journal writing, as the kind of journal writing that yields the greatest educational benefits. The idea behind that is informed by the work of Schön (1995), who theorized *reflection-in-action*, the idea that people reflect on their previous actions so that they will make better decisions about future actions. This concept is often applied to the creation of professionals in the fields of nursing and teacher education. Journals are seen as a means to teach students to think about what they are doing in a more insightful, thoughtful way, which leads to better decisions and a higher degree of

professionalism. Hearn (2005), Dart (1998), and Arredondo and Rucinski (1994) find that journal writing yields reflection and metacognition. Hearn studies *reflective journals*, which are nebulously defined, so it is difficult to tell exactly what is meant by reflective journals. Are they structured or unstructured? To what degree was reflection taught? How much privacy was granted the student in his or her journal writing? And so on.

That vague definition of the journal writing assignment itself, and how the instructor taught journal writing, is a common feature of the literature. The journals under study tend to go by names such as *learning journals*, *reflective journals*, yet it can be difficult to see what makes them different and unique; the instructor's classroom teaching of those forms is glossed over, if it is mentioned at all. But interestingly, and perhaps confirming that an essential characteristic of the experience of journal writing is how it facilitates reflection and metacognition, in all three of the above studies, evidence of metacognition and reflection was found. Dart (1998) speaks to this in his claim that both academic and personal journals serve:

. . . a constructive as well as reflective process. That is, in the process of sense-making and understanding, journal writing enables learners to recognize their own relevant ideas and beliefs (recognition), to evaluate these in terms of what is to be learned and how it is to be learned (evaluation), and to decide whether or not to reconstruct their ideas and beliefs (decision). (p. 296)

Given the high value placed on reflective journal writing, studies in those fields have often sought to measure and quantify *reflectiveness* in students' journals, with mixed results. The problem with studying reflection stems from the difficulty of defining

the term and then deciding which linguistic features of students' writing indicate reflection (Anson & Beach, 1990; Langer, 2002). Ultimately, Langer (2002) calls for studies that looked at the students' experiences with journal writing in the hope that those kinds of studies will provide a clearer picture of what students are doing with their journals, which would, in turn, give us a better idea about how students experience reflection in journal writing.

This study indicates that, as defined by Dewey (1910) and Schön (1995), my participants were practicing reflection in their journal writing without my interference, without my defining those terms, and that was true for all of my participants to varying degrees. For instance, we see a highly reflective attitude in Tony's description of his use of the journal for solving problems. Tony wrote about problems that he faced and used the journal to find solutions to those problems. He looked back at his previous actions and decisions, scrutinized them, and then hypothesized better courses of action. He believed that journal writing would enable him to make better decisions in the future.

Likewise Bobby, when rereading his journal entries and looking back at his previous decisions, saw much about those actions that he did not like, which in turn led him to change his behaviors and to make better decisions. It was a painful process, but it seems to fit the definition of reflection, a looking back and a looking forward.

Metacognition, thinking about thinking, or consciousness about consciousness, also emerged in the descriptions of participants. Metacognition is often addressed in the literature in connection to dialogue journals, such as Berthoff's (1987) "dialectical notebooks" (p. 11). The dialectical notebooks described by Berthoff are closely related to the sort of rereading done by this study's participants because the conversation, or



dialogue, is with the self. No third party responds, but rather, the student responds to himself or herself. The journals in this study differ from Berthoff's journals in that Berthoff exerted a great deal of control over her students' journal writing with an emphasis on specific goals that centered on the cultivation of critical thinking habits. Further, the journals are assigned a specific format. That contrasts with the unstructured, anything-goes nature of the personal journals that is the subject of this study. She describes the assignment as follows:

[T]he dialectical notebook is a double-entry journal with the two pages facing one another in dialogue. On one side are observations, sketches, noted impressions, passages copied out, jottings on reading or other responses; on the facing page are notes on these notes, responses to these responses—in current jargon, “meta-comment.” (p. 12)

Then Berthoff (1987) takes up what would have been my question, and then provides the answer:

“Why tell people what they are doing when they are doing it normally, naturally? Why intervene with theory when they are creating without it?” The short answer is that knowing how to make meaning in one instance is facilitated by knowing that we have done so in other circumstances. Consciousness of consciousness makes that knowledge apprehendable. (p. 12)

Admittedly, noticeably absent in my participant's descriptions are those academic objectives so prized by Berthoff. Participants in this study did not describe their experiences in terms of critical or logical thinking. Academic aims were almost completely absent in their descriptions. Instead, they emphasized the personal. Journals

helped them with their relationships with others. Journals helped them better understand themselves, both in terms of what they were thinking and what they were feeling. If academic aims were mentioned at all, they were discussed in terms of practice, such as with Philip, who saw journal writing as a way to practice writing and to gain confidence in his ability to write, or in terms of Bobby's "warm-up lap" that facilitated the firing of neurons at eight o'clock in the morning. For Bobby and Mike, opening the day's class with journal writing got them going and brought writing, the subject of the course, to the center of their thinking.

In this theme, the question that began this chapter, when to intervene and when to step aside, comes to the fore. Berthoff (1987) clearly emphasizes habits of mind most valued by scholars, namely critical thinking, the ability to be critical of one's own thoughts. The personal and private journals kept by this study's participants contained the very same elements of critical thinking, of metacognition, yet the narrowly defined academic emphasis was absent. Participants employed critical thinking in ways that encompassed their identities, not only as students, but also as people with more than brains, but also hearts, hearts that sometimes hurt, that sometimes broke, as was the case with Janet. The conflict between the personal and the academic comes into full view.

It seems that many different configurations of journals achieve similar ends, and the personal journal has the added benefit of encouraging students to think about their own personal growth and development. It resisted compartmentalization or categorization, and instead fostered a sense of the whole person working context to context. Personal journal writing, put another way, was not limiting, but expansive. Further, metacognition and reflection and critical thinking are not excluded in the

personal journal format.

### On Rereading: A Conversation with Multiple Selves

Rereading was an overwhelmingly dominant theme of this study. In the short term, participants said that a large part of their journal writing process involved rereading the previous entry and then responding to that entry. Many entries were explicitly connected with the previous entry, often in the form of a response, but participants also described rereading entries out of curiosity, to see what they wrote about last time. Rereading those entries often prompted participants to consider those entries in considerable depth. A good example of that was described by Rick, who, when rereading an entry in which he described being belligerent with his girlfriend and calling her names, realized that he had been in the wrong, that name-calling was bad behavior, and that he should be more respectful, nicer, to his girlfriend. That revelation then became the start of his new entry.

Many other examples exist, such as Anne, who, upon rereading her entries in which she wrote gossip about her friends, realized that she was too “catty,” and she disliked how those entries made her appear, or Julie, who saw in her rereading that she was right to want her boyfriend to stop using drugs. Tony described rereading as a process of continual questioning: Why did I handle things that way? How could I have handled it better?

The process of rereading demonstrates the dialogue of multiple voices within each participant, convincingly confirming Bahktinian theories, such as those developed by Trimbur (1987), that writing involves a polyphony of voices, that there is no one stable voice inside each writer yearning to get out. This study shines a light on the character of

those multiple voices. They are determined by myriad factors, especially *time, social relationships, and emotional states*.

To a large extent, the length of time that had passed in between journal entries and the rereading of those journal entries were tied to the participant's response to those entries. In chapter four, I separated time into two categories: the short term and the long term. In the short term, journal entries were closer to the participants in terms of time, and again, they would often respond to issues in their latest entry. For example, if in one entry a problem the participant faced had become resolved, the newest entry would note that resolution and describe how such resolution was achieved. Anne described that kind of rereading when she spoke about being frustrated with receiving a grade she did not like, or with worries concerning an upcoming test. With those hurdles behind her, she saw that perhaps her worries were disproportional to the problem. She saw that she had overreacted. Whereas in the previous entry she had blamed the teacher for being unfair, in the newest entry she saw that the grade had been her fault and that she should have studied more for the test. The short amount of time that passed between those entries revealed a change in her thinking, and she was effectively having a conversation with that other self who was worried and lashing out. In that conversation, a resolution was achieved, and Anne believed she became a better student as a result of that dialogue.

Long-term rereading yielded the most intense emotional responses from participants. It was in talking about longer term rereading that some interviews, most notably my interview with Janet, turned into powerful, unforgettable, emotionally-charged interactions. Janet, recalling her failed romance, found it painful to read about how much that relationship mattered to her. Janet was struck by "how much it mattered"

to her at the time. It was “shocking” to her when she saw how hopelessly in love, even obsessed, she had become with her boyfriend. The experience broke her down. She had cried the night before our interview, and she cried, almost continuously, throughout our interview. Seeing herself, a version of herself that she did not even seem to recognize in long-term hindsight, put her in conversation with that former self, and she resolved to become more independent, as in, less dependent on boyfriends for her sense of worth and well-being. (I will mention here that Janet has, as of this writing, kept in sporadic contact with me. She has graduated from college, and she has, by herself, done a great deal of travelling and has made connections with people in many different countries. Talking with Janet, I get a strong sense of her independence, and she credits, at least in part, her journal writing in our course as a step toward self-sufficiency.)

Bobby fought back his tears when he reread his journal before meeting me for an interview. His journal revealed behavior that made him feel ashamed. He saw that former iteration of himself as hopelessly lost, aimless, and just mindlessly following the crowd. In that rereading, he was struck by the voice of his mother appearing in his journal. Echoing Trimbur’s (1987) account of this phenomenon, Bobby had channeled his mother’s chastisements, telling himself to stop behaving badly, to pull himself together, to live up to his family’s expectations.

Ellen cried during the interview when she discussed her entries relating to her father’s tour in Iraq, and her father’s voice of reassurance appeared in her journal, assuring her that he would be okay, that he was coming back. Cindy cried when she recounted entries that detailed her mixed feelings and her strained relationship with her mother.

Interestingly, even though long-term rereading led to intense emotion, especially sadness and shock, participants characterized that sort of reading as resoundingly positive. That struck me as counter-intuitive at the time. Who wants to feel bad? Yet, participants insisted that though they were crying, though it hurt to reread those journal entries, the benefit of that rereading was worth the pain. It yielded concrete benefits. It yielded wisdom. Both short-term rereading and longer-term rereading provided an interaction with the multiple selves that gave participants a way to explore their ever-changing identities. That interaction with previous entries led to insights, which led to personal growth and a different sense of perspective. Lessons learned from rereading and responding led to better decisions, better behaviors, and in the cases in which rereading confirmed or justified behaviors or reactions, participants found the resolve and confidence to take action, knowing they were in the right.

That finding supports the research of Pennebaker (1997), who found that even though journal writing could be painful, most journal writers reported that the experience was positive. This study illuminates why that is the case. It shows that rereading those entries is hard, but it yields a wealth of insights and benefits. In rereading, participants described a complex interaction of emotion, the passage of time, and an emphatic emphasis on the journal's connection to their relationships with others. The conversation among those voices was often painful, yet it was beneficial.

### On Journals as Therapy

The use of journals for what could be considered therapeutic purposes—to work through life's problems in relationships, adjusting to change, negative emotions, frustrations, resentment, anger, among others—was an exceedingly strong theme to

emerge from this study. Virtually all participants used their journals for what can be considered a therapeutic purpose, to varying degrees. Indeed, the theme of therapy seems to unify the previously discussed themes of reflection, metacognition, and rereading. Whereas reflection is often cast as the highest order of journal writing in the educational literature about journals, participants in this study experienced the therapeutic function of journal writing as the most beneficial function, which unified reflection and metacognition within the rereading process to create an overarching therapeutic benefit. Put another way, therapy seems to have happened when participants wrote their journal entries, reread those journal entries, and responded to those journal entries, and that process had a strong reflective and metacognitive character. It all added up to what participants described as therapy. Tony exemplified that when he said that he spent much of his early journal writing making lists and recording the mundane facts of his day. It was only when he started using the journal to deal with his problems that he felt he was getting the most out of his journal. Even participants like Mike and William, who did not find a strong connection to the assignment, recognized that personal journals were conducive to working through one's problems.

It is worth mentioning here that the results of this study show that all of the historical pre-forms of the journal/diary described by Fothergill (1974) are present in the journals of my participants. The historical pre-forms are part of the journal writing experience. The spiritual or religious diaries were alive in the journals of William and Christine, who explicitly addressed God in their journals. The commonplace book, a collection of memorabilia, clippings, quotes, and anything else one might find of interest and worthy of collection, was present in the journal of Dorothy. Ellen used her journal to

record her travels to Texas, demonstrating the persistence of the travel journal. Yet, it was the newest journal form, called by Rainer (2004) the “new diary,” that seemed to dominate participant’s descriptions. Rainer envisions the journal as anything and everything, an amalgamation of forms. The new diary is whatever the journal keeper wants it to be. Its common denominator is its intensely personal focus on the life of the writer.

All participants were keenly aware that journals are therapeutic. Of course, if students did not have an explicit awareness of the therapeutic market of journal writing guides, such as the works of Progoff (1992), it is reasonable to assume they had at least a tacit awareness. After all, if the popular booksellers are sound indicators, it seems that journal writing for self-help or therapy is ubiquitous in American culture, and participants, in one sense or another, were aware of that and gravitated toward it quite naturally.

The benefits that participants experienced from journal writing connect with those described by Pennebaker (1991, 1997, 1999) and Pennebaker et al. (1988, 1990), and there are some striking parallels between the experiences of Pennebaker’s research subjects and this study’s participants. First of all, participants described that, sometimes immediately following writing journal entries about painful topics, they felt worse. Philip and Carol wrote about homesickness, and sometimes they felt more homesick after writing about it in their journals. Other participants, such as Ann and Janet, described the “shock” of confronting feelings that were less than positive or aspects of their characters that struck them as unflattering. Pennebaker’s research subjects also found that writing about traumas, at least in the short term, made writers feel worse about their problems.



