

PERFORMANCE STUDIES AND THE REINVENTION OF “I” IN COMPOSITION:
MOVING MYSELF BEYOND A TEXTUAL MODEL

BY

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This study reconsiders the category of personal writing by contextualizing and linking it with the field of Performance studies in order to examine its potential critical function in the field of Composition. I examine the history of personal writing in English Studies and the possible expansion of its definition through the application of Performance studies methodology. I extend the scope of personal writing and offer valuable tools to critically analyze and theorize its application in Composition scholarship and pedagogy.

Table of Contents

Introduction	
Personal Writing: A Vexed Relationship.....	1
Chapter 1	
From Singular to Inclusive: Evolution of the Self in Personal Writing	12
Chapter 2	
Personal Performance Pedagogy: Extending Definitions of Personal Writing	50
Chapter 3	
Getting Personal in the Writing Classroom: Theory and Methodology	90
Chapter 4	
Investigating my Classroom: Incorporating Student Voices and Visions	128
Chapter 5	
Interviews: Composition Scholars Define Personal Writing.....	172
Conclusion	
What's Next for Personal Writing: Strategies and Support.....	223
Works Cited.....	233

Introduction – Personal Writing: A Vexed Relationship

Modern democratic culture continues to privilege individuality and the sovereignty of a human subject with certain inalienable rights; on the other hand, many who share this modern culture profoundly distrust traditional autobiography, one of the narrative forms through which the West sustains its romance with individualism and promotes a universal, representative subject. (Smith, Watson 6-7)

It is a knotty business to assign value to stories we hear and see and read, and perhaps harder yet to evaluate the wisdom of teaching, telling, or writing into circulation any particular story. Yet we all have profound responsibility for the stories we circulate – from the jokes we repeat to the stories we assign students if we are teachers to the texts we invent if we are writers. (Ekanger 95)

At a recent SUNY Council on Writing Conference, “Inevitable Intersections: Writing at the Crossroads of Public and Private,” Professor Sondra Perl from the CUNY Graduate School gave a keynote speech on the value of personal writing. In her talk, she relayed stories of her own difficulties sharing personal writing with her classes and explored some of the pitfalls for other scholars engaging in the negotiation of public and private. After assigning her book *On Austrian Soil: Teaching Those I was Taught to Hate* to a graduate class, she was forced to face how challenging it was to engage in personal writing and then share these experiences in this intimate way. From this speech and from interviewing Perl, I came to understand how the personal is part of everything for her – her teaching, her writing, her interactions. Her teaching practices are not so much about

the use of any kind of terminology, but rather about having personal investment and personal stakes in her writing (Perl Interview).

I use this conference and an overview of Perl's speech as an entryway into a dissertation on a topic that colleagues have called everything from "wonderful" to "naïve," comments I repeat since they seem to mimic the academy's vexed relationship to personal writing. Certainly, throughout this process, reactions to my research have varied and my own comfort level with researching my classroom and myself as a scholar has been unstable. It is only natural to seek to define the self in a coherent way to provide a well-researched and airtight narrative that can carry a large project like the dissertation. Not only have I found this to be impossible, I have found it works directly against the ideas that I promote throughout my writing and research. Throughout, the placement of myself as a scholar and my own notions of self remain at time partially hidden behind other voices, an issue I will address in my concluding chapter.

The example of Perl serves a number of purposes, perhaps foremost to show that a conference that was focused around the concept of personal writing was able to bring over 100 Composition scholars together. I reference Perl's keynote address and publications as examples of moves to critically engage personal writing. This conference, however, is not an anomaly. As I attend conferences, join qualitative inquiry networks, meet colleagues, and teach classes, I find that many of us are doing work with the personal, but many find that there are not enough spaces to properly theorize the work we are doing. Although personal writing remains a popular topic, varying opinions about its value and use continue to keep it from being analyzed and studied in such a way that

allows its definitions to expand and evolve. The turnout at this small conference may demonstrate that many of us want a forum in which to talk about the personal and the work it does. This study comes out of a desire not to ask why personal writing has been such a contentious form in the field of Composition, but rather a desire to trace its history and evaluate current scholarly moves to see what role it plays in the field and how we can now engage it critically and productively. The widespread use of the personal in the classroom today calls for more theorizing about what else can be done with the personal. As this dissertation will show, the burgeoning field of Performance studies can provide a critical framework to both evaluate the position of personal writing in the field of Composition and provide methods to strengthen its contribution. This study demonstrates – through interviews, examination of my own classroom and an overview of relevant literature – that personal writing is far from a unified category. Each person I interviewed for this project had her/his own criteria and terminology for what I will call “personal writing.” They have spent years developing their own definitions for the work they do and ways to term the work to make it acceptable to a larger audience. Despite the fact that personal writing has been publicly discussed for so long, people still toil away with their own individual ideas about what it is, how to define it and its function in the field. This study seeks to draw together a number of these working definitions in order to make it possible for scholars and teachers of the personal to create a cohesive body of knowledge tracing the history of personal writing and thus pave the way for the expansion of its scope through the addition of Performance studies methodology.

Within the field of Composition, “personal writing” - an umbrella term that includes any writing that draws on first-hand experience, including subgenres such as autobiography, autoethnography, and mystory - maintains a precarious position at best. I choose to use the term personal writing to both provide a more general term that can apply to many kinds of writing and to avoid using terminology that has historically been problematic in this genre. Following a more general trend that started in the mid 1960s and flourished in the mid 1970s, personal experience has appeared in the academic accounts of scholars involved in the process of creating the field to expanding it to include disciplinary ideas from Communication to Cultural Studies. The use of personal writing has become so ubiquitous that often it does not get the critical attention it deserves or receives critique that is not productive. As I will discuss in Chapters 1 and 2, there are concerns that what is personal is not critical and evidence that the personal does not gain academics publications, prestige or tenure.

Deriving knowledge from personal experience is risky for at least two reasons: 1) first-hand experience may have limited application or relevance to more general situations – or as scientists and social scientists like to say, “anecdote is not evidence”; and 2) display of the ‘self’ can often lead to harsh personal and scholarly judgments from others. Those judgments can affect our ability to publish, receive tenure, favorable reviews as has been documented by scholars such as Louise Phelps in “Becoming a Warrior: Lessons of the Feminist Workplace” and Gesa Kirsch in *Women Writing the Academy* two pieces I will analyze in later chapters. “I” is a well-established point of contention for the teacher, researcher and even the student – when to allow it, how to use

it, whether it is critical, where its use can be rigorous. Although for most the notion of forbidding the use of “I” is outdated, there seem to be gaps in the critical research that theorizes the benefits of using “I.” Current personal writing terminology often carries negative connotations asking individual scholars to redefine their terms and in doing so, splinters the definition of personal writing. As Karen Paley suggests in her study of *I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Person Writing*, a book that came out of her dissertation which explored the implications of personal writing, “the sheer circulation of so many synonyms or near synonyms may be indicative of anxiety about the personal in the academy...on the other hand, the multiple names may reflect the versatility of the form itself” (10). Here I aim to break down current notions of “I” and in my later chapters assess the vast array of assignments that engage “I” both literally and metaphorically in the classroom.

Tracing attitudes towards the personal and how they have evolved within the pedagogy and scholarship of Composition can establish a working definition for the term and lay out the current stakes of personal writing in our departments and its potential for interdisciplinary expansion. Practices associated with the expressivist movement, such as free writing, fast drafts and even performance, have made their way into the core curriculum of many English departments according to scholars such as Karen Paley and Thomas Newkirk (*I-Writing, The Performance of Self in Student Writing*).

These two books thoroughly analyze the value of expressivist pedagogy as a basis for many popular Composition writing practices. In *I-Writing*, Paley chooses to frame the entire debate surrounding the use of personal writing through the history of the

expressivist movement in Composition, concentrating on the debate between David Bartholomae and Peter Elbow, and evaluating the classroom practices of Patricia Bizzell in order to discover what the expectations are for the personal in the classroom. Here, after evaluating the relevant literature, she defines expressivism as:

A pedagogy that includes (but is in no means related to) an openness to the use of personal narrative, a particular type of narrative mode of discourse. Personal narrative takes the writer's own experience as its focus. It involves the use of a narrational I that seems to be the actual voice of the person who writes.

Sometimes the narrator may appear to isolate individual consciousness, and sometimes he or she may represent the self in one or more social contexts, such as the family or college community. The narrator may or may not explicitly link the particular situation with those experienced by others. (13)

According to Paley, personal writing both concentrates on the experience of the individual and may include outside perspectives. The necessity of context is something I will discuss in Chapter 1 as I analyze the difference in the treatment of "I" from Literary Autobiography which traditionally focuses on a single life of great importance to concepts of Feminist Autobiography that use the "I" to represent larger social movements and communities.

Paley conducts her research on the premise that most literature denigrating the use of "I" is not based on qualitative research, a problem I will attempt to address in my own research. In chapter 2 I suggest that many methods employed by Performance studies allow the researcher to be more inclusive of varied populations. According to Paley, "The

misrepresentations of pedagogies that include the teaching of personal narrative are based largely on published writing as opposed to classroom observation” (13). In her own study, she spends time in classrooms and interviewing scholars to add to the body of scholarship on personal writing. In doing this, she is able to begin to break open the category by contributing new observations and insights into a very circular topic. In my study, I will incorporate concepts from Performance studies that push beyond expressivist pedagogy into the theatrical and include voices of students and scholars embracing these ideas in their own scholarship and classroom work.

The debate between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae that Paley discusses may be the first thing Composition scholars refer to when analyzing personal writing. This assumption that expressivism and personal writing are synonymous is so ubiquitous that in his book *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* Tom Newkirk assumes that the two discussions are one and the same, moving freely between analysis of self-writing and expressivist methodology. While the topics have abundant similarities, in Chapter 2 I will argue that we need to push past many of the restraints of expressivist writing including attitudes towards the theatrical in order to make new strides in critical evaluation of personal writing. The ability of the personal narrative to allow students and scholars to be engaged readers and thinkers becomes apparent in Newkirk’s study, which is also one of the first volumes to include performance. In Chapter 2 I will suggest personal writing moves further beyond expressivist pedagogy than Newkirk suggests and into the concept of performance.

In addition to expressivist pedagogy, Composition scholars regularly publish personal writing that draws on teaching practices, literacy narratives, and case studies. While Composition literature has included many nods toward the personal in the teaching of first-year composition, there are concerns when first person autobiographical perspective is engaged in our publishing and when non-text based models are used as research methodologies. An example of this resistance can be found in reviews of current autobiographical scholarship such as James D. Williams' *College English* piece "Counterstatement: Autobiography in Composition Scholarship." While contextualizing the importance of the personal in the accounts of Composition scholars Williams ultimately chides the authors of the books under review, stating "The key topics... must be pried from the personal history" (211). This simultaneous acknowledgement and rejection of the value of personal writing is not uncommon. As a whole, then, this dissertation will analyze some of the roots of conflicting attitudes toward personal writing and how we can make these disagreements productive in creating new definitions.

In addition to academic writing, there are many different ways to share personal stories, from casually recounting our day to our friends to sharing our own learning experiences in the ways we teach and write. In *Getting a Life: Everyday Uses of Autobiography* Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson emphasize the consumer nature of the individual American, who on a daily basis naturally takes in the life experiences and stories of others while giving her own back. Everything from popular memoir to reality television supports this kind of life-sharing. As Smith and Watson put it, "In postmodern America we are culturally obsessed with getting a life – and not just getting it, but

sharing it with and advertising it to others. We are, as well, obsessed with consuming the lives that other people have gotten” (3). We rely on personal stories to convey common messages and relate to one another. From the obsessive imbibing of celebrity gossip to sharing personal experiences in a conference presentation we can involve the personal in our leisure activities and in our work.

This study, then, examines not only how academics use personal writing, but also how our students use and are asked to use personal writing. I interviewed eight professors in the field of Composition who currently use personal writing in their scholarship and teaching and over 100 students from my English 121, the equivalent of first year composition, classes at the Fashion Institute of Technology. It is my hope that by offering an account of how personal writing has come to be such a contested category of writing, interviewing and engaging faculty and students, and bringing in key concepts from Performance studies, that I can provide both context and possibilities for the expanded critical engagement of personal writing.

In Chapter 1 I will examine the roots of personal writing in autobiographical studies. I consider autobiography as it changed from a primarily male singular identity narrative to a more inclusive genre that currently expands to include multiple kinds of personal writing and perspectives. This expansion happened with the introduction of feminist methodologies that extend the notion of the self to be inclusive of surrounding communities. I will then briefly examine publishing practices in Composition studies that allow for personal reflection before introducing the concept of performance.

Chapter 2 engages ideas from Performance studies to demonstrate how personal writing has been treated in allied disciplines. Drawing on ideas of performance, I will suggest that the fact that performance acts not only as a discipline but as a methodology allows it to expand the possible applications in Composition scholarship and classroom teaching.

In Chapter 3 I analyze the way that personal writing has been used in the composition classroom. Taking a close look at texts that consider the value of the personal for composition students, I investigate the issues that led me to conduct my own study of personal writing in first year composition with my students.

I introduce and analyze research I conducted with 100 first year composition students at the Fashion Institute of Technology in Chapter 4. First, I offer an overview of the way I planned my courses to include ethnographic inquiry and performance methods to allow students the opportunity to engage multiple literacies in their exploration of the personal. I analyze four student projects as examples of the effectiveness of personal performance engagement in the classroom.

In Chapter 5 I examine excerpts from interviews I conducted with eight Composition scholars at various stages of their careers. Here, I draw on their expertise and definitions of personal writing to broaden the notion of how personal writing is currently being employed in their classrooms and in their scholarship. In this way, I extend my practices beyond my own classroom and engage contemporary perspectives on the treatment of “I” and the value of performance in defining the personal.

The conclusion looks ahead, considering what an expansion of the term personal writing can mean for Composition. I will suggest ways to draw on experience to strengthen the availability of personal experience as a valid form of criticism and topic for engagement.

In all, then, this study examines the history of personal writing in English Studies and the possible expansion of its definition through the application of performance studies methodology. I hope to extend the scope of personal writing and offer valuable tools to critically analyze and theorize its application in Composition scholarship and pedagogy. This requires understanding that there is no necessarily singular, coherent definition of the “I” and that presenting and accepting this fact is key to helping ourselves and our students distinguish between valuable personal writing and notions of the self that can be limiting and dangerous. First, though, in Chapter 1 I will analyze the genesis of attitudes toward personal writing in English Studies to establish groundwork from which to expand our understanding of its application.

Chapter 1 – From Singular to Inclusive: Evolution of the Self in Personal Writing

In examining personal writing in the field of English, more specifically Composition, I will begin my analysis with autobiography, the most recognizable and longstanding form of personal writing within English studies. I begin where formal studies of autobiography and other forms of the personal began – notably in the field of Literature. While many recent volumes discuss varied forms of personal writing, including collaborative volumes I will discuss later in this chapter by Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, Diane Freedman, Olivia Frey and Murphy Zauhar, few if any give serious consideration to the relationship between Literature and Composition in the history of the genre. Autobiography's history within the field of Literature and its later rejection as an appropriate area of study for literary scholars helps to frame the consequences of the study of personal writing within Composition.

In this chapter, I will introduce attitudes towards autobiography that set the stage for the study of personal writing in English Studies more broadly. From here, I will consider the incorporation of feminist autobiography and how a shift in attitude toward personal writing from a singular form to a democratic form shows how personal writing can be representative and inclusive. Taking a look at collaborative volumes, I will consider how personal writing has been presented and analyzed before introducing concepts from Performance studies that can extend the possibilities for personal writing in Chapter 2.