Despite those initial negative feelings, his subjects felt better in the long-term, had fewer visits to the doctor, improved emotional well-being, and improved GPAs. He speculates that the writing stripped subjects of their ability to avoid thinking about their traumas, thus making them feel worse in the short term, yet in the long term the writing seemed to have yielded significant benefits. The longer-term benefits described by Pennebaker cannot be confirmed in this study because it was designed to investigate experiences more immediate to the phenomenon of journal writing. Still, this study's results do provide a counterargument to the charge that journal writing should perhaps be avoided due to shorter term discomfort it caused participants (and their teachers) such as in Singer (1990) and Hollowell & Nelson (1982).

In the short term, participants described improved emotional well-being as their journals helped them deal with their problems, even if confronting those problems was sometimes uncomfortable, even emotionally painful. That can be seen in the benefits participants described, namely an improved perspective on problems, that when they wrote about those problems they did not seem so daunting, or in the practical applications they found for the insights they gained from journal writing, such as Julie's understanding that she was right about her boyfriend's drug use, or Ellen's getting a better handle on her father fighting in Iraq, or Tony's finding a more mature, more diplomatic way of handling his problems with people at work. Journal writing yielded real benefits.

It should be said that journals are not the miraculous cure-all that one might think they are if he or she reads the evangelical, or testimonial, pieces about journal writing, at least not for all participants. The benefits should be tempered with the description given

by Rachel, who found short-term benefits in journal writing, but ultimately said that her problems never really went anywhere. She viewed journal writing as one tool in her arsenal, but for her it was not even the most powerful tool. Perhaps this insight came from Rachel's extensive experience with therapy, but she had what I consider to be a rather mature awareness that there was no magic bullet, that part of therapy was letting go of the idea that there could be a magic bullet, a permanent easy fix to ongoing and deep-seated problems. The best one can do, Rachel believed, was manage those problems. They were not going anywhere. In Rachel's view, journal writing was anything but miraculous. It certainly did not free her of her problems. No one gets liberated. Problems are a mainstay of human life.

College freshman live in continual upheaval. Changes come from every direction. In college composition, which is still one of the few universal course requirements since almost all college freshman are required to take the course, one could argue that broadening the conception of students from one of deficiency to one that incorporates a broader sense of their humanity could help ease their transition to college, and therefore give them better chances of staying in school and eventually graduating. One could argue, given the data gathered by Pennebaker et al. (1990) that points to improved well-being, improved GPAs, among other benefits, that a journal writing intervention in freshman composition would do far more good for students than the traditional emphasis on academic remediation. After all, longitudinal studies by Sternglass (1997) and Carroll (2002) have shown that such academic remediation just is not possible within a fifteen week composition course, that acquiring the habits of academic literacy is an endeavor that unfolds over the course of an entire college career,

course to course, instructor to instructor. One could argue that using journals to help freshmen deal with their adjustment to college life, and all of the problems and worries that comes with that adjustment, is a worthy goal, one that positions students to become better, more successful students in the long term.

Journal writing yields benefits, but those benefits are not miraculous. Instead, they are practical, everyday benefits that are centered on adjusting and coping with change. This study's participants did not describe being freed or liberated from their problems, as the testimonial pieces and the film *Freedom Writers* (2007) seem to suggest.

### On Metaphors

Tightly bound to the theme of therapy are the metaphors participants used to describe the therapeutic function of journal writing. Those metaphors are variously phrased as *getting it out* and *laying it down*.

As noted in chapter two, Trimbur (1987), in his discussion of the familiar *inner/outer metaphor* that characterizes much of the discourse about expressive writing prior to the post-process shift, finds the metaphor inadequate to explain what really happens when students sit down at their writing desks in the endeavor to express themselves. The old metaphor, as expressed by Moffett (1985), likens the inner world of the writer to a prison, to incarceration, and the struggle that is writing is a matter of setting it free from that prison. Perhaps a more colorful metaphor would be a solitary tower surrounded by a castle moat, and the journal serves as the all-important bridge that allows access to the wide world on the other side. At any rate, Trimbur finds such metaphors inadequate because he sees that the inner and the outer, envisioned as separate entities, are inextricably linked, that there is a back-and-forth, that one constitutes, is an

essential part of, the other. The mind is tied to the world, constituted by the world, never separated from the world.

The metaphors employed by this study's participants are different from the inner/outer metaphor Trimbur criticizes. No prison metaphors were expressed by participants. They did not see their interior thoughts as locked or partitioned away from the world. In fact, they saw themselves as vital participants in the world, as members of their *communities*, and that is the all-important distinction to be made. Trimbur's criticism of the prison metaphor for its implication that there are individuals who are solitary, confined, alone seems apt. The metaphors expressed by participants emphasized the social nature of the mind; the problems participants experienced were problems interacting with people. The journal provided insights about how to deal with their relationships.

Take, for example, the metaphor *getting it out*, also stated as *venting* and *blowing off steam*. At first glance, one might connect that to the prison metaphor as there is an image of release, yet the problem is not the lack of bridges or mechanisms to facilitate that release, but the proper venue and the availability of a receptive listener who can accommodate that release. The problem is not surmounting a wall, but finding a suitable interlocutor. That is a social problem, a problem of the pressure to keep one's problems to himself or herself, to pretend that everything is okay, even when it is not. The constraint, then, is not the problem of expression, but the problem of finding the proper audience and venue. The journal, for many participants, provided that audience and venue. It provided a suitable, safe, and acceptable place to release the pressure.

Journal writing provided some participants with a means to deal with their

problems with other people in ways that were more diplomatic. Journal writing helped participants come to terms with their frustrations in the most literal sense of that expression: participants wrote about their frustrations. They were doing something about their problems, coping with their disagreements with people, and coming to the awareness about what was inside their control and what was outside their control. When confrontations happened, participants found that journal writing had prepared them for those confrontations more than going into those situations cold, without preparation.

The second metaphor, that of *laying it down*, centers not on the build-up of pressure, but on the hauling of an oppressively heavy load. That metaphor centers on worries, grief, anxiety, frustration, resentment, and desire. Again, there is an explicit social connection among those emotions because they invariably originated in participants' social relationships. When people hurt us, when people we love fall ill, when people refuse to behave in the ways we wish they would, when people refuse to give us the things we want, we tend to carry those experiences with us, and they multiply. We worry, and those worries shape us and change us, and most especially, they weigh us down. The journal provides a safe place, a suitable place, to make an attempt to lessen the burden. As Rachel noted, we cannot lay all of it down, but we can lessen the load, and every bit of relief adds up to an important therapeutic benefit.

The key to understanding the metaphors participants used is the social. Far from being disconnected and alone or imprisoned, journals, as described by those metaphors, are profoundly social forms that lead to, in many cases, improved social outcomes. In journal writing, participants experienced relief of pressure, lessening of weight. Journal writing provided the medium, the place, to lay down a little of the burden.

## On Audience

A well-worn criticism of journal writing, and of personal writing in general, is that such writing isolates students and prevents them from participating in communities, that it ignores or disrupts the social functions of writing. Berlin (1988) is perhaps the most widely known proponent of that view. Certainly, the private and personal journal writing practiced by my participants was not social in the sense that it was read by another person. It was not addressed to an external audience.

This study supports Summerfield's (1987) view that all use of language is a social act, a movement toward an other, or others, even if that other is oneself (see Breuch, 2002). The multiple selves that participants addressed in both rereading and writing their journals confirm that the audience for journal writing is far more complex than one might believe at first glance, confirming the thoughts of Ong (1975), who highlighted the complexity of the oneself that is typically addressed in a journal. Participants cast those dialogues with their other selves as almost different people who were often strikingly different from the self who, in the moment, was addressing the self of the past.

Journal entries are always written within a context, which included the emotional states of the participants, the worries and thoughts that were on their minds when they wrote their entries, how they felt bodily (sick, sleepy, hung-over), the time in which they wrote their entries, the space in which they wrote their entries. Over time, situations change. People never stand still, and they feel differently in different contexts, and those differences are reflected in the journals, which serve as a kind of snapshot of a particular time and place, freezing it, which allows for analysis. Tony illustrated that quite clearly when he described asking questions about his previous entries. *Why did I react that way?*

*How could I have better handled that?*

The conversation with the self that the journals facilitated had profound social implications. The insights gained from those conversations with the self, or perhaps selves, led to action in the social spheres of my participants. Julie confronted her boyfriend about his drug use, knowing from rereading her entries that she was in the right. Tony worked to be a better swimming coach and to more effectively navigate institutional waters, which included his interactions with students, parents, and his principal. Ann found the courage to confront her roommate. Many more examples emerged in participant's descriptions. Personal journal writing had social implications that participants believed were beneficial.

Many participants echoed the insights of Elbow and Clark (1987) about the benefits of ignoring audience when one seeks to improve his or her writing. Participants, namely Philip, believed that they gained confidence and experience. Philip believed that forgetting about grammar and correctness yielded improvement in his writing abilities. It is important to note, however, that this study casts doubt on the idea that audience can ever really be ignored. A more refined way of thinking about it, then, is not that participants were ignoring audience altogether but rather that they were ignoring the audience personified by the instructor. They were ignoring me, the English teacher, arbiter of correctness. Indeed, this study demonstrates that ignoring *that* audience was a positive experience for this study's participants.

Another audience addressed in participants' journals was God. As shown in chapter four, William used his journals to dialogue with God, to ask Him for guidance and help. Carol reported that she did something very similar, having been influenced by

the devotional journal advocated by her preacher. She reported that she would thank God for his blessings and that her journal entries were often akin to prayers, only written instead of spoken.

For our purposes, that voice of God can be considered yet another among the polyphony. It is a voice that brings peace and guidance for William and Carol. It is a voice on which they could rely. To God, William poured out his worries and asked for inspiration and guidance. Whereas he had expressed thorough ambivalence toward journal writing in our conversation, the journal entry in which he prayed to God was sincere, earnest, and troubled.

But what do we do with Mike and Rachel? Both said that the conversation with the self that journal writing required was a negative, and they resisted it. Mike saw himself as a social person who would rather talk to his friends about his problems, and Rachel, who had had extensive experiences with counseling, found any relief offered by journal writing to be short-lived. In the end, she was still alone with her problems. Those problems did not go anywhere. Her preference was to sit down with an interlocutor who could respond and offer advice.

For Rachel, the journal was not as effective as talking to a real person, though she believed that journal writing was better than nothing. Journal writing was not as good as talking *by comparison*.

Mike avoided journal writing altogether. Like Stover (2002) said that some people are just not well-suited to journal writing. It was Stover's frustration with being one of those people, while it seemed to her that all around her people were finding their journal beneficial and useful that prompted her to think about her resistance so deeply.



Stover, like both Rachel and Mike, preferred to talk with friends and family about her problems. The journal was like talking to a mannequin.

Mike and Rachel present us with a difficult question with regard to the social uses of journal writing. If students dislike journals in a way that seems so fundamental to their identities, as with the two participants above, then it seems that no amount of intervention on the part of the teacher is likely to mitigate their resistance. *Though Mike said that more structure would have helped, he insisted that no amount of structure would have helped him to like the assignment.* He insisted that he could understand the benefits that journal writing could provide; nevertheless, he believed those benefits were not enough to win them over. For the teacher keen to employ journals, students like Mike and Stover present a particularly difficult conundrum that is worthy of consideration. Should they be given an alternate assignment? Should they be forced to write in journals despite their vehement resistance? Would the more public derivations of the journal better serve them? All of the above seem like important considerations for students who resist, and even hate, personal journal writing. Such questions, too, seem like excellent avenues for future research.

#### On Safety and Risk

When I introduced the assignment, I cautioned my students about the tendency of people to snoop, to find irresistible that which is secret or off-limits. In fact, I emphasized that more than any other factor. I recognized from the outset that students could potentially get into trouble if their personal thoughts and feelings were read by someone without permission. Despite my warnings, two participants were careless with their journals, and as I predicted, those journals beckoned to be read by people who had

no business reading them, assuming the privacy of adults should always be respected. In Philip's case, his mother read his journal. In Rick's case, his girlfriend read it. In both cases, a confrontation ensued. Philip's encounter with his mother turned out to be good for him, at least as he described it. He was homesick and far away from home, and his mother helped him feel better. Since Rick and his girlfriend broke up, despite his insistence that her reading his journal had no bearing on the breakup, I think it is safe to say that it did not help matters. Another example is Tony. Though Tony's girlfriend did not read his journal, he had left it in a conspicuous place on the bookcase in his apartment, and his girlfriend asked to read it. He denied her request, and explained that the journal contained some entries that were unflattering about her. He had to explain that he, like anyone else, has negative thoughts and doubts from time to time, but those thoughts were not necessarily the hard truth about his overall feelings, and that admission prompted an argument between them.

Though the literature speaks about the journal as a safe place to take risks with writing (Elbow & Clark, 1987), it scarcely mentions the other side of the coin, that the very qualities that make it safe also present significant risks. Yes, Berman (2001) calls journal writing *risky*, but not in that sense. He uses the term in the sense that journal writing prompts student to write about painful topics, and in his class, to share those entries with classmates. Another sense in which risk is mentioned is from the perspective of the teacher who would rather not read about the drug use or abuse or sexual activity of her students (Singer, 1990). The literature is largely silent on the problem of journal entries being intercepted by an interloper and how a teacher should handle that situation. If those journals are intercepted by an unauthorized other, problems can arise. This study

shows that an unauthorized reader can cause social conflict.