Autobiography: A Brief Literary History

For some scholars and workers in Composition, the personal has become a way to establish the history of the field. Paying attention to the history of Composition and its early relationship with the field of Literature can help explain the separation of self from the study and teaching of writing as I will demonstrate how attitudes from the literary treatment of autobiography influenced the acceptance of other forms of personal writing. In *Rhetoric and Reality*, James Berlin describes Literature's separation from the self and everything expressionist in the forties and fifties. At this point in history, the self was not seen as a valuable topic for writing since, as Berlin recounts through the examination of relevant literature, the self was seen as something too difficult to write about effectively for the everyday person as traditional concepts of individualism were being questioned. According to Berlin, "In the forties and fifties, then, literature was seen as serving the individual and acting as a safeguard against collectivist notions that might threaten the ideal of 'rugged individualism on the plane of the spirit' and, finally, on the plane of politics" (111). Literary models could give students characters to align their emotions with and the necessary perspective to writing about these feelings through the analysis of literature: "Literature thus rids the individual of any impulses which might be counter to existing political arrangements, defusing them through vicarious experience" (110-111). The fact that the self was seen as something that had been successfully written about by famous authors but not an appropriate topic for the student demonstrates an attitude towards autobiography which extolled the famous individual's story over that of the everyday story.

Formal, narrative autobiography has traditionally focused on the accomplishments of the individual life of consequence while the use of the term “autobiographical narrative” has assumed the creation of a complete, singular identity and a single story of a life, both concepts being problematic when we consider the varied uses of personal histories. Autobiography has historically been a way to preserve this perceived societal greatness in writing and thus ensure a place in history while usurping any misguided biographers of the future (Olney). As James Olney points out in “Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical and Bibliographical Introduction,” for someone to write about himself and receive professional support, they needed to be able to create a complete persona, have already achieved a certain amount of public fame, and be male (25). Yet, in recent years, autobiography has proliferated. As Olney explains,

Whatever reasons one might find why autobiography should be practiced by no one, recent publishing history offers plentiful evidence that it is practiced by almost everyone. Perhaps this is so because there are no rules or formal requirements binding the prospective autobiographer – no restraints, no necessary models, no obligatory observances gradually shaped out of a long developing tradition and imposed by that tradition on the individual talent who would translate a life into writing. (1)

Olney thus sees both that there is a traditional model of creating an important life history and the fact that this model’s unwieldiness has provided no modern examples for the form of autobiography. As suggested earlier, it is distinctly the lack of categorization that provides problems for the scholar attempting to construct a critical account of personal

writing. As Olney continues to explain, “I fear that it is all too typical – indeed it seems inevitable – that the subject of autobiography produces more questions than answers, more doubts by far (even of its existence) than certainties” (5). Despite this lack of a coherent definition, autobiographies tend to follow trends depending upon the genre in which they are written. Thus, we can trace patterns in popular autobiography and academic autobiography. The space for questioning that Olney creates can be valuable as scholars attempt to expand the notion of autobiography from singular narratives to personal writing that incorporates larger communities and varied perspectives.

In his 1980 book *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography*, Georges Gusdorf recounts the history of autobiography as the narrative retelling of a worthy life. The concept that there could be one fixed story of a life can be dangerous yet empowering since we can consider that autobiography has the ability to reinforce greatness and extol the individual. For Gusdorf, “The appearance of autobiography implies a new spiritual revolution: the artist and the model coincide, the historian tackles himself as object. That is to say, he considers himself a great person, worthy of men’s remembrance even though in fact he is only a more or less obscure intellectual” (31). In this account, autobiography is tied to personal feelings of accomplishment, which need to be preserved and shared so others can acknowledge and value these accomplishments. Autobiography is also assumed to be the genre of the “obscure intellectual” not the everyday person, an attitude that pervades much of Composition’s early history as James Berlin suggests (*Rhetorics, Poetics and Cultures: Refiguring College English Studies*).

Gusdorf evaluates autobiography in a few ways. Traditional autobiography relies on the concepts of memory and distance in the attempt to create a continuous life narrative, the move from a private to a public life. This is a move that modern personal writing shies away from, embracing instead analysis of current experiences and often piecemeal scenes from individual and community lives as I will discuss in future chapters. For Gusdorf, anything without this distance, however personal, does not count. He writes,

In other words, autobiography is a second reading of experience, and it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it. In the immediate moment, the agitation of things ordinarily surrounds me too much for me to be able to see it in its entirety. Memory gives me a certain remove and allows me to take into consideration all the ins and outs of the matter, its context in time and space. (38)

In this case critical distance is necessary to be able to step away from and evaluate experience and thus see it as valuable. Many classroom assignments ask students to write about personal experiences, but nothing they would be unable or unwilling to share with a larger class. Asking for critical distance may require students to choose memories they are distant from rather than memories they can actively work through in their papers. In Chapter 3, I will return to the problems with the assumption that distance is necessary when writing about personal experience. This definition of autobiography is notably limiting.

While Gusdorf sees autobiography as a unified narrative, he also recognizes its limitations: “Any autobiography is a moment of the life that it recounts; it struggles to draw the meaning from that life, but it is itself a meaning in the life” (43). Autobiography thus can only use specific moments in our lives to demonstrate larger ideas.

The significance of autobiography should therefore be sought beyond truth and falsity, as those are conceived by simple common sense. It is unquestionably a document about a life, and the historian has a perfect right to check out its testimony and verify its accuracy. But it is also a work of art, and the literary devotee, for his part, will be aware of its stylistic harmony and the beauty of its images. (43)

According to Gusdorf, the autobiographical form contains an inherent contradiction; it is at once a document that should be prone to verification but simultaneously be seen as a work of art. A strong interest in truth preservation through fact checking dominates criticism of both academic and popular writing. Gusdorf goes on to claim even more pointedly that “The literary, artistic function is thus of greater importance than the historic and objective function in spite of the claims made by positivist criticism both previously and today” (43). Public opinion has moved away from a view of personal writing that holds on to a strict concept of veracity as creative non-fiction continues to flourish but a commitment to narrative fact still persists. As I will continue to explore, based on the way it is currently treated in Composition and Performance studies, veracity is instead achieved by garnering multiple perspectives, breaking narrative traditions and understanding the value of telling a version of a story.

The legacy of autobiographical writing ranges from the individual stories of St. Augustine to Sartre, although as a genre, according to Olney, autobiography still finds itself stranded by the many fields it touches upon. Olney explains, “Autobiography, like the life it mirrors, refuses to stay still long enough for the genre critic to fit it out with the necessary rules, laws, contracts, and pacts; it refuses, simply, to be a literary genre like any other” (25). Because autobiography has come to include not only singular narratives of accomplishment its value has become even more difficult to determine for many. The broadening of the concept of autobiographical writing to include communities, multiple perspectives, reaction against reflection and sometimes non-narrative structure have redefined the genre and in doing so, will address many of the problems raised early on.

Challenging and playing with the outward appearance of autobiography, many feminist theorists have chosen to define the category in a way that includes many different “life-writing” forms whereas many literary theorists have traditionally given closed terms for autobiography. Philippe Lejeune, recognized for his contributions in theorizing the genre, for example, in the *Autobiographical Pact* excludes “memoirs, biography, personal novel, autobiographical poem, journal/diary, and self-portrait or essay” (20). As with any restrictive move, such limitations pave the way for new volumes that have opened up the genre.

Resistance to alternative personal writing forms and particularly women’s writing which challenged a lot of the structures of traditional autobiography can be seen throughout much early autobiographical scholarship. In “Women and Autobiography at Author’s Expense,” Lejeune’s work on French women’s autobiography questions why

women feel the need to publish their life stories at all. He asserts that without monetary compensation, notoriety or increased publicity of their lives as unique, regular women who recount their already difficult lives simply find another way to “fail” (250). In Lejeune’s case, it seems to be a question of when a life story is valuable and here the everyday life of French women does not contribute to the canon. Again, due to the fact that the category of personal writing is slippery at best, creating criteria for good modern autobiographical writing frustrates many scholars who seek to categorize the writing in order to either legitimize or reject its value. Taking a look at how feminist theorists have intervened in redefining the genre of autobiography provides a way to consider how the definitions of personal writing can become more malleable and inclusive.

Feminist Autobiography: Possibilities for Expanding Definitions

In reviewing recent autobiographical scholarship, it becomes apparent that many literary studies of autobiography don’t include anything by women and exclude many of the socialized accounts discussed above. The dominance of autobiographies by men signals an attitude towards what is considered valuable to the field. The distinct lack of female autobiography is something noted by Domna C. Stanton as she discusses what she terms to be “Autogynography” – autobiographical writing by women (132). As she begins to create her contribution to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson’s volume, Stanton finds herself continuously frustrated, confronted by the harsh reality that women’s autobiographical writing has been continuously devalued:

Yes, I decided, leafing through ‘A Room of One’s Own,’ I could start by evaluating theories and studies of autobiography in those many gynoless volumes that now stood on my bookshelves before tackling the question of the specificity of women’s texts in the few ‘individual articles’ by feminist scholars. Then, perhaps, I might be able to say something, however partial and inconclusive, on the subject of autogynographical difference. (134)

How is it, as Stanton asks, that all of these “gynoless” volumes have persisted for so long?

Traditional concepts of autobiography begin to break down when they fail to embrace multiple points of view or experimental forms of writing. Tracing the history of autobiographical literary scholarship as a traditionally male form to a form embraced by women and men can establish a trajectory of its positioning in academia. As mentioned, even though it is not accounted for in the bulk of the scholarship until about the 1990s, early in the history of autobiography women used the form in a number of ways. Women increasingly employed the personal in their writing as preservation of female experience became considered historically and socially significant. In this way, the history of women’s autobiographical practices takes into account social circumstances more than individual lives of note. Acknowledging social circumstances distinguishes it from the traditional forms extolled by writers such as Gusdorf and LeJeune. Contemporary writers such as Estelle Jelinek, who created one of the first volumes concerning women and autobiographical writing, have taken steps to write and collect the history of women’s autobiography and in so doing have made the genre more visible and inclusive.

According to Jelinek, women first felt justified in writing their life stories when they had particular purpose and relevance for the larger community surrounding them. What is studied is based on what has been deemed to be historically important or significant to women and their surroundings. Jelinek explains, “The greatest productivity for women’s autobiographies have not been during revolutionary (male) times, but during the high points of women’s history” (6). Jelinek’s account helps explain the proliferation of Quaker and other religious narratives, where women discuss their religious awakening, and the fact that famous women write about the circumstances of their lives rather than their own accomplishments. Attention to surroundings rather than strict analysis of the self stands in direct opposition to the history of male autobiography provided by Gusdorf and Olney, notably autobiography as something to celebrate an individual life. Over time, as women began to gain more social freedoms, they also felt the freedom to experiment with the possibilities of autobiography. In the 1920s, women such as Gertrude Stein and earlier Virginia Woolf paved the way for literary experimentation, granted with substantial fame already backing them up. In *Missing Persons: The Impossibility of Auto/biography*, Mary Evans connects this change in freedom of personal expression to women’s sexual and social liberation.

What Virginia Woolf recognized was that the nature of modernism was feminine – not, as she knew, in any literal sense, but in the way in which the condition and experience of twentieth-century urban life offered a range of possibilities, a diversity and in a sense an inherent instability of identity which was closer to the range of possible female experience than the fixed and proscribed nature of

masculinity. (95)

It is precisely this identification of women's autobiography as unfixed and varied that has adjusted the status of autobiographical discourse from a singular narrative form to one that is flexible. Feminist autobiography pushed these distinctions farther to suggest more inclusive methods of personal writing.

Feminist theories of autobiography have been largely responsible for giving attention to the larger social implications of the personal and the need to study its forms. For this reason, I align myself with Feminist methodology to break open the concept of autobiography and move into a more inclusive definition of personal writing that takes into account social stimulus, community and the possibility of the "I" to represent the many who may not have the means for self-expression. *In The Auto/biographical I*, Liz Stanley establishes that autobiographical writing (and the individual) is produced by the society surrounding her. Theorists like Stanley trace the path of the genre distinctions of autobiography along with its move from something strictly literary to something studied and used by many fields (sociology, anthropology, history, sciences) as its relation to historical circumstances and future narratives have been more closely examined (4). Since there is no such thing as a single, unitary self, there is a need to take into account many different types of autobiographies, including those that are considered "popular" and "everyday." Stanley maintains that "all lives are intrinsically interesting" (12-13). Beyond being interesting, though, the question becomes whether they are intrinsically valuable.

As presented by Stanley, the term auto/biography is a body of work for research, which includes memoir, diaries, letters, biography, autobiography and even fiction. The purpose of her book is to determine whether there is a difference between women's auto/biography and feminist auto/biography and to find how each kind of life writing contributes to this study. Stanley explains,

My aim in this book is to contribute to the groundwork of a feminist approach to auto/biography which rejects conventional genre distinctions and separations, instead showing how the same analytic apparatus is required for engaging with all forms of life writing... This is not to deny that there are differences between different forms of life writing, but it is to argue that these differences are not generic. (3)

Stanley's conclusion is that yes, there is a difference, since the study of auto/biography itself is based on the positioning of the reader, writer and subject.

Some feminist scholars contend that women are compelled to write in terms of autobiographical experience because from birth, their lives are complicit with the production and development of other lives. In *Intellectual Parenting and a Developmental Feminist Pedagogy of Writing*, Janice Hays articulates this feeling for the feminist scholar. She explains how women's "ways of knowing" can allow them to view scholarly endeavours in less singular terms. Hays describes,

Central to this discussion is the premise that the dominant reasoning and linguistic modes of Western society have been male-patriarchal ones that reify meaning and valorize individuality, competitiveness, binary thinking, analytic separation of

experience into its constitutive parts, and emotionless rationality and abstraction. All of these ‘hard’, unitary, phallogocentric ways of functioning that exclude communality and cooperation, caring, multiple meanings, holistic thinking, emotion – and women. (158)

Assuming roles of daughter, mother, wife, partner forces women constantly into a position where they are not only responsible for their own lives, but also responsible for and tied to the lives of many others. For this reason, using their personal experiences and interactions with the world around them to describe their academic experiences can be quite natural. In “The Way In,” Nancy Mairs suggests that, “Through writing her body, woman may reclaim the deed to her dwelling” (471). But, Mairs not only believes that women are able to claim their spaces by writing their bodies, they are able to acknowledge the larger world they share their experiences with and embrace it. As she calls for others to share their autobiographies, she has high hopes for the implications of her own.

I hope that I’ve spoken truthfully about all our lives. Because I think that my ‘story,’ though intensely personal, is not at all private. Beneath its idiosyncrasies lie vast strata of commonality, communality. I don’t see how anyone engaged in self-representation can fail to recognize in the autobiographical self, constructed as it is in language, all the others who the writing self shelters. The not-me dwells here in the me. We are one, and more-than-one. Our stories utter one another. (473)

Many feminist theorists acknowledge this feeling of connectedness that women share, how they feel themselves to be particularly socially located and responsible for passing messages on for others who do not have the opportunity to speak while still needing to claim their individuality.

From these feminist theories of autobiography comes the genesis for looking at autobiography as a larger, social genre rather than an individualized singular one. One of the most important issues Stanley deals with is the contested idea of truth in autobiography and how expanding the scope of the subject helps the writing to be more truthful than a cohesive narrative account. To begin, Stanley quickly traces the study of auto/biography in its movement from just a literary subject, to a now anthropological and social one (4). Among the suggestions that Stanley makes for ways to study auto/biography is the need to first understand that there is not such thing as “truth” in auto/biography. She substantiates this claim by locating the reader and the subject of the writing in a larger social milieu, and takes the position that no writer, reader or subject acts uniquely or independently of the society that has created them. In this way, auto/biographical practices are in opposition to the practices of historians (7). “Any biographer’s view is a socially located and necessarily, partial one” (7). This concept of truth developed in the Victorian era, for Stanley the seeds of the auto/biographical tradition, and needs to be revisited since, “it proposes that there is a coherent, essentially unchanging and unitary self who can be referentially captured by its methods” (8). Stanley believes that all forms of life writing continuously change both through intentional and unintentional methods and positioning. For these reasons, even if you can

devise a theory of auto/biography, nothing will ever be read in the same manner by each person – much of the way that writing is understood is dependent on what Stanley purports as a type of reader-response theory. To Stanley, developing a canon for study is important, but the way it will be used is not fixed.