### On Personal Journal Writing and Ownership

This study challenges the idea that the personal journal is not *academic*, in the sense that it has no academic merit, that it is too soft, that it lacks intellectual rigor. As I have emphasized, this study challenges that notion by showing that personal journals offered participants numerous benefits, including benefits that can be classified as academic in nature in the improvement of their writing.

When journals are cast as lacking intellectual rigor, I am struck by the connotations of the word *rigor*, its association with stiffness and death. *This study shows that journals lack rigor.* That is good. Journals are not rigorous. They are *vigorous*. They are alive. They are full of life and vitality. Students learn and grow when they keep personal journals. They engage their journals in a complex process of rereading, reflection, and metacognition. They enter into dialogues with the polyphony of voices that comprise their fluid identities. They utilize their journals to improve their social relationships. They learn to see writing as continual and vigorous practice.

There is no question that the institutional space in which my participants wrote in their journals exerted force on my participants' journal writing. While I had hoped that using personal journal writing and combining that with a policy of non-interference would help my students transcend the transactional nature of formal education, that outcome was only partially realized. The in-class entries were often to-do lists and devoted to academic planning, as in, planning for an upcoming chemistry exam. The outside-of-class entries tended to be far more personal, centered on social relationships. That seems to suggest that if teachers want students to use journals in a way that

transcends the institutional context, then those journals must be employed outside-of-class in the students' home environments.

In the case of William and Mike, the fact that the journals were personal and unread by the instructor seemed to work against their investing in the assignment. Yet, the majority of participants were able not only to invest themselves in their journals but also to transcend the assignment's classroom origin in the process. The moving accounts of journal writing from Ellen and Janet in which they described very painful and personal topics such as love and sex and drugs and death indicate that those students were able use their journals in ways that break away from a more traditional and conservative classroom model. For those participants, the journal was much more than an academic hoop through which they had to jump. And to further make that point, five participants, Melissa, Julie, Brian, Dorothy, and Ellen, either continued their journals after the course had ended or started a new personal journal after the course had ended. Some of my participants made journal writing a part of their ongoing literate practice.

When we talk about journal writing, we are talking about a genre that has the *potential*, at least for some students, to transcend the institutional context of its origin, and it is difficult to imagine that same outcome from the research essay. For a handful of my participants, their journals were valuable and worthy of safekeeping. How many students would cherish an argumentative essay in such a way? The journal helped many of this study's participants discover a way to incorporate writing into their lives that had not been there before. Even though such an outcome resists the language of assessment that has become so pervasive in higher learning, I can think of no better outcome of a composition course.

## Recommendations

My policy of non-interference into the journal writing of my students provides the reader with a view of what students do with their journals on their own, with minimal instructor interference. It provides a sort of baseline. That means that this study's results show, to a large degree, what the participants did with their journals as per their own decisions. Of course, the institution, and all the trappings thereof, were not, and most likely cannot, be completely transcended. The institution, the authority of the teacher, the blandly painted walls and uncomfortable desks, all exerted an amount of influence on participants' practices, yet this assignment did, as much as possible within its institutional context, relinquish a great amount of control and put that control in the hands of students.

If we observe a river, how it flows without human interference, we get an idea about how that river can be harnessed to yield a desired outcome, such as powering a turbine to generate electricity. If we know what students do with journals on their own, we can plan how we can utilize those natural tendencies to accomplish the outcomes that we desire in our classrooms. This study, then, can serve potentially as a guide to teachers who want to employ personal journals in their composition courses.

Certainly, I could have intervened more than I did, and if I were to assign personal journals again, I would center that intervention on fostering an ongoing dialogue with my students about their journal writing practice. I would be keen to identify the Mikes and Williams who need structure and perhaps a little coaching. Likewise, I would be keen to identify the Dorothys and Melissas who would want me to leave them alone.

I would heed the oft-recommended advice from the literature to provide a more lengthy introduction to the traditions of journal writing and the purposes to which

journals are put, which seems to be necessitated by the brevity of a composition course combined with the difficulty most participants experienced getting started and finding their purpose. Yet, in the interest of nurturing the agency of students and helping them come to a sense of ownership of their journals, this study seems to suggest to tread lightly. Given a tenured situation, the sort of dialogues described by Berman (1994, 2001) and Burnham (1994), in which students openly discussed their most personal traumas, would allow avenues for intervention and dialogue that would seem to yield a course on English composition that has the potential to be powerful and, as believed by Berman, even life-changing for students and teachers alike. This study shows that even an adjunct adding a personal journal piecemeal to his course can achieve powerful results for many students.

Journals present the researcher with many options. Because journals are so versatile and adaptable, so highly configurable, and because the configuration of journals tends to have a great impact on how students use them, studies that investigate different configurations in different contexts would add to our knowledge about journals in the classroom. Those kinds of studies are needed. This study points to the need for more studies about journals and therapy in the classroom as well as explorations of journals within other institutional contexts. Of particular interest might be students such as Mike, who saw themselves as inherently ill-suited to write in journals. Studies could center on students with high or total resistance to journal writing and look for alternate means to serve those students with the aim of helping them realize the tangible benefits of personal writing.

## Conclusion

As I conclude this dissertation and look back on this project as a whole, I find myself haunted by the image of Janet, her eyes puffy and red from a torrent of tears, clutching her journal to her chest with both hands, saying, “This is mine!” Over the course of my ten-year career as a composition teacher, seldom have I seen a writing assignment have such an impact on a student. For participants like Janet, Ellen, Dorothy, and Bobby, among others, the journals they kept in their English composition course became more than an assignment. Their journals were important to them. This study opened a window through which to see what happened well after the course had ended, and for some participants, though the course had ended, their journals kept going.

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## Appendix A: Interview Samples

Rachel, February 15, 2008

J: Describe your experience with journal writing in Mr. Wester's course on English composition.

R: Well, um, you basically told us that we were gonna write in our journals like every day or at least a couple of times a week and some days you would tell us that we could go you know go outside or the hallway or somewhere else away from the classroom. and then some days we had to do journal entries on our own at home and basically at first I was like oh you know this maybe . . . I'll enjoy this 'cause in the past I've written in diaries and journals but it never particularly did anything for me. I would start off good but then after a while it kind of got to be like a chore almost and it was . . . it really didn't enthrall me in any way.

J: I gotcha. You said that at first you thought that you might enjoy it

R: Yeah

J: Okay that's interesting. can you elaborate on that that sort of initial feeling when you thought it might be pretty cool?

R: Well, I'm quite a worrisome person. I'm constantly stressed out. I'm kind of anxious and lots of other things but I just thought maybe that it could help me in that way that I could write down things you know that are bothering me you know or whatever but it didn't really seem to help any of that.

J: I see. You were a very conscientious student and that's apparent you know very quickly with you so I'm just restating for clarity: you thought at first that it would help you to maybe deal with some of that anxiety you describe?



R: Yeah

J: Does that anxiety come from . . . is it just a part of your personality would you say?

R: Definitely

J: And . . .

R: It's just my personality. I'm a perfectionist and to tell you truth I think part of it is genetic 'cause my dad was like that my mom's like that so it's just how I've always been and it's pretty much the way my whole life is everything I do.

J: I worry a lot too we have that in common I guess the difference, this is what we are going to try to zero in a little bit on we're gonna follow this a little bit um a difference, like my personal journal that I keep it does tend to help me with those things um I don't know it tends to help me get things out of here where I'm worried about them a lot and put them on the page and sort of be able to wrestle with them in more a physical way if that makes sense.

R: Yeah

J: So okay so if okay you had high hopes it might help you in that way too is that fair?

R: mmmm-hmmm

J: and by the, as the semester went on you didn't sort of realize those benefits that you had hoped would come?

R: No not really

J: Any idea why?

R: I would say I'm really close with my mom. she's like my best friend and I tell her everything she knows when I'm upset so whenever I'm upset about something or I'm stressed it helps me more to talk about it rather than write it down for me to read so

talking to someone else that I'm close to and getting reassurance and encouragement and advice is more helpful to me

(5)

J: That actually makes a lot of sense. It seems to me you know talking seems to help you more when you are dealing with issues

R: Mmmm-hmmm

J: What you need is somebody to listen

R: mmmm-hmmm

J: and a journal doesn't provide that

R: right

J: is that fair?

R: mmmm-hmmm

J: fascinating

R: Like when you're with yourself and you're so anxious and everything you know you have so many thoughts everything is running through your head and then if you're writing it down you're still with yourself with the thoughts so you know talking to someone kind of gets it out and makes you feel like you know like you release a burden or something

J: That makes a lot of sense um so you as a writer in that journal it was your feeling that this is writing to myself

R: mmmm-hmmm

J: this is keeping it to myself

R: Yeah yeah

J: It's not going anywhere it's still with me

R: mmmm-hmmm

J: and when you have an audience member like your mom and she's listening to you and interacting with you that makes you feel better but keeping it bottle up, it is still bottle up in the journal?

R: Right, that's what I think

J: All of that is fair to say about what you are saying?

R: Yes

J: Because you know one of the, one of the, when you read literature on journaling that's one of the number one things you come across you can find self-help books out the wazoo about the therapy the therapeutic aspect and see you didn't feel that you hoped that you would and you didn't that's very important that's important okay um okay this might be a hard question to answer but I'm going to throw it out here how did you the activity the journal writing in the classroom how did you feel about it?

R: I though I just kinda answered that um

J: Well you did, you did, but I'm just sort of probing a little bit here

R: I was just basically like neutral I mean some days there were like you know I kinda had more to write about but then other days I just really had no idea what to write about and I just kinda wrote like whatever whatever happened that day whatever I was gonna do or something

J: And that wasn't important for you to do?

R: No

Mike, February 20, 2008

J: Describe you're your experience with journal writing in my course

M: Last minute. I always did it at the last minute. Sitting in the class I remember I really couldn't concentrate long enough and almost all my opening statements were something about, usually bitching about something. The weather. Mostly the journal.

J: Writing about the journal itself?

M: Yeah most of it, the pages were filled up with why I thought the journal was stupid. It's just the only thing I could think of. I just, nine o'clock in the morning I was not filling up the writing. Writing itself has never been one of my favorite things.

J: What is your field of interest?

M: I'm in pharmacy. I still have to write, but as far as

J: More scientific?

M: Yeah

J: If you were writing about the journal itself a lot of the time, describe those entries.

M: I never saw a point in the journal I wasn't ever pulling anything from it I never, you know, you could say I used it to vent about the journal but I never, you know, writing is not my escape. My idea is hop in the car with somebody and just drive that's what I do to relax the journal didn't do that for me frustrated me and I said that the only thing I'm going to get from it is carpal tunnel so

J: Why was it so frustrating?

M: I just didn't see a point in it, and there was no purpose to it, it never would have taught me anything one of my greatest weaknesses is been grammar and that sure as hell didn't help me there's no spell check in a journal and you know freewrite, write whatever

want about spelling doesn't matter just cross things out all sloppy and there was no purpose for it. Like if was like an assignment like, all right, I want you to write about you know the superbowl or something I could do that I'd deal with that a little bit better but I just never saw the point and I think that's why I didn't like it I just saw no purpose and having to write is something I don't like to do

J: So you would have preferred me to be more directive about it, more structured?

M: That would be my opinion, yeah. I mean, I still wouldn't enjoy it in general but if it was like an assigned writing then you know I might have even sat in my dorm and sat down and wrote it that night, you know, for like a grade or something

J: I want to connect something if we can. One of the things that sticks out in my mind about you as my student is that you would do these really long involved papers. One in particular I remember and you were telling me how much you got into that. Do you remember what I'm talking about?

M: Yeah, the second one

J: What was it about, refresh my memory

M: Human sexuality

J: Did you enjoy that?

M: It originally started out as, you know, my friends were like, you won't do it. I was like, what does it matter. It is about whatever I want to write about, so yeah, I'll do it and then I ended up getting really involved in it because it's really something to think about how, you know, why humans are evolutionarily attracted to other humans I mean, down to like pheromones, you know, why Vogue magazine has perfect-looking women on it, it's because it's what's visually attractive waist-to-hip ratio point seven (.7) you know

there's just so much to it that you just look over like, you're just, wow, that girl's hot you know you never really sit down and think about why, you know, now I'm just like, yeah she's got a waist-to-hip ration of point seven

((LF))

She's got a large bust line that means, you know, her hormones are where they should be, which means she'll produce viable offspring, like, there's just so much to it that people overlook, and I mean I couldn't get into love because that's uniquely human and way to complicated and over my head but, I mean, what humans really are are animals. We're the smartest animals on Earth but you get down to it we're homo sapiens, animals.

J: I totally agree, and I like looking at it like that too. I find it interesting. So, okay, we did do something in class that you did like?

M: Yeah, that paper was fun.

I wonder how I could bridge that gap, you know

M: To make the journal enjoyable?

J: How could I have made it at least something that you didn't hate.

M: I don't know because I can't quite put my thumb on exactly why it is I didn't like it.

You know, if I could pinpoint exactly why I didn't like it. Like, I had to do one last spring semester too for another professor here and her, what she did, was every time you had a paper due she had more papers due than you everytime you had a paper due you had to turn in ten pages you know five pages front and back or just ten pages straight of writing and anything less you go a grade and many times I would walk fifteen twenty minutes late into that class the day a paper was due because I was sitting in my dorm an hour before just writing on one of them I wrote I found a facebook group, doesn't matter

that I'm using her journal as an example, do I?

J: No

M: Since we were able to do it like out of class, which we were with yours but there was one particular, it was a facebook group one-hundred things women should know about men and she never picked up on it but I actually wrote out the word one and what one was and I wrote two it was nothing but just this list completely nothingness just I needed something to write and I could look to see what I needed to write so I was up there one two I wrote out the letters there was no numbers and I got an A on it just it made me so mad

J: I'm interested in this. It was a journal assignment in that class?