Auto/biography in this sense is a series of choices, structures, memory and fictions that can be signaled by an individual author, or can remain hidden (130). There is no such thing as a “contiguous narrative” (130) as all recollections of the past are fragmentary. “Auto/biography smoothes out of sight doubts as to the nature of the self – or at least those selves who write or have auto/biographies written about them, if not the selves of the common readers – by treating its reality as an a priori truth” (133). According to Stanley, we need to think about the “processes” behind auto/biography as well as the product itself (136). Stanley believes the ultimate understanding of auto/biography has to come through the realization that the “self” is a fabrication” (242) and is therefore highly complex. There is no single subject of auto/biography, rather it is intertextual and cross-disciplinary.

Such ideas about autobiography extend beyond scholarly work into teaching practices. In *The Feminist Classroom*, Frances Maher and May Kay Thompson Tetreault research the classrooms of six different universities and interview 17 different female professors to understand what the feminist classroom actually means. I align myself with the concept of the feminist classroom explicitly in the terms which Maher and Tetreault set forth:

The aim of this book...is to portray the ways in which their [the professors'] commitments to the education of all of their students have led to educational practices that break the illusions and silences, and transform the vision of students like Nancy. The feminist teachers have begun to articulate educational aims and criteria with these newer students in mind, to integrate students' and multicultural content, into their curriculum and to experiment with new, sometimes risky, pedagogical approaches. (1-2)

Mary Evans' book, much like the work of Stanley, Maher and Tetreault, is concerned with the larger social implications of auto/biography and how the treatment of the genre is both dictated by the time period and social circumstances in which it is being written. Much like Stanley and working against the ideas of Gusdorf and Olney, Evans believes there is no narrative, clean structure to life and thus any structure imposed by an auto/biographer (chronological or otherwise) is a false construct, often determined by attitudes of the time period. All three also suggest that there is no such thing as the representation of the individual without the analysis of a larger social world.

The defining ideas of the feminist autobiographer as explored through these readings thus shares many of the same concerns as those writing in Composition and Performance studies: representing multiple voices, being inclusive, providing forums for multiple kinds of personal writing. While there are a large number of male authors engaging in personal writing, many Composition personal narratives are books and articles written by women, and women who identify as feminists, in no small part due to the fact that many of the prominent early figures in the establishment of Composition

were women. These initial stories of the discipline are tied up with a lot of disciplinary baggage, including Composition's positioning as a "service" discipline, with classes resting on the shoulders of part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants (Susan Miller). Examining the context of how this personal writing has been framed and published can give a clear idea of the value it has been given in Composition and Literary studies and what changes need to be made to invite new scholars and new formats to share experiences.

Personal Writing and Composition Studies: Individual Stories and Collaboration

Many early figures in Composition have written narratives that simultaneously define the field and tell personal stories of struggle and accomplishment. Gesa Kirsch uses ethnographic methods to present a series of personal narratives that demonstrate both women's hopes for their own careers in Composition and describe the journeys they took to get where they are today. These women's stories contain both harassment and accomplishment, and their personal journeys are integral to their recounting academic experiences. Kirsch presents her readers with a series of ethnographic case studies that look at four women's experiences across varied academic disciplines, as they write with different audiences in mind and within multiple surroundings (xvi). Kirsch explains, "Studying women as writers raises questions of gender and language, women's participation in public discourse and women's 'ways of writing'"(xvii). While focused particularly on women in the field, Kirsch's study raises questions about where personal experiences can be published in order to further public discourse – this volume is her

response to that missing resource.

Kirsch goes directly to the source, questioning women first-hand about their “interpretations of their writing experiences” (102). What is most rewarding about Kirsch’s study is the way she is able to establish a place for women writers and academics by allowing them to speak openly and personally about times that they felt discriminated against as well as times they felt successful, on and off the job. This integrated form of personal writing is simultaneously academic and reflective. According to Kirsch,

Now that women are entering the academy in greater numbers and in more disciplines, they are reexamining every aspect of academic institutions: the language used to ask research questions, the kind of research questions deemed important, the kind of data included in – and excluded from research studies, the conclusions drawn from research, and the type of writing used to convey findings and interpretations. (102)

Kirsch acknowledges the role of women in shaping the field and her inclusion of these narratives demonstrates the importance of their personal stories. This history illuminates the impact of women in field on personal writing as many of the case studies demonstrate women’s willingness to experiment with their writing, write creatively and include the self in their academic work. As Kirsch sees it, women have been changing the field of Composition, in large part because they choose to do this “interdisciplinary work” which often relies on personal narrative (106). As she begins to describe the genesis of her own work, she incorporates the value of the personal. “A lot of questions that I investigate

come from my own experiences, my own observations of what happens in the real world, as opposed to being logical extensions of things that I read in journals...I tend to think that some of my work is more creative because of it” (107). This scholarship based on personal experience exemplifies the potential for increased investment in writing when the self is critically incorporated.

Although Kirsch’s study establishes the value of these personal stories, it also sets up a lot of the difficulties faced by those who choose to engage the autobiographical in their academic writing. The women Kirsch studies who do branch out to include the personal and engage multiple forms of writing creatively and interdisciplinarily often have double the problems in publishing. According to Kirsch,

Scholars who study unconventional or interdisciplinary subjects face a number of potential problems, such as keeping up with the publications of several disciplines; finding forums for publishing their work; justifying the importance of their work; receiving funding; and in the case of tenure positions, finding reviewers who are competent enough to evaluate their work fairly. (108)

Lack of support from publishers may cause people to question their knowledge or power and “authority ” (127). Many may choose (as many already have) to write what they know, yet they may feel they have to construct it using antithetical modes. The concern extends into the field of Communication, an allied field in this discussion where Sonia and Karen Foss investigate what feminist researchers must consider as they make choices in their work. According to Griffin, “Foss and Foss identified seven accommodations feminist scholars make to the dominant research paradigm in order to increase the

chances of publication, including using non-feminist methods, citing nongender literature as a theoretical base, and suggesting limitations of gender research” (Foss, Foss, Griffin 22). Composition has however made accommodations to increase the presence of autobiographically relevant narratives despite resistance.

As this examination of scholarship on autobiography demonstrates, creating spaces for personal writing can be challenging for a number of reasons. Personal writing is often not considered as important as other types of scholarship. According to Theresa Enos, the majority of publishing in Composition happens in specialized journals, through collaborative efforts, speaking at conferences and online, thus it is hard to quantify publications the same way a “traditional” English department would; yet these standards still often hold true for those in Composition studies (79). Perhaps the first step is to not only see ways creativity and personal experience can play a part in writing but to see how important personal messages are to creating a new body of knowledge for early-career scholars casting about for role models.

One way to provide publishing opportunities for both Composition and Literary scholars engaging in personal writing has been to create collaborative volumes to accommodate these voices. These collaborative volumes are problematic in and of themselves however. According to Jeremy Popkin in “Coordinated Lives: Between Autobiography and Scholarship,” “such collections appear to be one of the characteristic forms of contemporary American autobiographical writing” (782). There are a number of issues that arise depending upon the call, the editors and who is included in the volumes. For Popkin, “Inclusion in a collaborative volume or series necessarily sets up intertextual

connections and interferences with the other selections that the individual authors did not intend; at the same time, it tends to separate the texts included in such project from those excluded” (782). So, while these volumes seem to be providing spaces for personal writing and multiple voices, they are also contributing to the problem of extolling certain individual stories as important while excluding others. For example, for their contributors to the volume *The Intimate Critique: Autobiographical Literary Criticism*, the editors Diane Freedman, Olivia Frey and Murphy Zauhar put out a call for papers that asked women to write from what they perceived as a female perspective. “ ‘In other words,’ we said, ‘write the essay about the literature you love in the way you would write it if you were not worrying about publishing it in a mainstream academic journal’” (2-3). The editors feel they need to give permission to respond in alternative ways. This kind of call engages the voices of junior scholars, but at the same time regulates what they can say and how. They need to give permission and be given permission, reinforcing a power dynamic and sense of authority between senior scholars and emerging ones. Presenting individual voices in a volume or collection also complicates the idea of the personal voice – those without authority in the field may express themselves through personal writing in a volume edited by those with authority and with others doing personal writing, but not in mainstream academic journals and certainly not autonomously. While personal writing is not always just about the self, the concept of the self has to be externally authorized to allow room for this kind of scholarship. This process of authorization is where the problems can begin.

For many, however, collaboration offers a very positive space where multiple viewpoints can work together, whether in a single piece of writing or a collection of pieces. The nature of the volumes for many mimics the nature of feminist personal writing. According to Diane Freedman, “First, the emphasis of individualism does not take into account the importance of group identity for women and minorities. Second, the emphasis on separateness ignores the differences in socialization in the construction of male and female gender identity” (72). For Friedman, it is a natural desire to collaborate to form communities and to strengthen individual voices. Volumes that solicit personal writing proliferate in Composition, often as secondary projects for those who have already established their academic reputations and received tenure in the field (73). While problematic in some ways, they serve a valuable function in the field, establishing places for new scholars to share their experiences in the classroom and in the academy. Despite the nature of their call, Freedman, Frey and Zauhar attempt to be inclusive. “We sent out calls for papers to journals and departments around the country, encouraging contributors to write in non-traditional forms: personal, narrative, mixed-genre, interactive, associative, relational, subjective, and/or feminist” (2-3). This kind of introduction prepares the reader to see creative response, but also how the pieces are dictated by an academic call for this kind of response.

There are other concerns that arise with these kinds of volumes and calls, however. That the writer does not write in complete isolation is no new concept. Popkin is concerned with “the phenomenon of autobiographical texts specifically composed for publication as part of a coordinated project, particularly when they are published in

collaborative volumes” (Popkin 1). He notes that these volumes can be identified by having a set number of essays of about the same length, editors, and a preface, which can account for a number of different important publications (4). Popkin’s concern lies in the fact that when we publish in collaborative volumes, whether these are the stories we are personally compelled to tell, or the stories someone else is compelling us to tell. Is autobiography altered by its publication in (and sometimes creation for) these volumes? The answer is of course yes, but should that be of the utmost concern?

What concerns most of the creators of these collaborative volumes is whether these volumes would exist at all without intervention, financial support and space. In Composition these volumes are often assembled as pedagogical tools, where editors elicit responses specifically for their volumes – so without the volumes, these pieces might not have existed. For many in Composition, this may be the real issue – it is necessary to create spaces for contributors to speak about their own experiences so that their stories do not get lost. Even Popkin notes that “One of their more important functions is to put the individual experiences of their contributors in some kind of perspective...the reader of these volumes can compare the different testimonies presented and attempt to draw more general conclusions” (9). There is both more freedom to express themselves in these volumes due to the idea of safety in numbers and more freedom for their experiences to be seen as individual in context with others. According to Popkin, “Being invited to contribute is a recognition of standing in an academic discipline; it has very little to do with whether the contributor’s life is likely to interest those outside of his or her specialty” (3). The question then becomes whether it is possible at all to actually find

recognition for writing an autobiography without having made some other significant contribution to the discipline.

As many create collaborative volumes and contribute to collaborative publications, there are those who struggle with the fragmentation that leads them to rely on collaboration to have permission to share their stories. These scholars need to have the opportunity to remain individuals while becoming part of the collectivity. Some, such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson recognize this purpose in their volumes. They explain, “The essays in this collection inaugurate a new inquiry into autobiography – as a repository of imposed subjectivities but also as a means of resisting complicity in their operations” (21). Fear of representing the self as fragmented, politically charged or flawed is complicated for those in Composition who feel the need to be role models, advance their own careers, receive tenure, develop new curricula and new programs, to clarify disciplinary boundaries, reiterate the positioning of women in Composition studies, and give a sort of guidance and sense of community to those who are already involved in the field or who are studying the field. It can be tempting to try to create a unified self.

There are a number of examples of important texts in Composition that while valuable, still engage in this creation of a singular life narrative. In *Becoming a Warrior: Lessons on the Feminist Workplace*, an example of a single-authored career monograph, Louise Phelps describes her struggle in the workplace, being denied tenure and being rehired to run a Composition program at another university: “I anticipated and desired professional recognition for what might be accomplished, but the process, the experience

of community, the intellectual growth, and the fate and appreciation of my ideas were probably more important to me in themselves than for the statues they might bring” (306). Here is where we get the common narrative: difficulty, struggle, but overcoming and acceptance. It is precisely this kind of narrative many feminist theorists of autobiography reject. There is a message of unwanted compromise, a desire not to ask for too much recognition, but to be content with the self without demanding the accolades of others. Such messages can be seen as both positive and negative. Phelps is brave enough to tell her own story so others can benefit from it, but it is a unique story in that it has a happy ending and has a conclusion at all.

Although Phelps struggles to achieve, she still happily achieves and is successful and well-known, which in many ways affords her the opportunity to discuss her story as one of “success and inspiration.” But many young academics do not have the backing to write full-length pieces about their experiences, nor do they have the reputation. Also, the danger of extolling the individual narrative of struggle and success is not a message many want to convey through their personal writing. Feminist scholars such as Dale Bauer in “The Other ‘F’ Word, or the Feminist in the Classroom” actually use the personal narrative to describe the importance of admitting failure and problems in their scholarship. Still, in each case, you need to have published to publish about yourself, might be a common cry. Is there a place for personal stories of the field written by those who are still entering it, approaching, or struggling with it?

Taking cues from the field of Communication we can come to understand how some other volumes of personal writing have attempted to include more non-narrative

and experimental forms. In *Feminist Rhetorical Theories*, Karen Foss, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin make a call to include alternative methods of writing and communication in order to broaden the field and make it more inclusive. They engage in a study of women and women's writing which includes studying the discourses in which they are actively participating. Doing so helps to broaden concepts of the integrated and social nature of personal writing:

Ranging from architecture to baking to gardening to holiday greetings to mothering to shopping, to expand what counts as significant forms of communication in the discipline...articles in which authors grapple with the intersections of personal identity, scholarship, and the academy suggest another form of recognition and valuing of the personal dimension as part of feminist scholarship by the mainstream. (20-1)

It is precisely these pieces that encourage experimentation that may open possibilities to new scholars.

Many of the studies that focus on broadening ideas about academic writing keep their focus on women's writing as a gateway to understanding personal writing as a situated and valuable discourse. Diane Freedman in "Border Crossing as Method and Motif in Contemporary American Writing, or, How Freud Helped Me Case the Joint" discusses how having access to "women's writing" in a variety of forms allowed her to write herself and to form her own, fragmented identity. Marginalization can force one to be creative in their writing, but awareness that many others also write on the margins builds a type of community. According to Freedman, "Obviously, borders, narrow lines,

can provide the form and context of composition and not merely a central image. I have often had to write in small pockets of time at the borders of other tasks. I have written (and read) in installments, in ribbons and borders, margin notes” (20). Sharing writing practices provides research that can uncover patterns and meanings in ways of writing, not matter how disjointed. For Suzanne Bunkers, reading women’s diaries and writing her own allows her to participate in a different kind of piecemeal collaboration, for as she reads, her own writing becomes situated and intertwined with the writing of other women, both in her mind and on the page (216). This concept of situated personal writing is one that I will continue to explore specifically as I engage ideas from Performance studies, which include audience interaction and community awareness.

Consequences and Situatedness

Beyond desiring space for recognition and publication, there are many reasons scholars may be reticent to write personally. Since as discussed the personal implicates one’s environment, many are afraid of betraying their field of study and much more as Miller describes in her discussion of personal writing. According to Susan Miller, “To some extent, then, this reticence about naming names is a matter of historical context: the nineteenth century backlash to the tell-all stance of Rousseau – especially in the area of the sexual connection, the erogenous zones of self.” (48). Writing the personal can also allow scholars to reconsider their stories and their meaning as they start to reconsider their own changing perspective and audience. bell hooks writes about her own experiences writing about her life in “Writing Autobiography.” “Strange that I had

always challenged the secrecy, always let something slip that should not be known growing up, yet as a writer staring into the solitary space of paper, I was bound, trapped in the fear that a bond is lost or broken in the telling. I did not want to be the traitor, the teller of family secrets – and yet I wanted to be a writer” (429). For hooks, her writing allowed her to connect to an early self she had problems reconciling rather than rejecting those early experiences as too harmful or painful to be incorporated into her present or her future. Initially, she thought writing would allow her to dispose of the unpleasantness, but it instead allowed her a new perspective, to realize the value of telling the truth as she remembered it. Yet, it could be difficult to face one’s own demons, risk speaking about one’s family and friends since people may betray this personal trust and not want to be implicated in someone else’s personal writing.