M: Yeah everytime you turned in a paper you had to have ten pages of journal entry

J: That went along with that paper?

M: No she said you could write about anything you want she would not read what you wrote same guidelines

J: Then why did you have to turn it in?

M: The purpose of it?

J: Yeah, why did she collect it if she wasn't going to read it?

M: What you did is when you turned in the paper you just opened your book and at the end of the semester you flipped through the pages and that was it. If you had ten pages of ink, A. So, there's was like four or five papers due, so I had to do it four or five times

J: Was this comp. 1?

M: Yeah.

J: I'm interested in how other people do it, other teachers. How did it contrast with how I

did it? How was it different?

M: With yours I felt more forced to write. Well, in both I had to turn it in at some point for a grade, but yours, you know I'd come into class and everybody would be writing, what do I do? I got to get the thing out and write as much as I don't want to I had to pull it out and stick it to it you know I'm rolling in at nine in the morning, it's my first class, its not something I'm looking forward to doing

J: So either way, you didn't like it?

M: No not at all.



Carol, February 20, 2008

J: Describe your experience with writing in the journal in my course.

C: I thought it was useful in a way. Because you got to take some time out of the class.

It wasn't all directed toward English and you had time to yourself.

J: Did you like that?

C: Yeah

J: Tell me why

C: I didn't like it every day. I think it was too much, maybe just once a week and then, I don't know, on Fridays, then its just to yourself

J: How often did we do it?

C: We started with two times [a week] and then every day, and some weeks we just forgot, and toward the end we were just doing it one or two times a week.

J: Can you talk about the frequency, and how you felt about it?

C: I didn't mind it. I think some people thought it was too much or just a waste of time, but I kinda liked it.

J: Okay, why did you like it?

C: I'm not a fan of English. You didn't have to write perfect sentences and grammar and all that.

J: You in education?

C: Yeah

J: What field?

C: elementary

J: what do you want to teach?

C: the younger ages.

J: So you'd be more of a generalist?

C: yeah.

J: Okay. So, think about it for a second. What did you write about? How did you use the journal?

C: Towards the beginning it was like how I hated it here and just didn't know what I wanted to do. And as it went on it was like what I had to get done during the week, when I was going home, what I was doing. Just my thoughts.

J: Could you be a little more specific?

C: I know whenever I did it on my own I would write the homework assignments I had to do the projects, the papers that needed to be done by the following week. What I'd done over the weekend, like, watching the Steeler games ((LF)) and that was pretty much all

J: So, how would you have done it differently if I had said going into the project that I'm going to grade these based on grammar, based on the content, based on what you are writing about? Would that have changed how you approached it?

C: Yeah, I probably wouldn't have put how I hated the school and that I wanted to go home every single day, and that I counted down. I don't know. I think some things are meant to be just for yourself and not for other people.

J: I agree, and I certainly in my own journal write like that. I just want to know what those things are a little bit more concretely. What is something that you wouldn't want to share?

C: All of my feelings.

J: Why? Why wouldn't you want to share your feelings?

Susan, February 25, 2008

J: Describe your experience with writing in the journal in my course.

S: I really liked it because I've written in journals in class before. My respiratory class we had to write a daily log, so you had to write down, not patients names or anything, but if you had a patient and you had a problem with them this is what happened this is how you thought about it and it was a specific thing but this was a little bit more free where you could write whatever you felt like writing or you could write your goals or whatever you wanted to.

J: Go into a little bit more detail with what you did with it in other classes

S: For my respiratory?

J: Yeah, is that what you were talking about? You were doing some kind of journal activity?

S: Yeah, we had to write a daily log, four or five sentences or longer if you wanted it to be but it was, like if I had a patient that passed away on me, was like well, I've been treating them for two weeks and they passed away and there was nothing I could do I felt useless or something like that, or if you did something and the patient got better then you felt good and you felt confident and that you could actually treat them so it was pretty much to figure out how you were feeling about working with patients because sometimes people can't handle like, I know the one girl, we go to the neonatal unit, and she had a baby pass away on her, and she couldn't handle it at all, whereas I went in and I had two babies pass away on me and I was fine. So, it was. . .

J: and you were dealing with those kinds of things in the logs?

S: mmm-hmm, oh yeah.

J: That's intense.

S: Yeah, it's a two-year program so we get experience in every area from neonates to right before the elderly pass away, so

J: So the log, the daily log, is for you to

S: Express our feelings so our teachers knew how we were feeling about certain things, so that if they knew that we had a problem with dealing with a death, or if we were really confident, they knew they could talk to us, and say, do you need help with this, or okay, you feel confident in this now so I don't need to worry about it. Things like that.

J: So it was definitely, that's how it was introduced to you? That's how you were told to use that log?

S: Yeah. You didn't have to express emotion, but if you just said, oh well I did this, this, and this today, I felt like I knew what I was doing, something like that, just to relate it so it wasn't a detailed description of which patients you treated, they didn't want something like that. They wanted how you thought about treating patients. So yeah, it was more emotion based.

J: Talk about mine, in contrast if you want to.

S: yours kinda, you didn't have to talk about emotion, I could just go, if I felt like just writing, okay today I have to have an exam on Friday so tonight I'm going to go home and reread the chapters, and tomorrow this is my plan, and tomorrow . . . so I could just go in and write goals down. I didn't have to write emotions, but then if I wanted to, like if I had a really bad day or something I'd come in and just write out whatever I wanted to write.

J: goals? You wrote about goals?

S: Yes I did.

J: and you wrote about things you wanted to keep on your mind, like what I had to do today.

S: Yeah, well I had, I had all my classes. I had a full class load. And I was tutoring. And I tutored two different students for two different classes. Plus the entire second-year respiratory classes tutoring, so I had like eight students that I tutored. And I'd do study guides for them. And review all my notes and try to find out what I could help them with, which is above and beyond what most tutors up here do, I thought I helped them, so, I'd write down my goals. Like, if I had to, if I had three tests that week but I knew I had to get a study guide done for the second year class, I'd do that. And if I had to do something for the first year class I would do that. So, I tried to keep myself a little bit more organized in it.

J: And the journal helped you do that?

S: mmm-hmmm. Yes it did.

J: Well I want to talk about that, if we could go into a little more detail about that, how does it help?

S: Before I would write on a random piece of paper, like, I had to do a test, and I'll stick it on a corkboard or something, and then I had so much stuff on my corkboard, I never paid attention so I'd look at it and go, oh, I have test tomorrow, oops. In the journal I'd write down all my goals and I'd flip back through it, and I reread it like six times, like I'd go back and just read like what I wrote, and the first day I was like oh, because the first day we wrote in it I was a little unsure about it, and I was like, I just spent two and a half years writing in daily logs, so I didn't want to do this for this class too but then after a

couple of days I really got into it and I was writing in it at least three times a week even outside of class, so

J: so it got to be something you did regularly

S: I still write in it

J: That makes me smile. I like it when students take something away from the course.

S: And I think that's the one thing that stuck out about your course. Like I liked discussing the things, but I really liked the journal.

J: How else did you use it besides the two we've identified?

S: I kinda used it to work through problems too, so I'd write down, almost like the hypothesis steps because I'm a little more scientific, so I'd write down what my problem was and all things I could do to solve that problem and which one I thought was the best and just worked through it on paper instead of trying to do it in my head. Sometimes I just use it to write down something to remember even, like if so and so did something this day I just wrote it down so I had a record of it. I know the one day the kid I was tutoring totally skipped the tutoring session and I just wrote it down so I knew that that day, because you have to turn in logs, so that I'd remember the ones with attendance and I'd turn it in with the other ones, so

J: So, you hinted that you liked doing it, and I wanted to follow up on that. So, how did you feel about doing it?

S: I really liked it. I liked having something that was not just okay, you come to class, we're going to go over this, and that's it. It's like, you come to class and kind have a little free time to write about whatever's on your mind, and then we'd go into discussion, or whatever, so it kinda made the class feel a little more personal

J: and that was good?

S: I thought so, but some people probably don't.

J: Why do you think people, if they didn't like it, if you had to guess, why?

S: Some people just don't like to spend the time to write and there are a couple of people I just heard mention just thought that it was a waste of time, that you weren't really gonna grade anyway on what it said, so why bother, but

J: well, how about that? How I graded them, what did you think about that?

S: I liked it. I got an A+, which was like 18 or 19 above what you had for class, but I know some people were complaining about it, and I thought, you only asked us to do more than we did in class, you didn't tell us they had to be at least one page front and back so it could have been a little blurb about something you didn't have to take twenty twenty-five minutes to write out four or five pages, it just had to be one little notation, so I think some people complained about it for kinda no reason, they could have taken a couple of minutes, wrote down a couple of sentences and that was an entry, you know

Christine, March 27, 2008

J: describe your experience with journal writing in the course

C: writing is something I like to do anyway so doing it in the journal um I hadn't been writing in a journal prior to that just because I'm busy and that gave me a chance to make me sit down and write and it sort of got the words flowing again and the writing it was good to have a little time just to write whatever so

J: what did you think about it in terms of its place in our comp. course. Did you feel like it belonged

C: I think it did just because the idea was to get people to write even if people don't like to write at all just to get them to write you know you know something that they can look back on you know if they keep it be like oh this is where I started but I've grown or changed you know so I think it's a good idea to have that especially in a comp. class

J: it's funny. I guess what I sort of found so far is so you said you liked to write anyway and some of my students who didn't like it didn't like to write so it's almost about like torture there were several people in my class who hated it just speaking from your view as a student okay um if somebody really hates something like that what can a teacher do to make them like it more what do you think?

C: I don't know. Um. I know there are some teachers who make you write about certain topics in journals but you gave us the option to write about anything like I heard a girl talk about all I wrote were the shoes I wore that day you know and there's such a broad subject area I don't know if there is anything you could do to make people that hate writing in journals to I mean you gave them the option of anything they wanted they could write about even if it was just I hate writing I hate writing to get them to get it



down I don't know if there's anything you could do to make them like it a little more

J: it is a hard question. Can you think of something you hate about school or in class?

C: I don't know. I love school. And after I took my break um and I came back I just want to learn anything I can and yeah there's gonna be difficult times there's gonna be hard subjects and hard teachers but it is part of school and I want to get through that so

J: were there times, so you generally enjoyed the journal are there times that you didn't like it?

C: not really. There were a couple of times when it was like okay I have to get an entry in but I have so many other things I have to do and the other things took priority but it wasn't that I hated anything about the journal I just felt like I had to write in it you know but it I wanted to write but at the same time with everything going on it was like I had to get this in and I sort of felt obligated to do it a couple of times and I hate feeling that way to write in a journal I want to be able to write in it and not feel like I have to you know for the majority of the time we had the journal in class I looked forward to writing in it there was just a couple of times like outside of class I was like I gotta get this in but other than that there wasn't anything I didn't like about it there so much freedom in it how could you not like it?

J: so you liked the freedom part of it? That was good to you?

C: yeah

J: some people didn't like that you know everybody's different some people want more structure I heard that you just sort of start to realize that no matter what you do you're not going to please everybody you know

Can you tell me what did you write about?

C: I wrote about a lot of things. I wrote about school, especially in the beginning just how that was going considering I'd been out for a year and talking about home life and talking about god I sorta used it as a time I could talk to Him in the journal and other times it was therapy and I was so mad about something or somebody did something or said something that bothered me you know I just wanted to get it out but I mean I wrote about everything even about writing and stuff and like my major and you know where I want to go in my writing and I just wrote about a lot of things

Dorothy, March 27, 2008

J: Would you describe your experience with journals in my course?

E: I mean, I liked doing them, but I always wanted to start a journal so it was kind of the push I needed to actually get going because before it was always I had so many other things to do this was something I actually had to do so it got me to start it

I used it to write about a lot of different things stuff in the course, other stuff I was doing, and I used it like you had said when you do research to read something and write about it; I did that a little bit so just a little bit of everything just like academic stuff or personal stuff it was sort of a mix

J: A lot of different things?

E: yeah

J: in terms of the context of it being a composition course, do you think it was an effective thing to do?

E: I think it helped, I mean, but I wrote too about some of the readings we had done and I would write about it that kind of helped me as far as the analyzing something so I mean I don't know how many people used it like that but

J: Well how did it help?

E: I would just sort of write down different thoughts about it instead of just reading it and waiting to class and trying to think oh this is what I thought of this part or this is what this meant I sort of wrote down how I felt about it

J: so you to some degree used the journal to help you understand the readings we were doing?

E: yeah

J: I'm not sure if this is a good question or not, but I was interested in when you look back on it how do you feel about it?

E: you mean just writing in it?

J: mmmhmmm

E: I liked it I'm glad we did it but I mean I've done other classes where we did a journal too but it was more of you'd write it and then you'd turn it in it would be graded and everything would be read so this was a little more liberating in that I could write whatever I wanted and it didn't have to be grammatically perfect or anything all that important you just sort of write whatever you wanted to

J: How did you feel about it at the time?

E: I liked it. I know a lot of people were complaining I don't want to get up at nine o'clock and come in and write. If you don't want to do that then don't take a comp. course at nine in the morning I don't know what they think they are gonna do

J: so you heard that from other students?

E: yeah, but like I said at nine o'clock in the morning if you don't want to write don't take a composition course it's sort of pointless to show up and think you're not gonna write anything

J: that is kind of a weird complaint, you know, taking comp.

E: yeah I don't know who it was that said it

J: I don't want to know who you know, I never hear those kinds of things

E: it was early so you weren't in there yet I think someone asked what did we do Friday and they said we just did the journal and he said oh I hate getting up and just coming and writing in a journal that would be like taking a math class and saying I hate to show up

and learn anything it is sort of you know . . .