Still, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, it is the many different forms that have contributed to personal writing being inadequately theorized and singularly defined. While variety keeps possibilities open, it also makes it difficult to examine its function as a genre. In “Autobiographical Manifestos”, Sidonie Smith discusses the dangers of the split in autobiography:

Any autobiographical practice that promotes endless fragmentation and a reified multiplicity might be counterproductive since the autobiographical subject would have to split itself beyond usefulness to be truly non-exclusionary. And it is difficult to coalesce a call to political action founded upon some kind of communal identity around a constantly deferred point of departure. (434)

These divisions and splits have contributed to the controversy over personal writing. Developing criteria for evaluation has been a highly contested process and often counterproductive. Still, Smith goes back to reinforcing the value of personal writing. She explains, “However problematic its strategies, autobiographical writing has played and continues to play a role in emancipatory politics. Autobiographical practices become occasions for restaging subjectivity, and autobiographical strategies become occasions for the staging of resistance” (434). Again, it seems that it is the indecisive and often contradicting nature of personal writing that keeps it relevant and useful.

Ultimately, the personal is still considered dangerous because people either identify or don’t identify with the stories being shared. In *Touchstones and Bedrocks: Learning the Stories We Need*, Victoria Ekanger talks about the way her writing fits into the world of writing around her: “I am attracted to books that encourage and teach me to listen for my own stories in the context of others’ stories” (93). But it is precisely this desire to know the personal and identify with it which can lead to a desire for idealization and actually keep others who are not seen to have “important” or even “typical” lives without spaces for representation. Smith and Watson explain, “The private and unique individual proclaimed representation status through a life worthy of inspection, summation, and print. But the very gesture of proclamation became one means by which national mythologies produced the conformity of individuals to new notions of identity and normative concepts of national subjectivity” (5). Our lives today are very easily accessible, but the danger lies in the way we interpret the fragments we are presented with and the identities we assume ourselves and assume for others. Again, we need to be

aware of the identities we privilege and the ones that are lost or underrepresented. There is never one subject of autobiography; it is at once intertextual and cross-disciplinary (Stanley 242) but many subjects are privileged over others.

Perhaps the hardest autobiography to study is that of the everyday person, or everyday academic/student if only because it is the hardest to find. Recovery of autobiographical/academic selves implicates the recovery of the autobiographical voices of many others considered to populate the “borderlands” if for only the same reason; that they have gone unnoticed, been silenced or been lost. The recovery of writing seen as “everyday” or “commonplace” is no easy task, and many who did not value “everyday autobiographical writing” do not see a large place for it now in new scholarship. This writing is often thrown away, stored in attics, or hidden so as not to reveal family secrets. Even currently we are losing the personal interactions we have on the Internet with online classes, blogs, and chatboards to the wells of e-mails deleted to make room on our hard drives.

The ordinary is often not just comforting, it is necessary for existence and the creation of a future; it is very much political in its inclusion. Potential for valuation of daily writing can be seen more articulately in the work of Doris Sommer who makes this value clear in “Not Just a Personal Story” as she breaks down the complications of the “I” verses the collective in her discussion of Latin American women’s testimonials. Testimonials are spoken life histories that stress development and continuity. They are at once an attempt to keep historical record for a society and maintain the importance of personal experiences in this society for the present and the future. According to Sommer,

When the narrator talks about herself to you, she implies both the existing relationship to other representative selves in the community and potential relationships that extend her community through the text. She calls us in, interpolates us as readers who identify with the narrator's project and, by extension, with the political community to which she belongs. The appeal does not produce only the admiration for the ego-ideal we might feel for an autobiographer who impresses us precisely with her difference from other women; nor does it encourage the consequent yearning to be (like) her and so to deny her and our distinctiveness. Rather, the testimonial produces complicity.

(118)

Investigations such as Sommer's bring the larger implications of life stories to fruition. This recording is complex, although its contribution is often oversimplified. Sommer makes the distinction between the autobiographers who maintain autonomy because the social strata allow them to and those who do not have a choice. According to Sommer, "Autobiographers can enjoy the privilege and the privacy of being misunderstood, whereas those who testify cannot even afford to survive it" (130). I will return to the concept of testimonial in Chapter 2 and continue to examine the relationship of privilege and the use of "I".

Historical inclusivity is an issue for many who feel they not only represent themselves, but their race and the possibilities for their race. Jacqueline Jones Royster in *Traces of A Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women* notes that African American women's writing is at once political and personal, and that the two

are inseparable. She argues that African-American women's writing is so diverse that it makes a space where writing in different forms is encouraged and necessary. According to Royster,

African-American women are poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights and scholars. They are also writers of essays in the public domain. On one hand, we might say then that these women are writing across genres, which suggests an inclination as writers to be multidimensional, to demonstrate a general commitment to productivity, and to evidence a specific desire not to limit their visions or their voices in any way by the form of expression. Another way of stating it is that the writers have an irresistible desire to write – and to do so by whatever form seems appropriate at the time. This flexibility suggests that these writers are operating not just aesthetically but also rhetorically. In using language and literacy across a matrix of communicative practices, they illustrate how highly they value the place and function of language in their lives. (20)

For Royster, African American women see writing as a reflection of their history, their personal lives and a method for “sociopolitical activism” (25). By being highly personal Royster suggests you are able to communicate with those around you (27). As she explains,

The implication here is that a communicator who has internalized values from a cultural system that holds oral practices in high esteem is likely to carry those values into her literate practices as well, such that sense-making strategies are perceived flexibly and the lines between orality and literacy blur, sometimes to

such an extent that interpretive power comes not from separating the practices but from acknowledging the blurring. (31)

Just as ideas about orality can meld into ideas about writing, a concept that I will explore in depth in Chapter 2, personal history is able to blend with lived writing experiences and research. Royster demonstrates how important it is to let others know that they are not operating alone. Composition scholars work from more than a research-for-research's sake perspective, but in the larger political sphere, where they gain power from what is expressed.

In discussing African-American women's biographies, Regina Blackburn also emphasizes that what most African-American women experience and record is necessarily part of a larger social movement (133). Relations to ethnicity are as complicated as relationships to gender and social surroundings, producing texts that like other personal histories, have much larger social implications and thus make women question how they will be read and by whom. I seek to provide critical context to create a more inclusionary definition of personal writing that includes new models and possibilities.

Concluding Thoughts

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, James Olney feels that its inability to fit a specific genre is what makes personal writing appealing. The categories of who can write autobiographies are not fixed whereas where they are published and how they are read might be. For Olney,

This is the crux of the matter, the heart of the explanation for the special appeal of autobiography to students of literature in recent times: it is a fascination with the self and its profound, its endless mysteries and, accompanying that fascination, an anxiety about the self, and anxiety about the dimness and vulnerability of that entity that no one has ever seen or touched or tasted. (Olney 23)

There are still many things in place to make people doubt going public with the private is a good idea, yet there is also a fascination with all things personal.

According Philippe Lejeune, you need to be a writer to be an important autobiographer. In order to be a writer, he states that you need to be “published” by an outside source and receive monetary compensation for your writing (250). This is something that can possibly keep many people who want to write their life stories silent. In my previous discussion of his consideration of French women’s autobiographies, part of a larger project he has taken on over the years to make a comprehensive volume of modern French autobiography, the problems with making this type of requirement become abundantly clear. If you choose to exclude those who self-publish or don’t publish at all, you are excluding a huge body of potentially valuable work from future generations.

Publishing practices aside, many do not have the means, time, or ego to publish or want to publish their writing, although they may think it valuable to themselves, or to future generations of their family. Once again, Lejeune shows the main problem with exclusion of cultural, gender and monetary circumstances. In “Women and Autobiography at Author’s Expense,” Lejeune investigates a personal publishing service

that provides none of the criteria for autobiographical writing mentioned by Lejeune, only books by women who feel that they need to tell their life stories. “As for the lives of dutiful women and family chronicles, who, outside the family circle, is going to be interested” (257)? This brings up a good point: Who does gain from the “everyday” autobiographical?

At stake in questions of who does and who should engage in personal writing is the question of value. This is also true when thinking about what we are taught to read for value. What we read, how we are taught to evaluate specific canons of writing shapes the way we respond in the future and what we choose to preserve and analyze. According to Victoria Ekanger,

When belief in a category (or canon) or necessary stories is promoted, values and visions about story possibilities are fettered. Such belief deludes us into calling whole our partial pictures of creatively imagined human experience and results in making stories that rend us culturally for stories that hold us together. It seduces us into finding universals before we’ve experienced enough stories for this to be likely. (95)

Assuming any body of work includes the experiences of all individuals is what leads to dangerous territory in any field. Frances Zauhar points out the danger of assuming any one point of view represents all outlooks out when discussing personal writing in “Creative Voices: Women Reading and Women’s Writing.” She looks for underrepresented voices and how we can incorporate them into what we are exposed to for the possibility of multiple levels of identification. Zauhar contends,

In contrast to prevailing theories of reading, feminist critics tend to see the relationship between the reader and the text as collaborative rather than submissive, demonstrating that the reader's choice to listen to the speaker in the text is not a matter of subordination but of cooperation, because she finds her own voice enabled rather than silenced by the influences of the text. (107)

Making more voices available can only increase the possibilities for identification and reader-response collaboration. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, student voices are a large part of this expansion. Peter Abbs sums up his ultimate desires in articulating a way to teach that includes student's personal experiences and provides room for their growth: "What I hope I have shown is that education is not primarily concerned with the accumulation of facts and techniques, but rather with the expression and clarification of individual experience" (5). The trick now is to make it happen.

As I will continue to explore in my future chapters, especially Chapter 5 where I interview Compositionists who incorporate personal writing in their scholarship and classroom practices, many if not most scholars included in this study not only believe that we are not capable of being truly objective and separating ourselves personally from what we write academically, but that this should not be a goal. Paul John Eakin asks "What are we reading when we read autobiography? Are we diminished as persons, I wondered, when we can no longer say who we are" (2)? If we maintain the goal of separating out the personal from our writing, much of the value may be lost.

As Kirsch points out in her discussion of women's writing, there is never a good place to end, and that trying to end too neatly may only cause the piecemeal and personal

level of the writing to be lost. For Kirsch,

Conclusions demand that an author summarize and unify, make coherent what might be otherwise fragmented, impose order and control on material that might be otherwise out of order, out of control. Such demands can encourage researchers to reduce complex phenomena and erase differences for the sake of developing coherent – and totalizing – theories. (125)

There is no single theory to the use of personal writing, only an ability to become increasingly aware of its presence and value for the present and to make space for its future. Personal writing is a vast, variegated, and contested category.

As I have discussed, moving from the singular traditional narrative autobiography to a version that is more socially inclusive demonstrates personal writing's historical expansion and potential. Feminist concepts of writing have allowed for greater inclusivity in the genre, embracing experimental forms and representative experiences. Composition provides a number of personal narratives that range from collected volumes to single-career stories. In addition, the classroom and literacy narratives, forms I will discuss in Chapter 3, really help us to see how our own writing practices come into play in the classroom and how they affect our students' writing. Despite my efforts to add to the large body of scholarship, it is true that there are many important forms I will not visit in this dissertation, including religious autobiography, autobiographical poetry and popular biography. My intention in this chapter is to demonstrate the progression of personal writing to suggest possibilities for further growth using methods from performance studies, the topic of Chapter 2. Performance studies draws on many of the same concepts

employed by Anthropology and Communication that have been embraced by the scholars discussed in this chapter and by the scholars I have interviewed for this project.

Continuing on this path, I hope to show additional examples of personal writing's possibilities through expanded research methods coming from performance studies and include not only the voice of scholars, but also the voices of students.

Chapter 2 – Personal Performance Pedagogy: Extending Definitions of Personal Writing

Personal writing itself does not occupy a single genre. Rather, it makes an important contribution in various subfields of the humanities. With its emphasis on audience, performance studies rearticulates this variegated genre in terms of rhetoric and an ethical regard for the other. Autoethnographies, mystories, monodramas, and various modes of performance art, that is, simultaneously engage critical self-reflection, the body, creative writing, and gender theory to enact stories of the self in the interest of larger, social change. For this reason, performance studies gives the necessary theory to break open the concept of personal writing and the way it is used in Composition by acting as not only a field but also as a methodology. It provides both textual and non-textual models for how individuals can engage in order to create larger social change, reestablish community in the classroom, and create scholarship that draws on experience and theory simultaneously. It addresses audience and performer, the impact of cultural norms, being inclusionary and how writing can be transformed into something active and without boundaries. As such, performance studies is deeply rhetorical, and this chapter will exploit its rhetoricity in order to identify how audience and analysis of positionality can expand notions of personal writing.

Using current movements in performance studies creates an understanding of how disciplines allow for the creation of the self and larger social change concurrently, and provides a space where students create critical personal narratives in the classroom that can allow them to understand their cultural standing, political investment, and academic position in a new and interactive way. Concepts of performance allow us to rhetorically

critique writings about the self by implying the inclusion of the reader (other), to draw on the performance involved in our students' daily writing outside of the classroom, and even to return to a moment when performance and writing were considered part of the same discipline. Instead of treating personal writing as a way for our students to introduce themselves in class, something that gives them "a break" from their essay-writing (often seen as the heart of first-year composition), or as a way to simply subvert the order of the traditional English classroom which uses but does not privilege the personal, we can critically teach methods of self-writing. Borrowing ideas from performance studies, Composition scholars can expand their notions of teaching and researching writing to include multiple types of personal writing and non-text inquiry. While the methods I suggest would not lead away from the importance of the text, they would add different levels of understanding that both build on textual practices and work outside of them.

By providing a brief background of the field of performance studies and its theoretical applications, I hope to establish the basic boundaries of the field. Throughout my analysis, I will continually return to the concept of audience and the importance it holds in performance studies scholarship. When students have the opportunity to interact and engage a live audience, they are able to translate their ideas in their writing. Audience not only allows them to focus and shape their thoughts in writing, it in addition changes the nature of what they are performing and thus the entirety of their projects. What is more, the mutual focus on audience allows performance studies and rhetoric – often the partner term to composition – to more easily form theoretical alliances. From

here, I will take a look at the way Composition scholars have used performance in their classrooms and research. In addition, I will explore methods of self-performance that performance studies has already embraced and that can translate to composition practices. I hope that these moves will provide the space to think about new potential for personal writing and performance.

Performance Studies: A Brief History of Personal Performance

Performance studies is a relatively new discipline, beginning in the 1950s, which seeks to examine daily interactions and cultural norms and how they are interpreted. Major theorists examine interactions with traditional modes of performance and the benefit of examining culture as performance in order to come to an understanding of how performance plays a role in most aspects of life. Like any discipline, there is much argument over boundaries, but scholars such as Richard Schechner provide what is generally agreed upon in the field as an overarching definition. In “Performance Studies: The Broad Spectrum Approach” Schechner explains, “Performance – as distinct from any of its subgenres like theatre, dance, music, and performance art – is a broad spectrum of activities including at the very least the performing arts, rituals, healing, sports, popular entertainments, and performance in everyday life” (7). Performance studies methodology is not only a way to understand different activities that fall under this definition of performance, it also provides theory that allows the practitioner to open up and analyze text. Performance studies is about making ourselves aware of what we do and why we do it. Much like traditional writing analysis, it invites us to consider

audience and performer, their roles, the positionality of each and how they are affected by norms of the field or culture they are addressing. Like writing, performance by definition has an audience and a performer. This interaction critically changes the nature of the process and the product of performance and performance writing.

Drawing from the ideas of Herbert Blau and Richard Schechner, Marvin Carlson in “Performance” analyzes the difference that comes from this idea of thinking about actions rather than just doing them. According to Carlson, “The difference between doing and performing, according to this way of thinking, would seem to lie not in the frame of theatre versus real life but in an attitude – we may do actions unthinkingly, but when we think about them, this introduces a consciousness that gives them the quality of performance” (4). According to Carlson, these actions can be divided into two different ideas – showing what we are capable of doing and engaging in what is culturally inscribed. What makes it performance is an understanding of the “doubleness,” a concept from Richard Bauman, which describes the differences between being simply an observer and having the awareness of audience and self as performer. The idea of being aware of your actions rather than just engaging in daily activities causes each of these actions to have increased meaning and context. This allows the practitioner to understand their own cultural positionality and become more critically aware of the circumstances that help inform their actions. For this reason, performance theory has been adopted by many disciplines as an important methodology.

According to Dwight Conquergood, in many ways considered the founder of the field, in “Beyond the Text,” “the performance-sensitive ways of knowing hold forth the

promise of contributing to an epistemological pluralism that will unsettle valorized paradigms and thereby extend understanding of multiple dimensions and a wider range of meaningful action” (2). Because of its range as a methodology, the potential for application in other disciplines is wide ranging. For Schechner, a discussion of applicability comes as he discusses what he terms the “broad spectrum” approach. He explains, “As for the broad spectrum approach – treating performative behavior, not just the performing arts as a subject for serious study – this idea is just beginning to make some headway among the academic establishment.” (7). As Schechner states, the application of these theories is just beginning to make its mark in other disciplines as academics realize the potential for inclusionary criticism that comes from engaging these practices. Beyond the large impact it has already made in the way performing arts are theorized and taught, Conquergood really called for it to be adopted by a wide range of academic disciplines: “What needs to be added is how performance is used in politics, medicine, religion, popular entertainments, and ordinary face-to-face interactions...Courses in Performance studies need to be made available...to the university community at large. Performative thinking must be seen as a means of cultural analysis. Performance studies courses should be taught outside performing arts departments as well as part of core curricula” (8).

Scholars such as Ronald Pelias have theorized actual applications of Performance studies in varied disciplines including Anthropology and English studies. In his book *Performance Studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, Pelias gives an overview of performance and what exactly on a daily basis determines what performance is and how

we can view it. He writes, “Performance is a communicative act embodying cultural norms and values. In this way, performance has the power to maintain cultural traditions and beliefs. Yet performance also has the power to transform culture. By stretching the limits of cultural expectations, by providing alternative visions, performance can bring about change” (11). Much of this impact happens through the relationship of the performer with the audience. Instead of simply interacting textually, performer and audience engage in a “genuine dialogue” which promises to change both perspectives. In this way, the performer is forced to adjust and interact with her surroundings. Pelias explains,

When genuine dialogic engagement occurs between a performer and an aesthetic text, the performer encounters another voice. The aesthetic text enters the performer until its words can be spoken as if they were the performer’s own. To allow another voice to speak in one’s presence, to have genuine conversation with another, to enjoy and intimate merger of self and other - that is the performer’s ultimate goal. When performers neglect this goal, they deny their human potential and silence those who seek to be heard. (17)

This kind of interaction may not be easy, but it makes the connection between performer and audience readily apparent and the need to adjust and change based on surroundings central to the performance.

In the following sections, I will explore the ability of Performance studies to act as an inclusionary methodology that allows for interrogation of the self while broadening ideas about the composition of texts. As Pelias suggests, performance facilitates not only

translation but also comprehension. “Performance offers an experience, an encounter with another sensibility. Experience allows for learning, for new knowledge” (20).

Personal Performance and Textual Possibilities

Richard Bauman sets up the stakes for the category of the personal in terms of performance. Practitioners tend to focus on the concept of personal narrative and how it is performed and what the implications of this performance are. For Bauman, personal narrative performance does not exist separately from daily life but instead changes relationships and extends understanding of daily life. He explains that it works within accepted social discourses instead of as a separate mode of expression. Personal narrative performance is also interactive and due to the live nature of it, always changing. In addition, personal narrative performance provides a way to think about the doubleness of performance that Carlson points out. Performance itself interrogates the role of the individual and how personal investment and analysis of the self can lead us to a larger understanding of society and our position within it. In this way, personal performance occupies a similar space in Performance studies as personal writing does in Composition. The personal is central to most of the practices in the field while receiving less critical attention than it deserves. In “Performance,” Marvin Carlson speaks primarily about performance art versus theatre,

Its practitioners, almost by definition, do not base their work upon characters previously created by other artists, but upon their own bodies, their own autobiographies, their own specific experiences in a culture or in the world, made

performative by their consciousness of them and the process of displaying them for audiences. Since the emphasis is upon the performance, and on how the body or self is articulated through performance, the individual body remains at the center of such presentations. Typical performance art is solo art...It is not surprising that such performance has become a highly visible – one might almost say emblematic – art form in the contemporary world, a world that is highly self-conscious, reflexive, and obsessed with simulations and theatricalizations in every aspect of its social awareness. With performance as a kind of critical wedge, the metaphor of theatricality has moved out of the arts into almost every aspect of modern attempts to understand our condition and activities, into almost every branch of the human sciences – sociology, anthropology, ethnography, psychology, linguistics. (6-7)

In essence, although understanding and often even relying on cultural norms to convey meaning, performance art tends to draw on the life of the individual and a kind of individual consciousness to convey specific meaning to an audience. I argue that this is what good writing does, drawing on experience and bias and operating with an understanding of audience and the positionality of both. This kind of solo performance art mimics a modern obsession with the self and perceptions of the self. Applying these theories to daily interaction and classroom pedagogy can be the next step. For Carlson, Looking at the theory and practice of performance that seek within the general assumptions of a postmodern orientation to find strategies of meaningful social, political, and cultural positioning, arguably the most critical challenge confronting

performance today, and certainly the site where the most lively and interesting discussion of performance is now taking place. (8)

Here Carlson is focusing on the personal nature of performance art to discuss how it opens into larger societal issues that deal with identity and citizenship. He is calling for theory that allows these intersections to be fully theorized. Likewise, these concepts about performance art can assist Compositionists who seek to create a sense of the value of experience and positionality in local communities and the classroom.

Kristin Langellier spends a lot of time in her research analyzing exactly how we can take these personal performance practices and not only engage in them but really theorize the process behind them. Similar to concepts of process writing, Langellier seeks a way to theorize the value of the creation of personal performance from beginning to end. In her article “Personal Narrative, Performance, Performativity: Two or Three Things I Know for Sure” Langellier asks “What can we learn about personal narrative in no other way than through performance” (127)? She is essentially calling on us to look at performance as the methodology. Langellier proceeds to describe exactly what she thinks performance has to offer:

Performance is the term used to describe a certain type of particularly involved and dramatized oral narrative. Of special importance is how performance contributes to the evaluative function of personal narrative – the ‘so what? How is this interesting? Who’s interested in this?’...The focus on performance emphasizes the way telling intervenes between the experience and the story, the pragmatics of putting narrative into practice, and the functions of narrative for

participants. From a pragmatic perspective, personal narrative performance is radically contextualized: first, in the voice and body of the narrator; second, and as significantly, in conversation with empirically present listeners; and, third, in dialogue with absent or ‘ghostly audiences’ (Minister). Personal narrative performance is situated not just within locally occasioned talk – a conversation, public speech, ritual- but also within the forces of discourse that shape language, identity and experience. (127)

Here, Langellier sets up major ways that personal narrative performance causes the performer to think about the story. Just like writing, the performer needs to consider the best way to communicate an idea to an audience. How can they make the idea’s value understood? What is the idea’s value? This is not only for a live audience that will shape and partially dictate the performance, but for possible future audiences. It is important to recognize the ability for the audience to shape and change the product and process as well as the potential for the body to dictate an understanding to contextualize the narrative in a drastically different way from writing.

To understand this value, Langellier again emphasizes that only by analyzing the process can we really acknowledge all of the different elements that come into play and their value. In other words, the value of the performance is in the theorizing of the different elements and people involved more than the performance itself. For Langellier, “Approaching personal narrative as performance requires theory which takes context as seriously as it does text, which takes the social relations of power as seriously as it does individual reflexivity, and which therefore examines the cultural production and

reproduction of identities and experience” (128). She especially notes the importance of understanding the theory behind the performance so that scholars can recognize the value of narrative practices from cultures that may not have the ability or means to theorize practices themselves: “Identity and experience are a symbiosis of performed story and the social relations in which they are materially embedded: sex, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, geography, religion, and so on. This is why personal narrative performance is especially crucial to those communities left out of the privileges of dominant culture, those bodies without voice in the political sense” (129). The concept that the personal narrative is really a product of a community, not an individual (139) is something I will continue to explore throughout this chapter.

An inclusive idea of identity includes an attention to multiple literacies. In “Beyond the Text,” Dwight Conquergood brings in the understanding of what it means culturally to privilege text above human interaction and how this paradigm can be shifted. He believes basing authority on text is a eurocentric way of thinking that privileges western cultures. He draws on Said’s concept of the “textual attitude” and questions how text can lead to an understanding of life. He appreciates how performance studies has opened the text, as Jill Dolan suggests, into folklore, festivals, rituals and rites (25). Conquergood asks the following throughout his piece, “Whose interests are served by the textualization of performance practices? What are the consequences of thinking about performance and textuality as fluid, exchangeable and assimilable terms? What is at stake in the desire to blur the edges, dissolve the boundary, dismantle the opposition, and close the space between text and performance” (25)? Langellier too suggests, that there is

power not in just the performances themselves, but increased power in the theorizing of process in writing.

Conquergood believes in overturning this reliance on text and his voice had a transformational effect on the field. Conquergood's ideas have shaped a lot of the ways that Performance studies deals with the personal and the cultural narrative. His ideas are rooted in the fact that he believes "performance is a more conceptually astute and inclusionary way of thinking about many subaltern cultural practices and intellectual-philosophical activities" (26). While the concept of textualism includes distance, detachment, and disclosure as ways of knowing, Conquergood argues that performance is immediacy, involvement, intimacy. "The textual paradigm is not a sensitive register for the nonverbal dimensions and embodied dynamics that constitute meaningful human interaction, what Mikhail Bakhtin call bodies of meaning" (26). The truth according to Conquergood is that many people involved in important performance practices have limited access to literacy and feel things in song, vocality, performance rather than through the written word. Still, the written word, as Langellier suggests, dictates what is seen as important. "The move from scholarship about performance to scholarship as, scholarship by means of, performance strikes at the heart of academic politics and issues of scholarly authority" (Conquergood, 33). For this reason, there must be a way to embody an inclusionary model of performance while also properly theorizing it.

The concept of testimonial is an example of an inclusionary model of performance, a process where one personal narrative is recorded and speaks for many who are not able to speak for themselves. It does not privilege the text in that it often

represents cultures that don't have the same access or relationship to the text. In testimonial, the concept of the personal and of the "I" is not fixed term and people rely on oral histories rather than textual ones. Scholars such as John Beverly, Kamala Visweswaren, Ruth Behar and Doris Sommer have written extensively on the impact oral histories and community identification have on our understanding of "I" and of the personal narrative. It draws on a translation of oral text to communicate a representative idea.

In "The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio" John Beverly writes on the power of collective story-telling and how people of other cultures do not understand or embrace the category of the Western "I." He engages in work that embraces "testimonio [as] a 'politically correct' alternative to autobiography in that, among other things, as (usually) a textual representation of actual speech, it implies a challenge to the loss of the authority of orality in the context of processes of cultural modernization that privilege literacy and literature as norms of expression" (106). According to Beverly, Latin American testimonial is "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (92). For Beverly, testimonio is a completely new category that is not reducible to ethnography or oral history because it is concerned with a problematic collective social situation in which the narrator lives and therefore must be representative of a social class or group and speak for a community or group. It is a non-fictional, popular-democratic form of epic narrative hero figure (95).

In this type of writing there is no such thing as a unique “I” in that one person’s experience has the ability to stand for the experience of a people (103). Beverly believes that the way testimonio is treated by academics not only preserves voices of those who cannot speak, but does so in an ethically responsible manner. “Testimonio is a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative in the sense that it implies that any life so narrated can have a kind of representational value. Each individual testimonio evokes an absent polyphony of other voices, other possible lives and experiences” (96). The creator of testimonio is not literate therefore it requires tape-recording and transcription – for this reason it lends itself to a different kind of “truth-effect.” For Beverly, “testimonio implies a challenge to the loss of the authority of orality in the context of processes of cultural modernization that privilege literacy and literature as norms of expression. It allows the entry into literature of people who would normally, in those societies where literature is a form of class privilege, be excluded from direct literary expression, persons who have had to be represented by professional writers” (97). Instead of being represented in a kind of non-fiction, actual language is recorded and transcribed to preserve the feeling of the narrative as well as the text.

Testimonio’s value lies in the fact that it provides a responsible model for creating a text of a performance while at the same time representing the cultural boundaries personal narrative performance crosses. According to Beverly,

Testimonio gives voice in literature to a previously ‘voiceless,’ anonymous, collective popular-democratic subject, the pueblo or the ‘people,’ but in such a way that the intellectual or professional, usually of bourgeois or petty bourgeois

background, is interpellated as being part of, and dependent on, the ‘people’ without at the same time losing his or her identity as an intellectual. In other words, testimonio is not a form of liberal guilt. It suggests as an appropriate ethical and political response more the possibility of solidarity than our charity. (98-9)

This concept of the collective “I” and the possibility for the self to be representative of a larger community will continue to be an important concept as I consider the ethical implications of personal writing.

D. Soyini Madison, who I will return to later in Chapter 3 for her ideas about performance in the classroom, continues to theorize the political applications of personal performance in “Performance, Personal Narratives, and the Politics of Possibility.” She describes her study as analyzing the performance of possibilities and those who do not have the opportunity to voice the self. Madison explains, “I am concerned, primarily, with the performance of subversive and subaltern narratives, the challenge of traveling between domains of power, and the ‘moral responsibility’ of artists and scholars fashioning more human possibilities for the problems that ‘beset our world’” (277). She argues that by privileging the written word we prescribe language and meanings on others or ignore them (277). Instead, by ethically recognizing that each personal narrative is part of a larger whole, we can maintain the value of the narrative and enact its potential for collective action and change. She reminds the reader that personal narrative is not really about subjectivity as much as it is about intersubjectivity and audience (281). Madison suggests that performances build like snowflakes, to gain power (280).

Considering how performance fosters an awareness of audience and community, in *The Future of Performance Studies: Visions and Revisions*, a number of scholars and practitioners of Performance studies contribute pieces on the use of personal performance in their fields. The questions they ask are similar to the questions asked in the field of Composition, where we consistently question value, how a story is shared, who the audience will be and whether by representing individual voices we are trying to generalize experience. By looking at their own integration of personal performance, we can see a number of possibilities for the field of Composition to similarly integrate this methodology. According to Ronald Pelias, the central question in these essays is “From your point of view, what will animate the study of personal narratives in the 21st century? What will be the more exciting aspects of your work? The more troublesome?” (200). Scholars were asked to consider the problems and the ethics involved in personal performance. “How do the three subject positions (constituting, maintaining, resisting) get negotiated? Does the self offer ‘knowable space’? Does personal narrative invite the ‘mistake of homogeneity?’ Who is authorized to tell a personal narrative? Is the audience authorized?” (200) The negotiation of identity, attention to audience and avoidance of generalization all show attentiveness to context that is necessary for the successful integration of the personal.

Throughout these discussions of the multiple values of personal performance, there is a desire to theorize value in order to provide textual evidence as well as ways to continue supporting and teaching performance practices. In response to Pelias’ prompt, Darlene M. Hantzis states personal experience should not be understood as evidence

unless it is interrogated and theorized. Analyzing the self in cultural spaces destabilizes the self. She believes we are produced by personal stories, not producing them and that this idea of the personal also belongs to the cultural and socio-political not individual. She feels that we need to acknowledge how selves are produced, maintained, regulated and resisted in a larger societal way, again taking away from the traditionally individualized nature of personal narrative theory (205).