J: So this might be a little overlap but did it help you?

E: yeah

J: in the course it helped?

E: mmmhmmmm and also writing a little bit more is sort of like you'd said about writing and getting your own style or your own voice, I thought it helped me with that

J: I guess I'm still trying to probe that one a little more because if it helped you improve your style, your style and voice, how?

E: well before everything I wrote like as far as research papers I tried to make it academic sounding and so formal and writing in the journal a little bit, I can't really explain how but I kind of loosened up a little and not everything had to sound like it came out of some scholarly journal somewhere it was just sort of my writing

J: and did that translate into the papers that you wrote?

E: yeah, especially the last paper I wrote. I think it would have been a lot more, I don't know what word to use, I guess rigid or structured I would have tried to write it the way I write a Shakespeare paper or something

J: and that was a good thing to you?

E: yeah because then to me my paper was more unique, like, I could tell my writing from someone else's it wasn't just a kind of faceless paper

J: yeah, I agree. Your papers always stuck out in a good way

E: I try

J: yeah, okay then this is asking you to take this in a little bit more specific place, um, specifically as you can, what did you learn from writing in the journal?

E: I hate to keep going back to the same thing, but not everything I write has to be absolutely perfect and structured and sometimes it helps because the thoughts can be more important than the actual words, like it was important for me to get my feelings out or ideas than making everything sound completely coherent and no one else was reading it but me anyway so its not like someone had to understand it but I think that helped as far as you kind of get more out than just setting a time to like um like an idea on something instead of spending an hour trying to get it to sound right I could just kind of ramble and get everything out before I forget it to me stuff like that helps. Or just listing things so I mean that helped with a lot of stuff or if I had an idea for something it was a place to kind of try things out I guess or different styles of writing

J: well how do you know, how do you know that's what you learned?

E: I don't know, um, I don't know how I know that's what I learned it's just like I said with my papers the last couple I've written now I've not worried so much about making them sound perfect I just try to put my own spin on everything I think that like I don't really know how to explain it um or like I'd just done a Shakepeare paper last semester and I actually won the Cal Grimes Award for it, and um, I think if I would have tried to write it the way I would have writing it say my freshman year it would have come out different because this I think has a lot more character to it cause I so afraid of taking risks with how I wrote it and what I put in it and it has a little more kind of

I really don't know how to explain it

J: you're doing a really good job

E: but like, I don't want to say abstract cause I don't know how to explain that but for me it was more important to get the ideas out than actually make it really understandable I

mean apparently it worked but I got a lot of that from writing because I would try different things instead of everything like I said having to sound like it came out of some book somewhere which was actually really boring because I hated writing like that but I thought that was how I was supposed to write in college like everything has to sound like a professor wrote it which I'm glad it doesn't have to

Bobby, October 30, 2008

J: talk about what happened last night . . .

B: oh last night after I got your email I was thinking oh I still have that journal somewhere so I started going through my stuff from last year and I found it my girlfriend was there and we started reading stuff and there was time where I had to pull it away and read it on my own first be sure it didn't say anything bad I tell ya it was really really entertaining to see what was going through my head last year compared to this year you know how things had changed what I had built upon last year that really bothered me things that I was really struggling with but I really read it for about 45 minutes just going over stuff and laughing and you know cuz it was stuff that I wouldn't have remembered unless I wrote it down but I thought it was really cool

J: that was a good experience?

B: yeah it was

J: could you talk about the change involved, I mean what did you see that was different?

B: um like fighting. Last year I fought a lot for some reason I'd never fought in high school but when I got to college in ended up getting into not a lot of fights with a lot of people I get along with most everybody but my like with my roommates we'd get in fist fights straight up fist fights and when I'd write it down in here I wrote about it say aw he I hate my roommate you know he's such a d-bag you know all kinds of bad stuff and there's another time where I had gotten into a bad scuffle with someone who was a lot bigger than me and they actually once the fight was supposedly over and uh we were getting up off the ground he came back and messed my face up pretty good after they



said they were done and I said I was done and uh I wrote about that in here and that was something that I was like wow you know if I could go back to that what would I have done different you know maybe I shouldn't have hit him first you know just little things like that and I look back at how I've matured just in one year you know from living on my own for the first time to living on my own the second time and how I look differently at things even without wrestling looking back at how I like you know it was such a such a hard thing to do going in and getting my butt kicked every day and you know running so much I hated it almost I'd feel good about it after it was done but I hated it I really didn't like it and then this year now that I just have a completely different outlook on practice and a completely different outlook on the way um my workout habits and just little stuff like that

J: sounds like you're seeing changes in your maturity level

B: yeah definitely definitely actually one of my best friends passed away this summer he was in a car wreck and uh actually that kinda makes you stop and uh kinda reevaluate what's important in your life and uh you know sometimes I think that if I kept going the way things were going I wouldn't be around to see something that would be very important to me like actually the one part in here I uh wrote about what I'd like to see what I'd like to live for or what I'd like to live long enough to see and I'm looking for it [shuffles through the journal in front of him] it's uh it just said uh it was just talking about I want to live long enough to see my grandkids and I talked about a few things that like my grandparents had done for me and you know like slipping me twenty dollar bills or giving me candy just stupid stuff like that but I talked about you know if I let my life keep going the way it was that there wasn't a high possibility that I was gonna make it

that long but that's not something you think about when you're young you know you

Brian, October 30, 2008

J: Describe your experience with journal writing in my course.

Brian: all right coming into freshman year college composition I figured it would be a little tougher, harder, um I was used to normal English classes where you'd be given a paper told what its supposed to be on and like all this stuff and then you have to meet the guidelines and whatnot but with your class it was a lot different (giggle) like I liked your class so much more because its like I was given the freedom of my papers to do what I want yeah you did some grammatical stuff but you didn't really focus on that you just focused on writing as like a whole and at first it took me off guard cause like my first paper because I didn't know what to do I had such freedom and it was really weird because like before I'd be like okay I'm given this topic I can write what I want it took me a while to actually come up with ideas come up with ideas on my own and just what to write on and it was really nice for a change to do that and like that goes along with the journal too like this is a journal I wrote it my senior year of experiences and stuff and it helped me looking back now just to remember read through it and I thought that was a really cool idea cause like my senior year was a blast we did so many different things and like I mean yeah I have memories but I don't have it written down which I mean I still remember the good parts but there's some parts that are a little hazy and stuff so I mean that is a good tool for that and I like the idea of it so I kept that in mind when I was writing towards it and like you said no body's gonna read it you said yourself you're not gonna read it except for this you said you might be doing research later but its completely optional so like that took so much pressure my first couple of journal entries were kinda I still wasn't sure what you meant like I was still like okay how's he gonna grade it then so

I kinda kept it structured and eventually I realized that you weren't going to read it so it was just nice just writing what's on my mind getting what's out there it was really nice to get all that stuff out there because I'd never done it like that before cuz like a lot of teachers too like in high school like not a whole lot of em did journals but when they did they're like okay you're given this topic write about this and then they'd take it a read it like you can't some of the stuff you can't add very personally because like you don't want someone reading it and just like judging you because sometimes that happens but other than that like I really enjoyed your class and what why I took you again the second semester because it was really nice it was definitely a change of pace like I had no expectations of that at all cuz like I originally thought okay its just gonna be another English class I gotta get through but whenever I took your class I actually got good grades on the papers because I was having fun with writing and like normally I hated English but your class was nice because it was relaxing I did what I wanted and like I got rewarded for it so I liked it

J: A couple of things really struck me in what you were saying so first of all I'm going to repeat my interpretation of what you said, um so you were expecting more of the quote unquote typical English class

B: Yeah

J: the grammar,

B: structure and grammar, yeah that was what I was really expecting

J: and that's not what happened, in your mind?

B: no, I mean there was some structure, obviously there has to be some structure to a paper but like I could do as many topics as I wanted as many paragraphs you didn't limit

Rick, October 30, 2008

J: Let's talk about your experience with journal writing in the course.

R: yeah, um, I came in being, I was an average writer but I knew there was always some room for improvement so I was definitely looking forward to coming to college to be a better writer and then with the journal aspect I think journalizing and writing kinda go hand in hand so I thought that was a good thing just practice it every day so you get better at it every day and just the fact that coming to class every day and knowing that we were going to write in our journals was good for me because I was actually doing writing so and then it would also let me clear my mind a little bit just go out there get away from people and just write about whatever it is that might be that day what's on my mind you know things like that and I just thought it was a good experience for two semesters I really enjoyed it.

J: what was bad about it?

R: I really didn't find anything bad about it I mean I definitely thought uh twenty minutes was enough time and the first day of every class or the first twenty minutes of every class that's what we would be doing so I really didn't see any negatives of it at all.

J: well, come on, I don't want to be a smartass, but you're the perfect student and you just loved every minute of it? There's gotta be something wrong.

R: I mean, I did write about some stuff that kinda pissed me off or whatever like that so like looking back on it like maybe that would be a negative thing like it would come back into my head when I would look back over the stuff I wrote about

J: oh really?

R: yeah

J: I haven't heard that before

R: yeah

J: so, heh, like what?

R: like uh, I had a girlfriend the first semester of school and we would always fight and then like I would look back at the stuff that I like wrote and stuff and I don't know if I'd feel bad but it just like kinda irked me and she actually came up to visit and she saw it and she read it

J: ooooo

R: so yeah, it was kinda a bad thing but like it wasn't too bad, it was just kinda weird, you know?

J: talk about that, okay, talk about that experience for me

R: uh, we'd fight a lot and she didn't trust me and stuff and uh, I don't know, I didn't really like sleep well at night, so I would always kinda blame it on her because I would always be thinking about her and stuff and then I just kinda took my frustrations out in writing and stuff and uh I don't know I kinda blamed everything on her, so to speak, because she was in high school so just not being around her and stuff was kinda weird and it wasn't it wasn't that hard but she made it seem like it was impossible to like stay together and stuff so just looking back on everything it was kinda kinda irked me a little bit like I said

J: are you still with her?

R: nah

Betty, November 5, 2008

B: My journal, it was an interesting time in my life so

J: well start talking about that

B: well my father-in-law passed away right before that semester he died in October so there's a lot of stuff in here about that because we were the ones who had to deal with most of the situations that came up from his death even though my husband is one of four kids so we were dealing with that and I was pregnant and there's a lot of stress relief in this [laughs] that's what I used it for I mean especially like in the mornings whenever I woke up and was getting my son ready for school and dealing with all of that other stuff like there's a lot of stuff in my journal about all that it was a stressful time in my life not that it's any easier now but

J: you know when there's siblings and something like that happens it always seems like one of them

B: yeah

J: gets to be default you know

B: he's been like that he's the most responsible one he's the only responsible one out of all of them anyways so we knew that was gonna happen but we were dealing with a lot of stuff then and being pregnant I think added to it so that's what probably most of my journal is about. Last semester was stressful too in school so I know that there's a lot of that in there too [laughs]

J: okay, do you, I mean

B: do you want to look through it real quick?

J: no I don't.





Anne, November 6, 2008

J: let's start with like um what would you like to say, how would you like to start this talk?

A: well like, the journals were great for my first semester because it was such a life change, like if I lived on campus even though I live so close but it was nice because it was something to write about like you could use the journal to help you get through the transition it was big transition moving from like home to school with people you didn't know. I was in a whole new dorm, didn't know anyone in my dorm, and that was just nice to have something to write down like what was going on in my life and being able to like sort out my thoughts kinda, it was like comforting kinda

J: . . . .well keep going

A: I was trying to think. . like whenever I would get stressed out like you always had us I made a little list like my weekly plan I would say like two journal writings because you said how many we should have so I made sure that I always did at least two a week and it was funny cuz about twice a week I'd get really stressed out so I'd just sit there and write down everything that you know happened or what was going on or how busy I was and

J: what was the effect of it, or writing it down?

A: it was comforting, like you thought that really, sometimes when you're stressed you just want to say something, but if you say you don't don't want to yell at somebody and it's nice to just have somewhere to write it down so you don't have to be mean to anyone you just get it out and not have to hurt anyone's feelings

J: yeah, who's feelings would be hurt?

A: my roommate, and you knew her, we always came to class together and I never knew

her before class but she's very sensitive so I didn't want to hurt her feelings

J: she was sensitive?

A: she was very sensitive

J: it's funny, she didn't come off like that to me

A: she was different in the classroom I have to admit like

J: did you guys get along?

A: the first semester yes, the second semester we have issues. Her boyfriend moved into our room, so

J: where?

A: in the dorm, but he lived right down the hall from us but he just always stayed until maybe three in the morning and would leave

J: so it was coed dorms

A: yeah, the hallways were coed, like, one hallway was all girls and the other two would be all boys. No one supervised, no one cared they a role as long as the roommate agreed, but I wasn't going to say anything you know

J: well how did you feel about that?

A: it was all right. At first I didn't mind, but then he kinda like started bringing his stuff and kinda like invade my space then like I didn't want to yell at her or anything so I did write about it actually in my journal a lot, I wrote about that so

J: no kidding, and did that make you, I mean

A: it helped me branch out though, because I left my room and I made all sorts of friends which was great because now I live with one of the friends I made, so

J: what's she doing now? Is she still here?

A: yes, and she actually comes up, we made amends, we're friends now but it's just that she's a real quiet girl so she doesn't really have a lot of, like she'll come up and talk to me but I guess she doesn't have a lot of like close friends. Her boyfriend is her best friend so

J: we don't need to focus on her too much

A: no I feel bad

J: and in fact I'll delete her name in the transcript but um, if it's related to you and your life it's fair game and we want to understand sort of how, you know, like um, oh goodness, interviewing is very difficult, you see my challenge is that I'm trying not to put things in a way that you might not otherwise, like if I say something one way, then you try to make your words fit mine, and that's a problem, um, so I really need to like um sort of respond to your words rather than you respond to mine, so let's go back, let's step back to the trials and tribulations of being in college for the first time, and you said that you are writing in your journal about those things, okay,

A: mmhmm

J: so let's think about that for a minute. I want you to maybe scan your memories for a minute, and does one particular or two particular, or any particular journal entry stand out to you? Does anything stand out in your memories?