Tami Spry in “Performative Autobiography: Presence and Privacy” thinks about how she can contextualize her own writing and performance which focuses on the body and reenactments of things like rape and assault. She thinks about how marks on the body and using her body changes the focus of the performance and focuses on the relationship between the performer and the audience rather than reinforcing a separation. “How does this immediacy affect the audience’s engagement with performance? What meanings are created because of the corporeal and performative presence of the violated body on stage?” (254) She points out that her writing often occurs in the rehearsal of the performance, and she performs before writing some scripts. In other words, the performance encourages and inspires the writing instead of the other way around. Spry translates kinesthetic elements of the body and voice, from stage to page (256). Spry explains, “In processing my experience of sexual assault, I needed to know if other women’s experiences were similar or different and in what ways. But even more, I needed to reflect intensely upon and understand intimately my own assault” (255). In order to create and pass on effective performance practice, she theorizes their place in a larger context of women who shared like experiences.

In “Personal Narratives Changed my Life: Can They Fortell the Future?”

Mercilee M. Jenkins in response to the Pelias prompt discusses the plays she writes which are based on oral histories and that weave together stories and ways of speaking into a dramatic, effective whole personal narratives that to her were most interesting and effective when they were not what she intended to gather (266). “I decided to combine interpersonal communication and Performance studies using ethnographic methods and conversation analysis to study the verbal art in the everyday communication of women.” (264). Through this process, she wanted to emphasize that we are not authors of our stories, only interpreters. She keeps in line with the concept of the self as situated and as the most interesting personal narratives coming from their context and ways that they are told. To convey the stories most effectively, she actually tries to break from narrative form into scenes that would connect to tell a story so that it does not present itself as a coherent whole. Jenkins believes we can only learn about and teach interpersonal communication from the performance of these personal stories (270).

Playwrights and performers such as Anna Deveare Smith use interviews and ethnographic fieldwork not only to get the text of someone’s story, but intense character study to portray the way language is embodied. They use multiple personal narratives to create a larger picture that usually does not add up to a singular coherent story but rather presents multiple viewpoints to provide a view of the complexity of human experience of events.

Kristin M. Langellier reiterates a lot of this sentiment in “Voiceless Bodies, Bodiless Voices: The Future of Personal Narrative Performance” as she discusses the

overlap of these performance practices and their relationship to text. She does not want to see personal narrative as a text for performance but as a situated performance practice which must be critically examined for its text/context relations (208). “According to Anna Deveare Smith and Sidonie Smith, the personal is political only upon condition that identity is articulated in its embodied and material specificity - its problems and privileges - and destabilized in performance” (210). She believes scholars must perform personal narrative and look at and critically investigate production since context is as important as text, social relations of power. In this manner performers can intensify the experience using detail, reported speech, parallelisms, appeals to the audience, paralinguistics and gestures.

Langellier believes that performance can transform, but that it is not to be assumed that this will necessarily happen (209). She asks, “How can personal narrative expose rather than erase, mark rather than mask, the politics of the personal?” (210) To make it effective, Langellier believes that we need not to glorify, but to produce knowledge of how it works, how it gets power, condition, consequences and to also take an account of what we learn by performing. The questioning continues: “What can we learn in no other way than through the perspectives of performance and performativity about the workings of a practice most often conceptualized in terms of representation rather than embodiment?” (211). Again, theorizing performance and its practices is what makes it powerful – this is the same theory I hope to apply to personal writing in Composition Studies. It is an idea that comes out of the process writing movement and that can be extended into the embracing of performance practices.

It is important to consider ways to draw on the personal and simultaneously provide the room for this necessary reflection and how for our purposes in Composition Studies, we can preserve our valuation of text and textual practices in addition to supporting performance and other oral and non-literate practices. In “Performing the Mystery: A Textshop in Autoperformance” Michael Bowman discusses ways to teach and to evaluate a performance form called “mystery,” using text in a responsible and effective way. His guidelines can help Compositionists think about how to situate and follow through with personal performance in the classroom. Bowman explains, “While using performance as a means to explore the self, or alternative ‘selves,’ has been a staple of performance art in the United States since the 1970s, introducing autobiographical or autoperformance work in the performance classroom presents a number of challenges as well as opportunities” (161). There is anxiety around many of the issues that exist in Composition studies including how to grade it even though teachers come to the conclusion that personal performance is easy to grade. The contributors to this volume point out that it is necessary to distance the pieces from trauma or anything too personal or potentially problematic for the classroom, an issue I will continue to explore in Chapter 5. While doing this, they provide interesting ideas about its relationship to text and how personal narrative and text can interact responsibly. Bowman continues throughout her piece to investigate, “How might Performance studies classes also take into account the inventive strategies of texts and performances they encounter and learn invention from the performing arts, without forsaking interpretation and criticism” (163)?

The practices Bowman discusses draw on Gregory Ulmer's ideas about "textshop" and "mystoriography" which combine concepts behind the creation of multi-mediated texts and personal narrative discourse. By definition, "Mystory is Ulmer's name for a mode of creative research appropriate to a postliterate age, one that would result in a multimedia text, such as a video or a performance, rather than a more traditional expository essay...mystory attempts to uncover and trace the story of the 'self' that is buried or enciphered in a variety of 'other' historical discourses" (164). Mystory is a way to study the societal and cultural practices that create the self and to present the understanding in not just a textual, but performative manner.

Bowman's article focuses on how this "intertextual" balance can be reached. It seeks to provide methods for considering audience and context to represent experiences rather than simply trying to recreate them: "Its basic move is to shift from a 'readerly' to a 'writerly' stance in regards to performing personal or autobiographical materials. Instead of asking students to reproduce the personal experiences, events, or narratives of their lives in a performance, it [mystory] requires them to rewrite those experiences...The mystorical approach...seeks to foreground its own artificiality, to demonstrate its rhetorical self-consciousness" (162). As Bowman explains, Ulmer refers back to Carlson's concept of "doubleness" that asks the performer to recognize the experience and the performance of the experience simultaneously. Describing how it plays out in her classroom Bowman explains, "Because the mystory is typically built as a collage or assemblage of textual/experiential fragments, and because it seeks to recode or reaccentuate those fragments intertextually or semiotically in the performance, the

mystery performance becomes an occasion for inventing new knowledge of the self, rather than merely reproducing what is already known” (162). The key to the efficacy of personal narrative is being aware of value and how stories are rhetorically constructed and are conscious assemblages of imperfect fragmented memory. For practitioners of personal performance, understanding comes from the creation and performance of the mystery as well as understanding the theory behind it. Enacting stories operates similarly to other disciplinary ideas of hypothesis and realization. For Bowman, “The point in both the science and humanities labs is to produce a person capable not only of reciting the history of invention or analyzing the inventions of others, but of inventing something. The lesson should be that imagination and imitation are both integral parts of invention” (163-4). Students get models and an outline of the lab project that uses Ulmer’s historical and aesthetic criteria. They look at how autobiographies are constructed rather than the ultimate meaning, focusing again on the process not the product – they research, write and perform each piece. Reminding them of societal cues and structures in the formation of identity, they are able remind students so that “‘The personal’ becomes a central part of the mystery to be investigated in the research, rather than the alibi offered in response to the research questions” (169-70). Students report that the variety and quality make the mystery the strongest part of the classroom writing experience. “The value of the mystery experiment is not so much in the product but in the process of creation, just as much of the value and power of autoperformance as practice cannot be comprehended externally, but only through experience. It exists precisely for the user as actions, and it is writerly

through and through” (170). Again, the focus on process highlights the usefulness of personal performance as an applicable methodology for Compositionists.

Although many of the concepts I have already introduced seek to overturn the importance and power of text in a traditional sense, performance theorists also analyze what performance writing must actually look like. In addition to recording processes, texts perform in other ways. Langellier, Bowman and Ulmer all stress the importance of creating text along with the performance and that often a lot of the value is in the theorizing it takes to produce this text. This way we can transform text using performance ways of knowing to be sensitive to the issues of power and authority the use of text generates. These performance practices extend into the writing practices in which we encourage our students to engage. When discussing performance in terms of writing I tend to follow Della Pollock’s definition, set out in her piece “Performing Writing.” Here Pollock discusses the power of writing to create new worlds and engage people, environment and ideas in evocative ways.

Its value depends on its effectiveness, on how well it performs within a system animated not only by democratic conflict but by conflict over the nature and aims of democracy. That conflict in turn performs writing as an effect, as a sedimentation in the form of a specific social relation. What I want to call performative writing is thus both a means and an effect of conflict. It is particularly (paradoxically) effective. It forms itself in the act of speaking/writing. It reflects in its own forms, in its own fulfillment of form, in what amounts to its performance of itself, a particular, historical relation (agonistic, dialogic, erotic)

between author-subjects, reading subjects, and subjects written/read. Performative writing is thus no more and no less formally intelligible than a road sign or a landmark: its styles may be numbered, taught, and reproduced, but its meanings are contextual. It takes its value from the context-map in which it is located and which it simultaneously marks, determines, transforms. (78-9)

While she acknowledges that defining terms works against her own ideas of performative writing, she still tries to define the way she conceptualizes its value and authority.

Pollock says for a piece of writing to be performative, it has to be evocative, metonymic, subjective, nervous, citational, and consequential (85). Examples may or may not expand into visual or oral performance, but social change is an underlying goal. Writings by authors and scholars Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner's "Telling and Performing Personal Stories: the Constraints of Choice in Abortion" demonstrate the power of revealing the most intimate experiences in non-traditional textual forms – forcing the reader to face the reality of abortion through dialogue, reflection, and critique.

Similarly, Theresa Carilli attempts to list ways to write these texts, even though she as Pollock states, knows that even by trying to set up criteria they are imposing limitations on a form that's very basis is working against the concept of limitations (234). Carilli suggests that the personal narrative has potential to transcend all and that it should be the following:

- (1) It should be either a narrative told from the writer's experience or from the writer's embodiment of other individuals' experience
- (2) It should contain unique language which depicts a way of thinking or moving

through the world

(3) Conflicts which reflect ambiguities should be present throughout the narrative

(4) A substantial portion of the narrative should contain mundane details which reflect universal experience

(5) Symbols or metaphors should be present which give broader definition to an overall understanding of the text. (234)

Carilli points out the value of the tension necessary to make performative writing successful. It is both the conflict as well as the everyday that make it representative of a multi-level experience. By making conscious connections to practices and to cultural context, writing can be properly situated and still effective. Reiterating the sentiments of other practitioners she states that “creative/performative writers take on a political accountability by recognizing that they are giving voice to an issue which they do not own” (234). They show they do not “own” the issue by representing multiple voices and viewpoints in their personal writing. Representing multiple voices in personal performance affects the way we can potentially teach concepts of the self in Composition to be more inclusive and representational while also relying on individual experience.

Composition Studies and the Introduction of Personal Performance

As I have already suggested, the combination of personal performance and writing is not a new concept, although its treatment in the field of Composition may differ from the way it is treated in allied disciplines. Two well-known pieces from Composition studies, Thomas Newkirk’s *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* and

more recently Andrea Lunsford and Jenn Fishman's article "Performing Writing, Performing Literacy" notably analyze the interaction of performance and personal writing in the field. What differentiates Composition texts from Performances Studies texts in this case is that the classroom is not only the point of analysis but the ultimate destination for the implication of their theories.

As one of the first Compositionists to directly bring concepts of personal performance and writing into the field of Composition, Tom Newkirk introduces the concept of performance from the beginning as a way that the self and concepts of the self are fully realized in daily life. According to Newkirk, "All forms of 'self-expression' all of our ways of 'being personal' are forms of performance...the key feature of these presentations is their selectivity; every act of self-presentation involves the withholding of information that might undermine the idealized impression the performer wants to convey" (3). Newkirk, however, has a completely different definition of performance than those coming from the field of Performance studies that he employs throughout his book and also a very unclear relationship with its cultural studies and expressivist roots. He talks about the selection of self as a concept of withholding rather than the idea that self is fragmented and as for many Performance studies scholars, the fragmented nature of presentation is not seeking to produce an idealized version but rather a complex one. In personal writing as in personal performance we cannot produce a coherent self, we have many selves and no single truth. For personal writing and personal performance, it is more about audience than accuracy. Yet, for Newkirk, embracing some ideas of performance is very much about distancing the field of Composition from a romantic

literary notion of the autobiographical rather than embracing performance practices.

He introduces these concepts in order to theorize their value in the classroom and in Composition scholarship. Drawing on Erving Goffman's definition of the term "presentation of self" Newkirk states:

We do not *have* a self that we selectively present, hiding *x*, revealing *y*. Rather the sense we have of being a 'self' is rooted in a sense of competence primarily, but not exclusively, in social interaction. It is a sense of effectiveness, the robust feeling that we possess a repertoire of performances so natural that they cease to seem like performances at all. (5)

Newkirk discusses how we present images of self in our day-to-day lives and the things that threaten the certainty of the self. In this way, he introduces the need to examine context in production of personal narratives and performance. Newkirk suggests that it is actually performance that creates the self rather than something than performance being something that is used to convey self.

He argues for personal writing helping to fulfill the need to be self-reflective and see the self as evolving, learning from the story being heard. According to Newkirk, "The personal essay, as I have tried to describe it, mirrors many of the values teachers hold – in effect, it invites students to see themselves as learners, open to revising even deeply held beliefs. It utilizes narrative conventions we admire in literature. And it celebrates the capacity of writing for self-examination and personal discovery" (23). There are inherent dangers for this type of writing; as Newkirk points out, many students don't see these moments of self-formation and may already see self as formed. Thinking of my own

classroom, which I will continue to examine in Chapter 4, a student response to my first-year composition class at FIT on the theme of identity comes to mind. Soon after the semester, a student posted the following response on ratemyprofessors.com, “the whole semester was on ‘identity’ which got old and played out after a while, like hello I know who I am by now!” (<http://ratemyprofessors.com/ShowRatings.jsp?tid=1080159&page=3>). This was a response from a student who also thought it was a “good class” and that I was “very nice.” That the self might not be singular and completely formed may seem apparent to teacher, it is often not the case for the student. To understand this belief in singular identity, Newkirk breaks down forms that can help foster the idea of the changing nature of self.

In order to examine how the self is theorized in the classroom, Newkirk analyzes pieces of personal writing that appeal to him and in addition to taking a look at the personal essay, in his own classroom, takes a look at two additional kinds of personal writing; the eulogy and the testimonial.

Each form serves a psychological and developmental need of the write: They show loyalty, they draw a lesson from the life of someone else, they affirm traditional values, and they are an act of thanks to those who have taken seriously their generational obligation to teach and serve as a model. Yet the very one-dimensional, sometimes sentimental, quality of these forms may clash with an aesthetic that values irony, complexity and ambiguity. Where eulogies and testimonials seek to construct a coherent positive ‘self,’ this picture may seem maudlin and dishonest to those who endorse an aesthetic that prefers the

postmodern image of the divided, fragmentary self. The tendency then is to deconstruct, to critique, to look for feet of clay. (56)

These traditionally performed texts have a particular audience and a particular gravity to their performance. Newkirk, by engaging eulogy, does not distance personal performance from what can be a problematic topic, which is any sort of trauma or death, but instead uses these concepts as a jumping off point for analysis. It is not clear what he means when he refers to testimonial as very one dimensional or something that constructs a singular self and it is here where Newkirk really seems to divide from Performance studies.

Newkirk's overview of the problems with writing the self continually returns to the concept of expressivism, making it synonymous with the study of writing the self and idealized versions of what the personal actually means (87). Newkirk asks:

How do we evaluate the effect of one writing course on the political consciousness of students? Have expressivist pedagogies led to isolation, alienation, and an accommodation to the status quo?...To paraphrase [James] Berlin, there are attitudes and values fostered in expressionist pedagogies that resemble those that a capitalistic system seeks to foster in consumers (the self-gratifying enjoyment of 'choice') and in entrepreneurs (private initiative).