Tony, November 6, 2008

J: What would you like to begin with here? You know what the topic is, have you been thinking about it?

T: yeah, I was thinking about it when I first got here and I waited outside in my vehicle a little bit, um, I think that the course I had with you and the incorporation of journal writing I think it was more comfortable as a classroom setting for a student um it wasn't you're the dictator and I'm the student and I have to sit there and listen and do what you say you know I liked the interaction that we had in the classroom and I think the journals gave me um a way to express my feelings about things that were going on in my life at that time whether it was school related or personal related um and um I think I could have made better use of the journal, I don't think, I did it like once or twice a week um and I think I could have used it more and I think it could have helped me more with some personal things that were going on at that time but I didn't and I'm kinda sorry that I didn't because I think it would have helped me try to figure things out instead of just letting it pile up like it did and come to a peak

J: hmm, okay, let's explore this, I'm thinking about the potential that you saw the things that it could have possibly done for you versus how you actually used them. Could you talk about that?

T: I used it to write about what was going on in school, how my grades were, how my exams were, if I was prepared or not um should I have been better prepared um could I have done something differently, after the exam that is or whatnot, could I have done something differently to change my grade um could have approached it differently um things in my personal life were pretty hectic just with everything going on between work

and school and I was coaching a swim team and that was an extreme amount of stress in itself um with having to go out of town and miss class and I think if I would have expressed myself more regarding that I think I would have been better able to handle it than what I did um I think if I would have discussed the problems I was having with the swim team um and it was interesting to read, even after a week, to read what I wrote, and it helped me think you know, how I could work through the problem, and I did, after the fact, you know, I would write it and then when I would write my new entry the following week I would go back and read the previous entry and actually do a little bit more discussion on the new week's entry from the previous week to see if maybe I could find maybe a way to fix something or to find a solution

J: mmhmm, so how were you not using them like you think you should have?

T: I think if would have done it more, done journal entries more often, I think it could have helped me a lot more than what it did um I don't think, I think if I would have done it on a daily basis um I think I would have been able to make little steps toward the solution versus having to make one huge decision and it was a lot harder to do that. I think it would have been easier to do a day by day entry and um see the steps that I was taking towards that solution of a problem I was having and then I think it would have been easier to make a decision because I could look and see the progress that I made through that problem and what the better solution was versus looking at it a week ago and looking at it today after it obviously progressed through the week either has gotten worse or gotten better, I don't know, because it's been a week. I think if I would have done it day by day and could have seen the progress and read the progress and thought about it I think it would have made, I could have made a better decision

Janet, November 7, 2008

J: Let's just start there, why not?

Janet: It's just everything is so personal. I keep things in a lot, like I don't really talk about my feelings too much so for me to write it down in a journal was a lot of help, especially in the first year of college I think, especially living away from home and having a roommate and having to deal with like more stress and everything different, the environment, the people, you know, I think it really helped a lot for me to get my feelings out through the journal because it was like I was talking to someone but they weren't talking back to me as if I was saying something wrong or if I made a mistake, you know, I think that definitely helped a lot.

J: I want to clarify one thing. Me asking about this and probing for it and pressing the issue, do not take that to mean that I'm trying to talk you out of it. You've already made your decision, your decision was no, so it's off the table now. Now I just want to understand. So, I mean, you've got a lot of personal thoughts in there, but for the purposes of doing scholarly research with it, and even how this relates to me, you know, can you talk about that, I mean, why not? Why can't I see what's in there?

Janet: because it is mine. I'm just, I guess I'm selfish in that aspect. I do want to help you, but it's like, I don't want my feelings out. If I can't talk to someone else I don't want anyone else to know. I want it just to be my, it is my information

J: mmhmm. Can you keep talking, I mean, what does it mean for that stuff to be yours? It's mine, you know. Think about it in terms of your personality. I think this is speaking to who you are.

Janet: mmhmm. Um, I'm shy and backward usually. Like I tell my mom stuff that I

wouldn't tell a friend because I don't trust people too much I guess you could say. I trust my mom and I'll tell her stuff, but to a friend, even if I know their my best friend, I wouldn't tell them some things because I don't know how they would react or if they would go tell someone else. I think it's more of a privacy issue, like I like my privacy. I don't like everyone to know everything about me.

J: would you let your mom read it?

Janet: no

J: so we're talking

Janet: so I mean even it's just I don't tell my mom everything but stuff that I have a problem with I will tell her it's just I don't think I'd let anyone read it honestly I look back on it and the things that I said it kind of like shocks me even sometimes just to think back on things that I've done or went through. I actually did look at this before I came here a couple of days ago and it was like oh wow, the things that I've said or about relationships and everything like that

J: well, I want to, I want you to talk about those things um you know keep the things that you don't want to reveal, or that you find too sensitive to yourself, but can you give me some concrete things that I can at least a taste of what I'm not seeing, you know, concretely, what is in there that is shocking?

Janet: um, like, going out an partying. Like I wouldn't tell my mom that, and the things I do sometimes, I don't think I'd want my friends to know either, you know, or like, my relationship with my boyfriend, my ex-boyfriend, and how I thought, I wrote things like oh, he's amazing and everything like that, but you find out that it's completely different in the end, like that's what I looked back on and it was crazy to find that I thought so

highly of someone yet they disappoint you, so

J: you wrote about that stuff in there?

Janet: [nods]

J: I remember, was it an email that you were going to Johnstown to see your boyfriend, is that the ex-boyfriend now? When did that happen?

Janet: [begins to cry]

J: I don't want to make you upset

Janet: I know, I'm sorry, I'm emotional, like a month ago

J: I'm sorry Janet

Janet: it's okay

J: okay I understand that, I do, I've loved and lost, um, was it an emotional thing to reread some of those?

Janet: it definitely was, just to see how much it mattered

J: can I go get you a tissue?

Janet: I'm okay. I'm all right. Sorry

J: don't apologize, um, I mean this is the kind of thing that is going to help me in my research a lot, but I want you to be comfortable at the same time. Can I get you anything?

Janet: No I'm good.

J: um, well, how do I ask? Um, could you just do the best you can and describe those feelings?

Janet: like I don't know if I loved him, but I felt like I did, you know, I think that's the closest I've ever gotten to someone, letting my emotions get to it an everything you



know, and that's hard for me to do, so to let him know that it affected me that much, it hurts a lot, so

J: and, so when you reread those entries a couple of days ago, was it a couple of days ago?

Janet: yeah

J: did it bring that stuff to the surface?

Janet: yeah, it was ridiculous. It made me cry like I was really upset about it.

J: I can't assume anything so I have to ask you, was, were you describing some happy times?

Janet: oh yeah, mostly happy, like, I haven't really written in my journal since the end of school last year, so going back to it really, it was a big deal I think to see what I wrote about it because that was in the beginning then, it was like February when we got together, so it was I mean, it's been close to a year now right, so

J: almost a year. So that happened when you were taking this class

Janet: yeah, and I was writing about like mostly that during the end, and um, me and my roommate were not getting along at all because of it, I think, because I was spending more time with him and not my friends anymore which was a big deal because it was like distance between us then so I would always go out with my boyfriend and not be in the room, so I wrote about that a lot too and how that affected how happy I was there, you know

J: mmhmm, wow. So you were writing in your journal about this romance? You already said that it felt like love to you, and that's probably what it is. If it feels like it, that's what it is. Talk about . . . well, let's do this. Think for a minute, look at your memories,

um, of that semester, coming into the classroom and it is a journal writing day, you go out for twenty minutes to write, you know, does any particular entry that you wrote, any particular day that we wrote, if you search your memory, can you think of a couple? Can you think of any particular time?

Janet: Just about anything?

J: Yeah, anything.

Janet: I know one entry my aunt passed away and it was before college started, I think it was in July, it was right after my graduation party, like she made sure she was at my graduation party, and like the next week she died [crying, distress] and all I could think was you know, she just wanted to be there for that and she held on and the thing was I wasn't that close to her, I didn't see her all the time, but she loved me enough to hold on for that one day you know

J: yeah. You remember writing that?

Cindy, November 12, 2008

J: Okay, you're a student in my class, let's fast forward, you know, um, the teacher says we're going to do this activity and we're going to write in our journals every other day or so for twenty minutes, take a hike, go write, what's going on?

C: um, at first like I was just like, I thought it might be like dumb or something, but actually liked writing in it, it felt good to like get that out, and write it down, and then, I guess you don't really cry when you're writing it down, so maybe if I wrote it down it would be all right

J: what is "that"

C: hmm?

J: get "that" out

C: um, just like things that are bothering me, like I definitely wrote about my boyfriend a lot in that journal because he's a pain in the butt [laughs]

J: [laughs] they tend to be that way, don't they? Do you want to talk about that some?

C: like the boyfriend?

J: yeah

C: well, we're not dating now, we dated for two and a half years though um he's like a big time basketball player God's gift to Earth, I just couldn't take it anymore, um, I don't know I guess he just wasn't like mature enough for what I was hoping for I guess

J: and you were writing about, what?

C: when he would make me mad and why, and I would just get it out, like things I would like to say to him, I wrote it down

J: the things you would like to say to him but didn't, or

C: yeah like, instead of just yelling at him for like an hour, I just got it out and wrote like what I was thinking, like what was bad. And I wrote about school a lot, being stressed about it

J: what's the effect of writing about things that you instead of yelling at him for an hour you know what's the effect of writing those things in the journal?

C: um, it made me feel a lot better, just getting it out, it took a lot off my chest, and then I felt like, I don't need to yell at him because I just thought it out, then I didn't get yelled back, it's just in the journal, it doesn't judge you or anything

J: so it would help you get things off your chest. Did you say it would help you feel better?

C: yeah you feel better after, like if you're having a bad day and like you write about it because for a while after that I like wrote in it when we didn't have to like a lot but I actually liked doing it. I didn't think I would at first.

J: wow, there's a lot there. You see what I mean, I can't possibly pull all of this apart in one sitting

C: yeah

J: wow, well, okay, let's see, at first you didn't think you would like it or you thought, or you even said you thought it was dumb, okay, what's going on there, and what happens over time that made you change your mind?

C: um, because at first I was like I didn't know what I would write about like what am I going to sit down and just randomly write about, but and then once I did and once I started it was like it just all like kind of came out, like random stuff I was gonna do later like plans for the like the next day, or what I had to do, or my work I had to do and stuff,

so once you get it out then like, it like organized you in a way, like if you planned your day, you can see that you're not as overwhelmed as you thought you were so like the more and more I wrote in it I liked it more and more

J: so gradually you went from thinking it was dumb to actually liking it, to doing it more than you had to

C: yeah

J: so there was like a progression there?

C: yeah

J: wow. Okay, so in the process of you sort of gradually I mean you're figuring out things to write about? At first you didn't know what to do?

C: yeah, at first, at the beginning of class, I didn't know what I would put in it or what I would write about, if I would even have anything to say, but then, just like start on a topic like, if you're having a bad day you just write about it, then that leads me to maybe something you're going to do tomorrow, just kind of like a snowball effect, and I actually had more to say than I thought, but I tend to ramble sometimes, so [laughs]

Melissa, November 13, 2008

J: Do you have any ideas about that?

M: Maybe girls write more personal stuff, I don't know, maybe they kind of vent more, that they don't want out. I don't see why it would be a problem though because if I'm venting about something it's not like it's about you and I'm giving it to you like I don't really understand.

J: like, for example, I was thinking you know how there's kind of a double standard about males and females in lots of different ways but especially like with regard to sexuality, and I was thinking that if one of my former students who was female was writing about sexuality in her journal about her boyfriend

M: right

J: whatever, then she would be reluctant to give that to a male researcher because of that double standard, if a female has sex she's a slut if a males does he's a stud, all these theories

M: yeah I definitely understand where that one's coming from, I just, I'm not worried about it

J: I'm glad, and I hope I'm not talking you out of it [laughter]

M: definitely not

..... [explaining the mailing procedure . . . was not useful]

J: Tell me about your experience then

M: I never liked writing journals up until your class because like in high school it was always like you'd walk in the room and there'd be a prompt on the board and you knew

that you had to write two pages in your journal on this topic and the teacher was going to read it and grade it for whatever and then like when we walked into your class it was so like just write, you know, just write whatever you want really, whatever you want. It was a stress reliever for me at least, I could just sit there and just write and you'll be able to tell when you see my journals like I start out with this neat handwriting and then I get into it and I'm like scribbling by the end of it, which I apologize for [laughter]

J: why?

M: I couldn't write things quick enough almost, like I just tried to get everything out it was so like that was one of the toughest things about writing them, having to stop somewhere and um I enjoyed it I remember one time in class we wrote, wrote out what you had to do for the day, and it used to seem like I had so much to do and then when I wrote it down it was like, oh I can handle that, I just got everything out and then I could look at it in front of me, and be like, oh, that's not quite so bad, so I kind of used it like a schedule book, sort of, and I've looked back at it and I can't remember half the stuff if I wouldn't have written it down and I'm so glad that I did. I kept a separate one this summer for my I worked at the playground, kids are hilarious, and now that I look back at it it's so funny, like, I'm so glad that I wrote this stuff down because I used to tell stories. I worked there a year before and now I can look back and really see like day-to-day what went on

Ellen, November 13, 2008

J: Let's start there. In your mind right now you think one journal is going to be okay to give me, but another one probably not. What's going on there?

E: um, I don't know, I think the second one I got like more into detail because the first one it was like brand new to me and I didn't really go into, I went into detail but it wasn't like the deepest I think and the second journal I actually like went there and that's like every journal entry I did was pretty like emotional and deep so I don't know I don't know if I want people to read that just because of that

J: why?

E: um, I don't know it's kind of like, not a secret, but like it, you can interpret it as a secret because I don't want other people to know but they kinda already know it, it's just different, like they can see my feelings from just looking at me, but they don't how I really feel because I wrote it down I don't know

J: are you comfortable right now?

E: yeah

J: can I do anything to make you more comfortable?

E: no, I just get like nervous talking sometimes I don't know why, but I'm fine

J: it's not me, is it?

E: oh no no

J: is it me with regard to the second journal?

E: oh no, it's just um like it was stuff with my dad, stuff with my mom, you know, just like personal stuff kind of like, I don't know, sorry, I don't want to do this but [choking up]



J: it's okay it's okay

E: yeah

J: it's okay. I don't mind, um, can I ask you where that's coming from?

E: what, the crying? Um I think it's my dad. He's been overseas and I used to write about that so I don't know like it makes me sad to know that he's overseas so you know but

J: can I get you a tissue?

E: no, it's okay, it's fine

J: you just tell me what you need, okay?

E: okay um, I'm sorry

J: don't be sorry, when you're writing about personal things like this and you have your emotions wrapped up in them, I understand that

E: yeah

J: um, where is he?

E: um, he is in Iraq right now

J: I remember you telling me that in class now. Is he okay?

E: yeah, he's okay, I think it's like the media, like, I remember writing a paper about it. They make it worse than it really is and he just tells me like flat out how it is and it's like getting worse over there, so it just scares me so I don't know

J: so you love your dad a great deal, obviously

E: yeah, and I'm the only girl in the family, so we've had a really like close connection

J: do you have other siblings?

E: yeah, an older brother

J: just you and him?

E: yeah

J: you're the youngest? A girl. Daddy's girl.

E: yeah

J: is that true?

E: yeah, like my brother was a mommy's boy, and so I like kind of went to my dad and it's always been that way. I mean, it's not like I don't love my mom, but it's just, it's that connection you have with a girl, I mean because you understand with your little girl

J: yeah, I do. I hope that she's a daddy's girl

E: yeah, and you know, I just would hate to like lose him

J: so that was happening in our second class together, composition two, did he leave during that time?

E: yeah, he left in February

J: so class was starting

E: yeah

J: I do remember this coming up in class at some point, or even maybe talking with you, and we had a pretty close relationship for teacher/student at least I think

E: I think so

J: and I definitely took an interest in you. What I'm not really putting together though, and I'm not pressing the point to make you upset, okay

E: yeah

J: but why, that can't be the reason why you won't give them to me, I mean, why would I care about your relationship with your dad, why would that be

E: no no, I just think it's like personal, my feelings, and I don't know if I've ever like showed anyone those feelings before so like, I mean maybe, if I read over them, and I want to give them over, I will but I don't know, I just think like some stuff is definitely like really personal so I don't know

J: with regard to your dad?

E: that, and some like other stuff, um, I don't know. It's like some stuff, I know I had like problems with my best friend and I wrote it down, and I probably said stuff that I shouldn't have said, but like I wrote it down, and I didn't tell her that, so it's okay, but I don't know, I just think my second one is like really personal, instead of my first one, like my first one, it gets personal, but I don't think it goes in depth, like I said before

J: so, realize I'm not talking about this to pressure you to give it to me, okay, not doing that, but I want to understand. It's very very important for me to understand your experience sitting in the classroom and doing this project

E: okay

J: um so just in a general sense we've talked about that in that journal you're writing about your dad going away, and that's obviously a life-changing event, and now you're having trouble with your, did you say your best friend?

E: yeah, I did at the time, and like I just wrote stuff down, like what I wanted to say to her but I never said to her and um, just like get it off my chest, kind of and I mean, we're good now, we're like best friends again, but I think at that time I just like wrote it down to tell her stuff that I wanted to tell her but I never got the nerve to tell her

J: can you give me an example?

E: well, I know this is kind of mean to say, but I guess when she has a boyfriend or

whatever she gets to like be a service-level kind of girl. She only cares about herself, and kind of destroys everybody else around her, and I wanted to tell her that so bad, but I didn't know how she would handle it, so I definitely wrote that down

Julie, November 13, 2008

J: What would you like to say about what we did?

Ju: um, like about like the journals?

J: well, like I always liked doing the journals like especially last semester was like hard I had like a lot of required classes, so it gave me a chance to like open up all the time and like plus like um my like ex-boyfriend, boyfriend, whatever, at the time like was going through like a like rough time with like drugs and stuff so it gave me like it put a lot of like stuff on me so like I like really like opened up about it in like the journal like he was always like that class was so early and like I don't know like I always like talked about what happened like the night before so I would stay up like late with him like fighting with him about it and everything and then like stuff happened like with that class my computer science class so like it was like last semester was like really hard so I mean like I always like talked to people about how much I liked it like my family how like I would like recommend it because it really did like take a lot of weight off my shoulders the whole time, like I don't know, I don't understand some people like I thought it was like stupid at first I was like oh great like almost like busy work to do but like I was happy doing it. I didn't mind it at all I thought it really helped me a lot.

J: wow, a lot of stuff there

Ju: yeah, there was a lot

J: can we break some of it down?

Ju: sure

J: um, it's hard to hear it all and keep track um so I guess we'll start with the first place there that you, that was last spring, right?

Ju: mmhmm

J: composition 2

Ju: mmhmm

J: let's just start at the beginning. At the beginning you thought it was busywork

Ju: yeah like, I was like oh great like just more things I need to like do and I don't know I just thought it was stupid like writing like a journal because I never did like journals and like middle school where like you know you just had like different, you had a bunch of topics and we had to like write about like in like sixth grade so that was like I hated that, but I mean like I don't know I just, I really didn't want to do it at first and like after like the first couple of times like you made us like do it during class then it really like the first couple of like entries were almost like dumb entries like just about like oh what I did and just to like fill up space I guess but then I really started to like get into it I like yeah I like I don't know

J: I know what you mean, so the first few entries were just

Ju: almost like pointless I mean they weren't like pointless but they were just like I have to be out here writing so might as well just write about something

J: so just filling space

Ju: yeah

J: killing time

Ju: mmhmm

J: so what happened?

Ju: I think one night I just had like a bad night and then the next morning I was like wow I have something to write about and then it just like each time I had something to

elaborate on it and kept going and like it came out we had to have like those ten out of class like entries then I like didn't mind being like, like another bad day, so I would write about it so most of the entries were like more bad than good I guess but I don't know it just took a lot off of my shoulders writing it down

William, November 13, 2008

J: Okay, most people want it back, why don't you?

W: I don't know, I don't use it for anything so I don't think there's anything embarrassing in it, so if it helps you out, good for you

J: I mean, what I'm asking, does the content in there just have that little meaning to you?

W: no, but I'm not like ashamed of what I wrote, not like embarrassing, what I put in there is honest

J: yeah

W: so

J: but you don't want to read it again, ever, you know?

W: I don't even know why I kept it really, I really don't know why I kept it but I did, I guess that's a good thing, I don't know, I might read it again someday if it caught my eye and I was bored I might read it I guess but

J: you're not bothered just to let it go forever?

W: no

J: that doesn't bother you?

W: mmm-mmm

J: can you speak to why?

W: [laughs] to me it was just an assignment almost like I guess

J: that's what we want to talk about today, is what it meant to you, what this project meant to you

W: basically I just think of it as something you gotta do for class and most of the time I was thinking of something that, like, I mean I'm honest, but like sometimes it's like I just



gotta put something down, like it's I don't know, it has meaning to it, definitely, but at the same time I feel that it's just an assignment so it's like throwing away math homework or something I guess

J: I understand. So how did you feel about the assignment?

W: well, I really don't care for journaling I guess I guess when I think of it, it's like work, I don't like to do it, so, I mean, I didn't mind it, it wasn't terrible but

J: you're expressing ambivalence, I don't care one way or the other

W: yeah, like I wouldn't do it, I don't journal in my free time, I only did it because I had to do it

J: right, so what did you typically do with it in class, you know, you come to class, it's a journal day, take twenty minutes and come back, what did you do?

W: um, I'd just write about like what my plans would be, maybe what I was thinking, I think a lot of it I wrote about what I was feeling or what I was going through at the time, some of it was I guess it was a stress reliever, kind of, that's how I used it, like writing down my thoughts, this was making me angry, or something like that

J: what were your stresses?

W: stresses

J: yeah, at the time

W: writing papers. Papers always stress me out, so

J: really

W: yeah, there might be some of that in there. I don't really like writing papers, but that's just one stress um what else uh I don't know I think one thing I wrote was about having to take the class because I transferred from another school and I was mad about

that so I think that's probably one of the first ones

J: so you were having to repeat something you already took?

W: yeah, um I was stressed about my first paper that I wrote, about what people believe, and I was kind of stressed that people were going to be I don't know, that was a different topic though, and I didn't know how people were going to take it, so I was kind of stressed about that, but they weren't huge things I guess. There's more stressful things than that.

J: was it all school-centered stresses?

W: uh, like for the most part, if it was stressful it was probably about school but yeah mostly school

J: what are you doing at school? What's your major?

W: I'm in education

J: is it elementary?

W: no secondary. I kind of just started.

J: what field?

W: uh, math

J: okay, you want to be a math teacher?

W: yeah

J: I can see that for some reason. Are you really good at math?

W: I enjoyed it the most in high school, so, if I would teach anything it would definitely be math, when I was at my previous school I flunked calc one and that made me not want to be in math because I didn't want to have anything to do with math after that but now I'm back into it, and that's stressful too [laughs] because I gotta like start from scratch, so

J: what were you doing previous?

W: When I first went to school it was engineering, and I was in that for like a semester, but then I just did general stuff.

J: how old are you?

W: I'm going to be twenty-four in two weeks

J: and what year are you?

W: junior I think

J: so you're a little bit older than some people in composition. Is that just because you transferred and lost some time

W: Yeah, I started in 2003 and I took about two and a half years off. I didn't know what I wanted to do or where I wanted to go so, I'm kind of regretting it now though because I could have been done with school like a year ago

J: well, what could I have done to make the journal something that appealed more to you? That you would have felt more strongly about.

W: see I don't know if you can, like I don't know, it wasn't really, I didn't mind journaling, but like I don't know how you make it enjoyable, I don't know if there's anything you could do because you could write about anything so I'm just not a person who likes to journal I guess

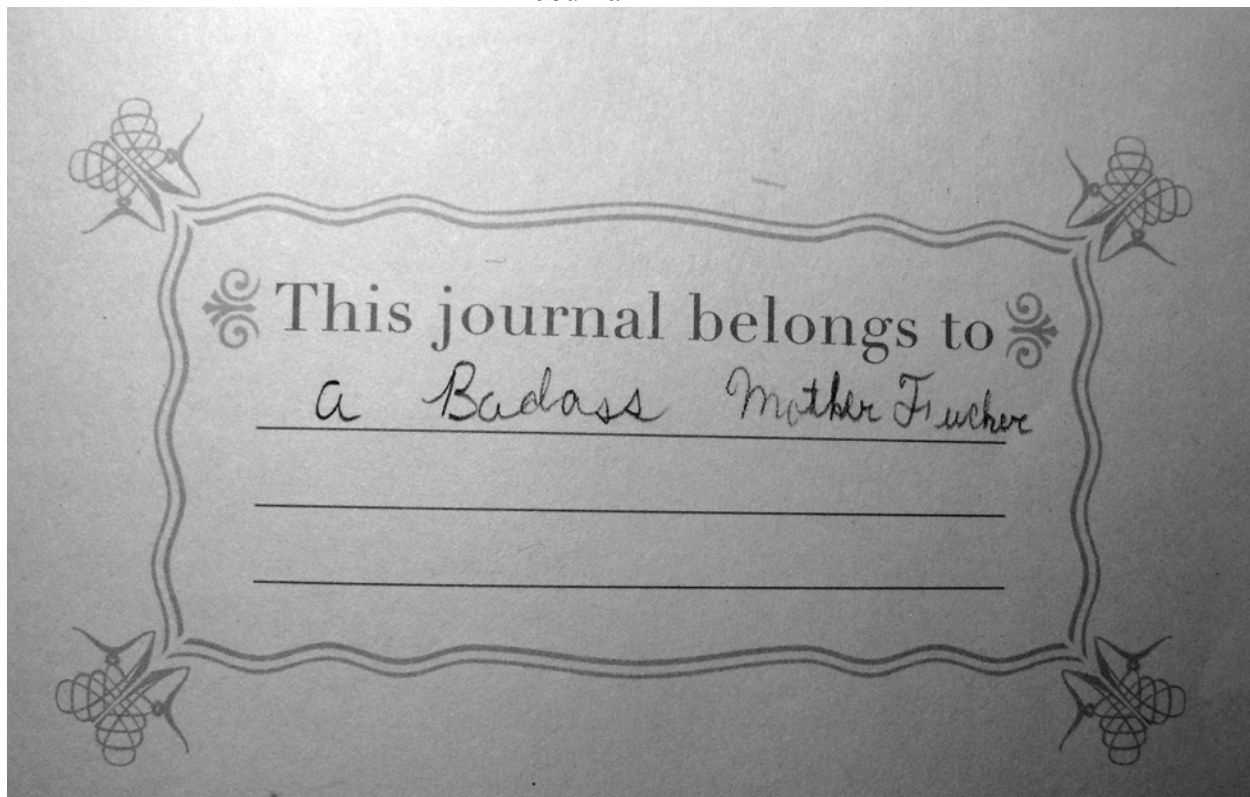
J: well yeah, but see my whole point is to figure out why that is, like what kind of person is it that doesn't like to journal

W: I think a lot of it is that it feels too much like work like reading is I've been reading more, and I don't mind reading as much as I used to but like before I'd never read anything [unless I had to] but I think I didn't like reading before because it seemed like

work a little bit, like school so like to do journaling in your free time is like you're back in school I guess, in a way, not totally, but it has that feel to it, so I don't know

J: did you um, so work bad.