Because of this similarity, expressivist teaching causes students to enter happily and even successfully into that system. (89)

That we have the freedom to choose who we are is something that Newkirk tries to work against in his classroom practices, thus emphasizing the importance of society in

dictating much of the self and how we perceive it. Even though he insinuates that this is indeed the case, he critiques a cultural studies perspective where we are products of our culture, what he calls a defensive attitude towards the world (90). Newkirk continues, “The most persistent charge made against expressivism is that of ‘individualism’ – the construction of self as isolated, solipsistic, focused on purely personal gratification and success, oblivious to the communal responsibility... This corrupt, impoverished view of expressivism deserves to be rebuked” (92).

While Newkirk works against this categorization of expressivist pedagogy as shortsighted, he does much to reinforce these ideals throughout his book. Much like the many applications of Performance methodology and its treatment of the “I,” he sees rather that “culture offers a repertoire of subject positions” doesn’t believe “resistance and critique” are the only ways to respond, as he suggests cultural studies tells us are our options (96). He does not, however, offer an alternative and fails to explain exactly why these strategies are necessary, especially in non-literate cultures. Seeking to make peace with the situation in his own way, he comes to philosophize about his relationship with expressivist pedagogy:

It may be time to admit the obvious, that expressivist pedagogy is romantic, that romanticism is deeply embedded in American literary traditions (and I would wager not the actual belief system of even its critics). This romanticism has extraordinary resonance with young writers. It is empowering for students – for all of us – to believe:

that we can imagine ourselves as coherent selves with coherent histories and can therefore create stories about ourselves

that this coherence, this 'identity,' allows for a sense of agency, a trajectory into the future

that we each see the world in a distinctive way and have the ability to make a distinctive contribution to it

that human beings share an essence that allows the 'I' of the writer to become a mirror for us all

that knowing entails feeling, and that discourse becomes sterile if it shuts out emotion

that openness to that particularity of the natural world, what Lawrence Buell calls an 'environmental imagination' serves as a check to human egotism and can create a sense of stewardship. (98)

While beginning to open the dialogue about performance and creation of the self, he quickly reverts to traditional literary concepts about the value of personal narrative and its effects. Newkirk seeks to theorize the comfort in the notion of a stable 'I' while at the same time pointing out the inherent flaws. At the same time, he reiterates the value of this traditional notion of self to invite students into engaging the personal.

Yet the testimonies of writers that Don Murray and others have collected take us inside the lore of writers, acquaint us with a generative set of sometimes contradictory beliefs and habits. It may be that these self-descriptions are inaccurate, that they leave a lot out, that they contain a bit of posturing – yet they

speak to beginning writers and others for whom the achievement of ‘self’ is more than a theoretical issue. (99)

By demonstrating the attractiveness of the public concept of self coming from traditional, if flawed, notions of identity, he settles on the value of the traditional “I” being a sense of comfort and entry point for new writers.

In “Performing Writing, Performing Literacy” Andrea Lunsford and Jenn Fishman take the concept of performance in Composition a step further than Newkirk, working along with two of their students Beth McGregor and Mark Otuteye to analyze a study where they attempted to “describe the breadth of ‘college writing’ experience by our [their] 189 students” (225). This analysis aligns itself more directly with Performance studies and theories of performance I introduce at the beginning of this chapter. During this study where they received a plethora of materials from both inside and outside of the classroom, they began to interview these students and realized they were missing a key piece of information, “writing performances: students’ live enactment of their own writing” (226). They didn’t want just a written product, but an enactment of these practices. Only through this could they develop an idea of value and process. As they explain:

Although ‘performance’ often refers to demonstrable mastery over skills or knowledge, and in writing programs we tend to treat student performance like something we can measure and assess using rubrics, grades, or test scores, our students compelled us to pay attention to the live, scripted, and embodied activities they stage outside the classroom: everything from spoken-word events

and slam-poetry competitions to live radio broadcasts, public speaking, and theatrical presentations. In addition, our students prompted us to consider how the act of embodying writing through voice, gesture, and movement can help early college students learn vital lessons about literacy. (226)

In this way, Lunsford and Fishman include a number of important aspects in their projects that I embrace in my own practices – using performance to engage students lives outside of the classroom in their scholarly practice, encouraging reflection and enactment of performance practices to add to the levels of understanding and writing in response to performance to share and theorize this information in a responsible textual manner.

Their goal was to engage in “identifying how writing performances play a role in early college students’ development as writers” (226). They used qualitative inquiry methods including interviews, texts, and questionnaires and worked closely with two students engaging in performance practices to create their study. As Lunsford and Fishman explain:

Through our work with these two students, and with others in the study, we have learned to see a potentially close relationship between performance and current college literacies. Our collaboration has taught us to count performance as one of the many nonacademic knowledges that students possess, and our work together has compelled us to think about how teachers of writing can respond. How, our research has prompted us to ask, can we expand our curricula and our pedagogies to make room for performance in the writing classroom? (226)

Here, Lunsford and Fishman move from a point of view that performance is innate and something that can be developed in classroom practices. By recognizing the day-to-day role that performance plays in student lives, much like Newkirk, Lunsford and Fishman seek to understand the implications for scholarship and concepts of the personal.

In many ways, the article embraces the potential for performance practices in the classroom and builds upon obvious benefits and connections between the two fields of Composition and Performance studies. As Lunsford and Fishman explain it:

Performance is a dynamic form of literate expression that is both fun and deeply serious. Immediate and face-to-face, performance encourages active participation and collaboration, and thus it models many of the qualities we value most in real-time new-media writing, while at the same time it brings renewed attention to talk and scripted forms of oral communication. A tool for innovation as well as a potential vehicle for helping students to transfer literacy skills from situation to situation, performance, at least from our perspective, stands to reinvigorate both teaching and learning in the writing classroom. (226-7)

Collaborative writing (which is enacted in the actual production of the article), enactment of practices and reflection on the self have always been elements incorporated into the writing classroom and scholars are consistently looking for ways to broaden and reinforce the value of these practices.

Much of their scholarship is affected by the realization of the potential for performance as a methodology rather than just a practice. They carefully explain the direct application of this methodology:

In particular, work in Performance studies has changed our reading of more familiar work in rhetoric and composition, helping us to formulate new questions and new approaches to our data and to college writing research more generally. As a result, we believe that Performance studies...has much to contribute to Composition Studies, a field with a parallel history and a host of similar concerns, including relationships between language and the body, individuals and communities, and social norms and forms of resistance. Perhaps most important, Performance studies offers useful ways of theorizing the oftentimes slippery idea of 'performing', which is both medium and act, noun and verb. (227)

Coming from a cultural studies perspective they realize "performance's ability both to reinforce social hierarchies and to resist them by offering alternative way for imagining and enacting social relationships" (227). It also reminds them of a time when disciplines were not so separate, particularly, as I discuss in my first chapter, a time when speech and writing were part of the same department. "Not only does performance help us draw connections between past and present habits of communication, it also helps us look toward the future and the great range of self-aware, media-savvy moves that are coming to signal full literacy, indeed, the multiliteracies that present-day college writers must strive to achieve" (229). Their integrated vision of writing and critical analysis provides a perfect example of how multiple literacies can contribute to the teaching of writing.

Lunsford and Fishman draw on relevant literature to make a case for the power of "delivery" and Performance studies to expand writing practices. They are also astute in observing the fact that we already participate as our students do in these practices, many

of which relate to the multi-mediated society in which we exist. They do not question, however, whether it is just delivery that makes these pieces more valuable or the topics behind the writing and then the delivery that allow this to happen.

The first student, Mary, explains that it is writing for an audience and working with a persona in her head that she is able to write. This is how she uses performance. “What I want to suggest is that performance brings real writing lessons to life in a way that can be tangible and engaging for students. The specific lesson I’m going to talk about today is that communication through writing is not only what you say but also how you say it” (238). She, in conjunction with Lunsford and Fishman, is able to interrogate the difference between self-performed and non-self-performed writing and what messages need to exist in each. In this way, she is talking about how practices affect her text formation:

In academic writing, you must not only say what, but also how. You must not only make an argument, but also make it with eloquence, a human touch, and polish. Great composition writing must not only be clear and analytical, but also phrased with music. One of the ways to get students to a place where they truly understand the importance of ‘how words are said’ is to work with self-performed texts in which this distinction is literally embodied and personified. (239)

This is a familiar concept that focuses on the value of delivery and reading out loud as a way to understand audience and diction in writing.

For Mark, who has a personal history with Spoken-word poetry and performance there is a more intimate understanding of its value. He explains:

The more I've worked with self-performed writing, the more I've become hyperaware of how the content of my words is interpreted in non-self-performed texts. With this in mind, I've been able to write academic essays that maintain a human touch by learning to collapse the body language and voice modulation of performance directly into the written words themselves. My experience with performance has improved my writing in this way and in so many others. And I strongly believe that even a little experience with performance can help students become more supple and expressive writers. (242)

Mark is able to actually bring in cues from his performance experiences to create performative texts, much like the kind Della Pollock and Theresa Carilli discuss, that focus both on creation of narrative and ideas learned from performance with a live audience.

I seek to extend Lunsford and Fishman's important intervention by calling into question how the personal is tied into these performance practices. What is key for the participants cited in Lunsford and Fishman's study is this concept of investment and what topics they write about outside of the classroom. Performance is not valuable unless the students have motivation. Taking for example Mark's poem which is a highly charged piece, using racial images and harsh language to convey meaning, it is clear the power behind his performance comes from his investment in the ideas in the writing, not just from the performance of the writing. It can be dangerous to ask students to perform pieces they are not invested in, as can be evidenced by the terrible end of the semester presentations so many of us have elicited or at least witnessed. How can you get stand out

performances and investment in these writing practices is what I believe is the real question.

Are there ways to talk about how performance doesn't work? Mark seems to already have a well thought out understanding of what the connection between spoken word and unspoken word can be. Mary produces what we might consider a more traditional response to this kind of prompt (we don't actually know what the prompt is). Enacting multiple roles in her head and in the performance piece, this multi-voiced dialogue being a popular form employed by performance writers. What about the students who don't already possess knowledge of performance? Here Fishman and Lunsford highlight students who already have a background is something akin to theatrical arts - there are no examples from students who do not already have this kind of background.

Also, despite citing the ability for change, there seems to be little follow-up on how there can be change beyond our classroom practices. What are the ultimate implications for students who are encouraged to employ this beyond the composition classroom? Should their voiced performances have goals, teach them about audience, give them the tools necessary or just rely on what they already know? Performance studies after all, is not just about delivery, it is a critical methodology that needs to be fully explored to assess its value. Returning to models of performance in other classrooms can help us understand ways to take these ideas that are just in their initial stages from Newkirk, Lunsford and Fishman and more fully realize their potential.

Concluding Thoughts

Throughout, this chapter demonstrates ways that Performance studies can be valuable as an engaged methodology in Composition. Scholars in allied disciplines have already made strides to include and theorize the value of personal experience and the potential for this experience to be largely inclusive and representative of larger cultural viewpoints. In reviewing the way the personal has been treated in Performance studies, I seek to provide relatable models for the expansion of the concept of self and personal writing in the field of Composition where a number of scholars have already sought to integrate some of these concepts. My hope is to extend this engagement through critical analysis and more thoroughly engaged practices and application.

In setting the stage for the discipline of Performance studies, Ronald J. Pelias lays out the stakes for performance skills in the classroom. “Performance is a communicative act embodying cultural norms and values. In this way, performance has the power to maintain cultural traditions and beliefs. Yet performance also has the power to transform culture. By stretching the limits of cultural expectations, by providing alternative visions, performance can bring about change” (11). Working from a model known as holistic education, Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer in *Teaching Performance Studies* tout that, “Students learn critical reading and critical thinking skills, and they learn print, electronic, and ethnographic research skills. Students learn to read and evaluate all kinds of performance...These practices teach students to read language as heard (as well as written) and to analyze nonlinguistic media such as music, dance, gesture, facial expression, movement, graphic arts, and plastic arts” (9). It is from this

idea of expansion that I work to engage the personal and the performative in my writing classroom. In the following chapter, I will begin by focusing more specifically on ways that personal performance has already made a strong contribution to general classroom practices and more specifically Composition classroom practices. Here I will more bring together the use of personal writing and personal performance, a move not yet fully theorized in Composition studies scholarship.

Chapter 3 – Getting Personal in the Writing Classroom: Theory and Methodology

Upon entering the writing classroom, students are often asked to engage the personal to introduce themselves to the instructor or their classmates. Histories of their individual relationships with writing, family histories and educational histories are just a few examples of what students are asked to write in order to ease them into writing “formal” or “academic” essays. In other words, personal writing can function as a warm-up exercise for “real academic writing.” Using personal writing only as an untheorized method of introduction to other kinds of writing can potentially distance students and their experiences from their subjects of study. When these activities are not given critical attention the result can be that although personal writing will be used in the classroom, the manner in which it is critically considered may not be clear and thus the majority of its value can be lost for the student and the teacher. While the personal obviously is thought to have some value since it is used so frequently in writing classrooms, many teachers may be missing numerous opportunities to draw on the personal critically. Personal writing does not necessarily connote the deeply emotional and private moments many may assume. Instead, as I will continue to explain in my remaining chapters, the personal is a representation of individual and collective experience, sometimes serious, sometimes playful, but always rooted in ideas that are valuable and meaningful for the writer. Among the possibilities for this kind of writing and expanding the way that personal writing is treated and theorized is potentially allowing students to connect with other students to create a classroom community and even connect to the larger university community through extended critical projects that simultaneously engage students’

interests and expand the potential consequences for expansion of these interests. Enacting and experiencing their ideas can help students understand their positionality and the consequences of their positionality. In this way, performance can be engaged not only as an activity but, as I explained in Chapter 2, also as a methodology.

The teaching of performance studies methodology, which includes the personal, can provide methods for the expansion of concepts of the personal in the writing classroom. Activities and methods can be established to help students and teachers build critically on the personal, by grounding it in method and theory, and thus allow first year students to bring what they know to the classroom while simultaneously empowering them and allowing them to connect to other new students. For students who are already established in the university, the personal can be a way for them to give back to their immediate university community or local community. For teachers the personal can create richer connections for community building in the classroom and allow insight into the students' interests and connection to their academics and outside lives. It can encourage us as scholars to value our own personal experiences, positive and negative, and share them with the field in our own writing. Building a critical framework for the use of personal writing in the classroom can thus both empower students and scholars who can then situate their work in a larger body of theory and scholarship. While not without its problems and complications, the introduction of performance into writing classrooms can provide valuable examples for this kind of engagement and expansion.

Min-Zhan Lu's essay "Reading and Writing Differences: The Problematic of Experience" portrays a pattern that appears within Composition again and again; the

desire for an ability to try and re-envision the classroom through our experiences and thus revision our understanding of one another as parts of the classroom community.

According to Lu, “We need to imagine ways of using experience critically: experience should motivate us to care about another’s differences and should disrupt the material conditions that have given rise to it” (239). When we can identify with certain elements of a story or piece of writing, we tend to focus on those experiences at the expense of other important elements and veins. In *Reading and Writing Differences: The Problematic of Experience*, Lu offers a concrete set of “exercises” for her students that will allow them to at first read and interpret a story based on their own experiences, then take part in reading critical feminist discourse, and finally, “re-vision” and rewrite their initial interpretation of the story from new perspectives, incorporating the viewpoints they have read about in order to learn how this can change their initial readings and allow them to see from new perspectives while analyzing their old perspectives (240).

Exercises like the ones that Lu discusses that encourage students to integrate real world experiences into their academic writing provide the basis for performance studies methodology and can foster positive effects on personal classroom writing practices.

In many different ways, teachers have tried to build in the personal in direct and theorized ways. In “Personality and Persona: Developing the Self”, Walter S. Minot discusses the value of building the self-esteem of his students through writing assignments that interrogate the concept of persona (353). He encourages the use of one form of performance where he draws on research that states if we repeat something often enough or use a certain voice, we are more likely to accept it as our own. He argues

essentially that embracing the concept of “I” and using it verbally and in writing makes you more assertive (355). In other words, actively practicing something and utilizing it in multiple ways can make you believe in its value and applicability in a way that just writing it cannot.