Appendix B: Journal Samples  
Bobby's  
Journal



1/11/08

I've been a while since I've written an entry and turned my last journal in Japan it is probably laughing his ass off while he is reading my paper.

But I have also recently turned into an alcoholic due to my new schedule which allows me to sleep till whenever on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It is hard not to drink especially when not much is going on in your classes and you not going to wrestling practice.

1/16/08

Well that has been going crazy lately, I'm finally getting back in the swing of things with wrestling and as much as it sucks, it feels sort of good to be getting these workouts in again. I feel sore as fuck but its almost a feeling of achievement that I have pushed my body to this extent it feels sort of good. There has also been alot going on at our apartment, with Petros being a toad and some other drama with Philly of course I got his back though I dint want to leave him out to dry. Its sort of funny but really not but I kicked down Petros's door the other night, I have no idea why but I guess I thought it was a good idea at the time. It really wasn't though because he already told on me.

1/23/08

I feel good lately about my dedication to wrestling. I still have a lot of work to do but I plan on really trying to buckle down next week and go balls to the walls and really try hard to do some damage at Edinboro which is the last tournament of the year. I really want to push myself to excel in this tournament. I want to see if the hard work pays off and if it is all worth it in the end. I am also starting to annoy me and make me a bit nervous that I have had hardly any assignments yet or any tests, which is not good because I more than likely will end up getting them all around the same time.



1/25/08.

Last night I was so  
fucking pissed off with  
my roommates the always  
smoke a ton of fucking  
pot and get so fucked up  
that they don't know what  
they're doing. Nothing is  
more aggravating than trying  
to talk to someone who  
can't even keep a straight  
face. I just want to  
put their head through  
a wall. I've fucked  
even lit firecrackers  
in the fucking shower  
last night at 4 AM.  
I am becoming extremely  
frustrated and what I need  
Hopefully things will  
perk up.

## Betty's Journal

Friday Jan 18, 2008

Worry from our ultrasound in December. Baby has spots on kidneys and heart. Both are markers for Down's Syndrome. I had a blood screening + the results were negative for downs. I still worry every day. This is a cruel world + I don't want my child to have to deal w/ even more cruelty. We have another ultrasound in 32 weeks.

Note Baby boy needs a name  
(were having problems w/ that)

Collin	Preston	Bailey
Conner	Dylan	
Carter	Damon	

I'm sick I think maybe a sinus infection. I am so run down. Aedan is sick too. He has an ear infection + something that has to do w/ his nose draining. It's the first time he has had to have a perscription.

I am meeting w/ Dr Ankrum today about applying to upper level. That means 4 more semesters. Say!

Baby boy #2 still has no name. It's driving me crazy. Aedan had a name when we found out he was a boy.

I'm so tired + sick I don't know what to write today.

Amanda didn't ask me to watch Bruce yet so I didn't get to tell her yet that I can't. I'm too sick + have school work to do. I wish she would call more than the night before Mark has told her that so many times. Then she'll be stuck b/c it's the last minute.

The baby is moving right now. He is moving so much now that you can see it when I have a bare belly. Nedan loves to kiss my tummy. He & Mark do it every night. Nedan often just lays his head on my tummy. I think he could feel the baby move yesterday.

I think I hate my Structures of the Real # System most this semester. I hate that today too. It's so hard to do math on a little kid level. Very important class bc I don't remember a lot of simple things. Just don't care for the teacher.

Friday Jan 18, 2008

I have about 45 minutes until I meet with Dr. Ankrum. I have already wasted 45 minutes waiting. Seemed senseless to waddle back to the car & go somewhere. I got my homework done for geography. I feel so old up here. All the kids talk about is partying. I can't believe how quickly that time of your life comes and goes. Not that I ~~even~~ want to go back. This time in my life is awesome. I am where I want to be. I just can't wait till I am done w/ school & can teach.

Wed. Jan 23, 08

Mr. Wester doesn't seem to be in a real great mood. Came in + immediately said "Journals".

I have a doc. appt today. Went to talk about that Downs screening that I had. It came back ok but I wonder if there is still reason to worry about those spots.

I had my oral screening yesterday in Foundations. Lost track of thoughts + went entirely too fast. Hopefully I passed b/c I don't want to take theatre. That's what you have to do if you fail.

I am so ridiculously tired. Aidan gets up at 2 AM every morning + will not go back to sleep unless it's 4:30. Then I can't sleep b/c he is a maniac in his sleep. I cried last night. Being pregnant, going to school + keeping up w/ the house is just too much. When you add Aidan not sleeping right + my lack of sleep, it

sets me over the edge. I can't do it  
Need to talk to Mark.

I have 2 huge tests next week and  
I have to get my paper started for  
this class. This weekend is going to  
suck.

I'm sooo hungry.

I'm sick of worrying about dinner  
too for that matter. Due appt at  
2:15 today. I say Subway. Tomorrow I  
have Math tutoring bc I forgot how  
to divide decimals + change fractions  
to decimals. I remember now so I  
shouldn't be there too long. Crockpot  
meal tomorrow.

5 months pregnant + baby boy is  
still nameless. I hate that. We really  
need to decide.

Fri, Jan. 25, 08

Hedan is 17 months today.  
I didn't want to rant about my in-laws  
in here but I am so upset about it  
that I can think of nothing else. My  
MIL is not very nice. She's had  
big Mark's pension & since who knows  
when and has told Mark she hasn't.  
However, everyone else knew she did.  
What would possess her to lie to  
Marky. Mark who has always done  
everything he could for that woman.  
Mark's stressed himself out paying  
taxes on all the properties + all  
the bills and for what? It's  
crazy. We need to get rid of  
these buildings which aren't ours  
to begin w/ they are her's. We  
are going to go broke. She bitched  
to Bob about giving Marky & to pay  
him back for all those bills WTF.  
Then Mindy told her Mark is  
starting a business w/ Mike so he  
needs &. Negative Mike is working w/

Brian's  
Journal

Aug. 29, 2007 - Wednesday (in class)

Yesterday was one of my better days in a long time. For college it was my best day so far. The day started out with me going to my Chem lab which only took like 45 min. due to the fact that we didn't have anything really to do. Then things got kind of slow for a while so Brian, Phil, Adam and I went hitting for a while. We didn't really know where it was so we wandered for a while but eventually found it. Then after that we were going to go to the pool but it was closed so we just shot basketball for a while. Next Anthony decided to go to Wal Mart so again I went with to get this journal for my English class. I got this and a few other things for other classes the next day. So far I've gone to Wal Mart every day ~~see~~ that I've been here. Later I met up with my friends in Hickory and we went to go play some Frisbee. It was really nice though relaxing not as serious as real Ultimate but still fun. We got into this dual if you will of throwing the Frisbee end to end hoping one of our teammates would catch it. I met this

one girl who hopefully will play ultimate named TD or "Tits" as some people called her. It was awesome cause Dave a.k.a. "Dunk" and I began to pick on Adam and she just joined in and it was great. Adam got mad as he tends to do and it was just really funny. Then I went back showered and again returned to Hickory. I met with friends and we went on Facebook to show Adam the pathetic video that Kelyn and Molly made for us. Adam wasn't tagged in it so we made him make a comment that was really emo but very funny. Then I went for a walk after losing to Lory and Jen in Foosball. It was good temperature. The moon was full and UPJ campus was amazing. Then I went to bed, woke up and am now writing this for english but the points made for why to keep a journal were really good. A few were memory, know who I am for example I don't know my great great grandmother but if she would have kept a journal I would be able to know about her. Another was that my teacher (Jason) wrote journals starting at his senior year and now he is able to reflect and

remember everything we did and I wish now that I ~~have~~ had because I had a really fun senior year and remember a lot but if I kept a journal I would remember more.

Aug. 30, 2007 - Thursday (out of class)

So I think my english teacher had a good idea and I'm gonna try and write in this every day or at least most days. Today wasn't bad I slept in and my roommate spent the night elsewhere. I went to University Scholarship (U.S) which was dumb but whatever it's easy. Then had another Chem class and then went lifting and frisbee. Then as always back to Hickory. That place and the people in it are awesome. We jacked around then Brian and I went to some church thing which was pretty cool. I think it'll be better later but yeah it wasn't bad. Then back to Hickory for Hule. Finally back to Laurel for the night where I'm writing this.

Aug. 31, 2007 - Friday (in class)

So far today hasn't been the greatest. I woke up a little before 6 and couldn't get back to sleep. I layed around for an hour or so and just thought about things. The main thought was whether or not I should go home labor day weekend. I could go home but it's a little scary and Molly



would probably want to hang out. I don't mind that but she needs some time on her own. Mostly everyone up here is going home so I may get bored. However, Anthony and Ginny are staying here so I don't know yet. They may get bored and need something to do so I may stay back but I still don't really know. I may go home for a little and come back or a vacation cause my pap is having a thing Sunday but I kinda want to stay and see what happens here. I do have the Pitt game to go to Saturday so I will be gone for a little which reminds me I have to find out where the bus meets to take us into Pittsburgh, when and possibly how much it costs. I also should see what Lewis is doing with his ticket and if Mike or anyone is going so I can meet up with them. Anyway it seems that I have a busy day so it should be interesting.

(out of class)

Tonight was one of the interesting nights & cool nights I've had. It started really bad and slow. Everyone pretty much went home for Labor day weekend except a few from each hall. Donald and Anthony were pretty much on opposite sides and I felt in the

Sept. 11, 2007 - Tuesday (out of class)

The past couple of days have been interesting. Between now and the last time I wrote I believe Ginny and I have gotten closer most people in Ligonier hate me but all and all I'm not too bad. First the Ligonier drama that seems to follow me. Molly found out about me being interested in Ginny and got upset. She flipped even though we aren't dating anymore. Anyhow she's not talking to me anymore and neither is most of the crew/Ligonier girls. Katelyn wrote me a note thing saying I never deserved Molly and that I mistreated her and now she's gone for good. This angered me and I almost wrote things about her and Kevin which I would have probably regretted. I then found Amy who came to see Adam and took her on a walk. I let her give me the whole anger speech and then told my side. Apparently Molly thought I didn't care about her and I'm still not sure what all went on there. Anyhow Amy understands me and doesn't hate me and hopefully the rest will follow but we'll see. I want Molly and I to still be close friends but I can't make her so we'll see.

As for Ginny we've gotten closer. She still gives some mixed signals but I know she likes me a little more. Sunday she sort of cuddled with me and we hug more and just more flirting and physical contact.

Rachel's  
Journal

Entry 1-In

8-31-07

Today is Friday. Finally!  
I'm glad this week went  
fast. Now I have a 4 day  
weekend coming up!

I'm looking forward to  
going to my next class - Psych  
But then, after that I have  
World Politics. I'm already  
worried about this class  
because I really don't like  
it. Regardless, I hope to do  
ok and atleast get a B.

I like college mainly the  
newly-found feeling of independ-  
ence that has come from  
driving to UPT & back home.  
I know mom misses me,  
and I miss her too. I like  
keeping busy with school

because it occupies my mind to keep from focusing on less imp. things that I tend to worry about.

I was quite disappointed when I found out I did not get the job I applied for. Hey, not everything works out to my liking though - that is life! Sometimes I expect too much from myself, perfectionism. I hope that with maturity, age, and experience, I will slowly begin to realize that all I should expect from myself is to do my best, and that should be enough. This would make life so much easier and more enjoyable.

## Entry 2-Out

9-2-07

It's a beautiful day out. My mom and I are going to the Log Cabin Festival today.

I still have quite a bit of homework to do. I'm really going to try my hardest to do well in World Politics. Maybe it will get better as time goes by.

I've already started trying to figure out what I want to take next semester. That way I can have it all planned out and hopefully get the classes I want.

I had to start teaching a book for my Thurs. class. I like it - I think it will

help me a lot. It talks about habits and the difference between being efficient and effective. It also talks about dependence, independence, and interdependence. In fact, I need to go read some right now. I will write again tomorrow to summarize what I read today.



~~entry 3-02~~

9-3-0

I finished my reading assignment for Directed Studies. I really like the book. From what I read yesterday + today, this is what I got out of it. Each of us has the power to choose how we feel about something. A "reactive" person tries to blame their feelings on an outside force. The ~~on~~ weather is bad so I'm not in a good mood. A proactive person chooses how to feel - they are response-able. This is the way I need to be with World Politics...

I can control how I feel about this class and ultimately how I do in the class.

I cannot control how the teacher teaches; therefore, I must learn to conform to her ways and learn how to use them in such a way that helps me. I can choose to be a good student, or I can do bad and blame it on outside forces. The first way sounds like a better plan.

Goal for the upcoming week: Get violin out and play!



Entry 4-In

9-5-07

After having 4 days off, I'm feeling tired. I hate getting up early, but I'm loving the fact that I get out by lunch time.

I had dance last night, which was fun as always. We are going to the Pulse dance tent in Sat., and I'm so excited! I hope I am able to go and have fun with the experience, and not sink in frustration if I don't get something right away. I love dancing - I feel like I've become so much more passionate about it since I came to PDS. I just love to express myself.