But there remains much confusion about the kinds of assignments we can use to engage students on a personal level while allowing them to develop their writing skills. Nancy K. Miller brings this issue to light in her discussion of teaching an autobiography class. What we need to ask of our students and what then to do with what we get is not always easy to figure out and value. Miller writes,

So, on the assumption that the main thing was to write something, instead of a second critical essay I assigned the writing of what I called ‘autobiographical fragments.’ My notion in asking for short takes of personal experience was to bypass both the problem of institutional writing, with its canonized standards of correctness, and the plot of becoming that characterizes canonical autobiography. (466)

While Miller encourages experimentation, she found herself scared to read stories that were too personal, and having a hard time dealing with how to grade and value a student’s life. This is an issue that comes up often as scholars struggle with how to evaluate and teach personal writing. As I will continue to discuss in Chapter 5, teachers have come up with their own ways of rationalizing and evaluating personal writing based upon individualized criteria and expectations. It is this kind of consideration of goals and value that can help mitigate nervousness about evaluation. Miller also considers all

personal writing to be something that requires a kind of secret-telling, which minimizes what I have defined as the personal throughout this study.

Ultimately, Miller realized the value by watching the reactions of her students and by noticing the way she reacted herself. It was valuable both for others in her class and herself as an academic to hear other people's stories, no matter how well written, touching or painful. She explains,

Teaching autobiography provides texts for reading that engender the coming to writing in others. Perhaps the essence of autobiography as a genre – or rather one of its most valuable effects – is to enable this process. To say this is also to say that autobiography in its performance as text complicates the meaning and reading of social identity, and hence of the writing subject. (468)

The students were able to analyze their positions in the classroom and relate to each other through the writing of the personal. This was not only empowering for the students, it also enabled Miller to write her own piece for publication based on her experiences, thus helping her enact what she was teaching. In this way, by empowering both teacher and students, Miller was able to analyze the situation and analyze the value of the experience thus contributing to a larger framework for the analysis and valuation of the personal.

Other scholars such as Janice Hays recommend programs of teaching where students are encouraged to be personal and reflect on their experiences and then “branch out” from there. According to Hays, “The use of personal narrative as topic material or as a springboard for more analytic writing can ensure that students do not find analytic writing irrelevant and dull, even though it may be general or abstract” (174). As I have

mentioned, in order for notions of personal writing to be valued and expanded, scholars need to move away from the concept of the personal as simply a “springboard” to more important or critical writing and understand what function it serves in their classrooms. Although problematic, Hays does still show that in the classroom, many academics believe in the value of “writing ourselves” even if their criteria and analysis of goals are underdeveloped.

Min Zhan-Lu suggests that often we create exercises for our students that allow them to experience what they read on a personal level, although we leave little room for this in our own professional scholarship. She believes that “The task facing a teacher is to help students rethink ways of using personal experience so that readings through the personal will not be at the expense of other stories and selves” (242). If we only use the personal as a “step” to other things, we are not valuing it in and of itself for our students or ourselves. We are unable to understand our environment in a critical way if we are unable to understand how we are situated within it. Lu thus believes:

We need assignments that ask students to explore the analytic possibilities of experience by locating the experience that grounds their habitual approach to differences; by sketching the complex discursive terrain out of an in which the self habitually speaks; by investigating how that terrain delimits our understanding of differences along lines of race, class, sex and gender; and by exploring personal and social motivations for transforming one’s existing self-location in the process of rereading and rewriting. (243)

Instead of using the personal only as a set of uncritical stepping stones, we need to theorize its function and application.

We need a methodology for theorizing the personal that is applicable in the classroom as well as in our scholarship. Such a methodology has to extend beyond limited notions of personal writing and evaluation and include theoretical value for the entire academic community. In this chapter I will introduce ideas of holistic education and performance methodology and how they can push students to interact with their audiences. I will also examine ethnographic and autoethnographic research, how it has been applied and received, in order to set up methods my own classroom practices in Chapter 4. I suggest throughout this chapter that it is the practice of these methods as well as the teaching of them that will provide the consistency and connections necessary to make the personal work productively for both students and scholars.

Using Experience in the Classroom

Students' experiences seem to be at the heart of a lot of personal writing pedagogy, especially for those scholars I interviewed for Chapter 5. Among the concerns raised in these interviews was how to get students to really understand how they can critically analyze their experiences and communicate their value to a larger audience. But how can we draw on these experiences to help scholars and teachers understand their value? I would like to explore a few ideas coming from performance pedagogy in this section to set up the moves I make in my own classroom analysis in Chapter 4 and the points of view of my interview participants in Chapter 5.

Performance pedagogy draws on methods from anthropology, linguistics and theatre to create exercises that simultaneously encourage use of the personal while regarding the position of the participants. It draws on ideas from Performance studies and translates their value in teaching practices. The balance can be found by integrating our goals as scholars with our goals for the classroom. As I will discuss more particularly in Chapter 5 based on my interviewees' responses, it is necessary for teachers to understand exactly what they are asking their students to do and experience this kind of writing for themselves. A separation between the goals of the teacher and the students or understanding of what it feels like to engage experience can cause problems in the ways that personal writing is taught. By understanding the value of their experiences, their cultural positionality and their experiences in relation to those of the instructor, students can more actively write from the personal in a critical way that communicates specific ideas to an identified audience. I argue here and in the next two chapters that enacting goals through methods of performance can help both teachers and students understand the value and structure of personal writing.

According to Nathan Stucky and Cynthia Wimmer in *Teaching Performance Studies*, since performance already borrows so many ideas from various fields of study, it is easy to trace how it is already employed in many disciplines. Stucky and Wimmer explain, "Students learn critical reading and critical thinking skills, and they learn print, electronic, and ethnographic research skills. Students learn to read and evaluate all kinds of performance...These practices teach students to read language as heard (as well as written) and to analyze nonlinguistic media such as music, dance, gesture, facial

expression, movement, graphic arts, and plastic arts” (9). Performance methodology is all about positionality and understanding your own placement and your own actions, a major concern for the Composition scholars I have already introduced. All kinds of learning are part of this methodology, including substantial amounts of writing and verbal engagement. From this integration, you can draw formal papers, analytic essays, scripts, or research. According to Stucky and Wimmer, “A basic theoretical claim of Performance studies is that no approach or position is ‘neutral.’ The challenge is to become as aware as possible of one’s own positions in relation to the positions of others – and then to take steps to maintain or change positions” (xi). For the authors, it is important to study action to be active much like scholars need to study forms of writing in order to write. They believe that students and teachers alike actually need to be engaging in fieldwork and becoming part of what they study in order to fully understand audience and what is at stake (xi). The importance of audience is something I will explore further in Chapters 4 and 5 as I take a look at activities that ask students to interact with their audience rather than try to imagine an intended audience. The value of this direct interaction with an audience and the value of fieldwork is reinforced by Stucky and Wimmer who believe that, “Techniques of embodiment increase students’ awareness of others’ ideological and social subjectivities” (4). When students are able to understand the position of others, they can more accurately come to understand their own positionality. Throughout Stucky and Wimmer’s book, text, scholarship, performance and teaching are inseparable terms. They advocate experiencing what you are asking students to experience.

The concept that performance is something that is always occurring allows students and teachers to mine their experiences and work together to effectively engage them in the classroom. In order to explain how this can work, Stucky and Wimmer draw on the constructivist theory of education that they attribute to Freire, Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey and Nel Noddings (9). This theory contends that students need to be involved in educating themselves for the education to be truly effective. They use the concepts of McLaren and Giroux “to engage student experience with a pedagogy that is both affirmative and critical and which offers the means for self and social transformation” (10). The concept of an integrated experience allows Stucky and Wimmer to introduce the concept of holistic education, which seeks to educate the entire person instead of one aspect. In order to achieve the goals of holistic education, Stucky and Wimmer want performance studies to be seen as a pedagogical tool instead of just as a discipline in and of itself and argue this is a move that has not been made yet.

Other performance studies advocates have theorized ways to help teachers and students effectively integrate experiences into pedagogy. In “Critical Performative Pedagogy: Fleshing Out the Politics of Liberatory Education,” Elyse Lamm Pineau “provide[s] guidelines for generating research questions, developing methodologies, and enhancing classroom practices that marshals the performing body for political change” (42). She embraces the idea that I introduced in my first chapter that we may already be engaging a participatory, engaged methodology although we are not paying critical attention to it. She gives a very useful definition, stating:

Performance methodology means learning by doing and might include any experiential approach that asks students to struggle bodily with course content. In addition, performance methodology emphasizes process over product by requiring students to use their bodies systematically over a period of time, rather than simply at the end of a unit. (50)

Using the methodology's repeated emphasis on process, Compositionists can create links between new ideas coming from performance studies with popular ideas that come from process-writing theories. Performance methodology in addition requires analyzing awareness of what we do and how we do it and other ways we may be interacting with society other than the ways we are currently choosing (50-1).

The links between "real life" and the processes of the classroom have always been clear to many teachers. According to Pineau,

Teachers who routinely engage their own and their students' bodies in the classroom have always recognized that teaching and learning are fundamentally somatic processes. It is notable that the move from theory to practice is being spearheaded by performance and theatre education...it is the disciplinary heart of our pedagogies. Each time that a student explores her or his presentation of self through an autobiographical monologue, or struggles to assume the voice and body of a dramatic character, or whirls through space in an interpretive dance, these educators find further evidence that when students engage their physical bodies they 'come to know' things in a uniquely personal and heuristic manner. (49-50)

Pineau sees the body as something we learn with and the use of the body as a way to allow students to understand things in a more complex manner (50).

An example of one of the things Pineau has her students do to understand how they are physically implicated in the critical work they are doing is don different size breasts and engage in everyday physical activities (51). This forces the students to pay attention to the role of the body in their interactions. At a session of the International Conference of Qualitative Inquiry 2009, I experienced something much simpler but similar in its focus when one of the presenters asked everyone in the room to get up and face one other person. We were forced to actually look someone in the face. This transformed the room from a group of people paying attention to the presenter, jotting down notes, and flipping through their programs into a room of people recognizing those around them. This was an exercise the presenter regularly engages in her classroom to demonstrate the importance and value of body and human connection. Being called to actually engage the body and understand the physicality of the classroom can incite participants to understand the value of this physicality in their other projects.

Pineau has a set of guidelines to consider as we try to make personal exercises that are based on the process and product of personal exploration in the classroom. Her use of the body is symbolic and demonstrates how we are physically and personally implicated in the work that we do inside and outside of the classroom. She offers the following recommendations for similar exercises:

- (1) Acknowledge that inequities in power and privilege have a physical impact on our bodies and consequently must be struggled against bodily, through physical

actions and activism. Critical performance pedagogy puts bodies into action in the classroom because it believes this is the surest way to help those bodies become active in the social sphere. To paraphrase Ernest Boyer, it uses the classroom as ‘a staging ground for self and social renewal’ by requiring students and teachers to rehearse more equitable and impassioned ways that make them human, complex, and compelling.

(2) Develop research that accounts for how particular bodies present themselves in the classroom and provide detailed and evocative accounts of what one sees and experiences in the course of a study. Use all the techniques of a good storyteller in bringing one’s research to life for a reader, in ‘fleshing out’ the characters in ways that make them human, complex, and compelling

(3) Think about what it means to teach performatively across disciplines and at all levels of curriculum design and implementation. What might one do, for example, in a large lecture class that disallows student ‘performance’ in the traditional sense of moving through space? What would a course look like – and more importantly, feel like – if the syllabus were designed according to the model of collaborative group rehearsal? Can performance methodology be integrated across the curriculum in ways that writing has come to be implemented? An important test of critical performative pedagogy will be to apply it as fruitfully to course in the hard sciences as to those in the performing arts. (53)

Understanding the power dynamics of the classroom, where modes of behavior are often strictly coded as well as dress and placement of bodies, can bring about an awareness of

the impact of the physical that translates to larger critical issues. Understanding how we can actively transform the classroom space to make it more politically aware and sensitive to the bodies that create it can bring about an important awareness in our scholarship and the way our students use multiple ways of learning to understand their world. The key to Pineau's methodology is that it asks teachers and scholars to engage in the same behaviors they ask students to engage in creating the connections and awareness necessary to understand personal investment and engagement.

In her book *Public Education and the Imagination Intellect*, Mary E. Weems applies a number of the same concepts to her discussion of the curriculum in K-12 public schools. She wants "critical, imagination-intellectual development as a primary goal in K-12 public schools" (xix). Weems believes the imagination-intellect is achieved by incorporating the body and many methods of critical artistic inquiry in our curriculum. Her ideas work against the concept of separating out ways of knowing and call for an awareness of the links between doing and writing. She believes in:

Teaching students to think by facilitating imagination-intellectual development, by integrating aesthetic appreciation, oral expression, written expression, and performance into the curriculum should be the primary goal of education. That focus will create an increasingly imagination-intellectually astute student population well-equipped to love the pursuit of knowledge, to question, to criticize, to affect positive social change. (3)

Weems' goal is to create an educational model that will extend its influence beyond the classroom. The key to doing this in her opinion is exactly what Pineau suggests –

understanding the classroom as a space where multiple ways of knowing need to be integrated and embraced in order to help students be more aware of the many ways they come to critically understand and interact with their surrounding communities.

Weems believes that in order for her vision of the imagination-intellect to succeed, curriculum needs to include aesthetic appreciation, oral expression, written expression, performance and social consciousness, “Each day students are encouraged to ask questions and critique the information shared by their teachers – to develop new ideas about the subject matter they’re studying, and to both appreciate the art of others and to create art themselves. Oral and written expression is part of each teacher’s daily lesson plan” (6). Weems believes students need to work together as a community as well as work with their teacher for this vision to be successful. Hers is a performance methodology that includes the ideas of doing in order to fully understand and appreciate.

Aesthetic appreciation and expression should be explored simultaneously in the classroom...if...students are allowed to view a painting and paint, discuss, and write about what they see, if they are allowed to develop a dance that describes how they felt while viewing the picture, their imagination-intellecets are stimulated. They experience the work of the artist, and their own creative process becomes the connection to their appreciation of their power to create. (104)

Much like Pineau, she wants students to enact what they study in order to better and more fully understand their place in the process and what they have to personally contribute to it. This gives the students an authority in what they create and learn, often a difficult

concept to convey. I will explore such authority-giving moves further when I discuss ethnographic research.

In creating her vision of the imagination-intellect based on the concepts of holistic education, Weems explores the disciplinary divides that have caused some of the problems younger students experience with reading and writing.

One of the reasons students may dislike reading and writing is the lack of focus on the connection between orality and literacy. In public school classrooms the emphasis is on writing. Students are introduced to language on the page without learning that language is primarily oral, that writing is an imperfect attempt to reproduce speech and thought, and the original histories and stories of all cultures were passed down through an oral historian. (105)

Thus, she again calls for an integration of skills and inclusion of activity and process as well as product to help students explore and understand connections they have to what they are learning. Through this integrated education model, she believes students from a very young age will learn to “love” things by doing them instead of just seeing them or hearing about them. Simple steps that engage performance methodology can make a tremendous difference in any classroom. For instance she observes, “Improvisation facilitates, among other things, fast, creative-critical thinking key to the problem assessment, and solution abilities all artist-scholars possess” (107) and for Weems is something that everybody can engage on some level in their teaching.

Weems does avoid addressing larger issues of institutional support, student resistance and under-trained faculty. She does believe that even if the teacher is

uncomfortable enacting things herself or sharing these methods, this should not prevent her from engaging these ideas in the classroom. Weems goes back to the important idea of community and collaboration for teachers as well, calling teachers to entreat the help of someone who can help you and ask someone to find ways to use their creative abilities to enter the writing prompts (109). Her vision is a utopian one, where administration, faculty and the student body are able to retain an open attitude and willingness to engage the arts in their learning. While not completely practical, Weems point of view can inspire change on a small level if even by suggesting that the integration of literacies can inspire students and teachers to be active learners. This call for students and teachers to take a more active role in the learning process is taken to the next level when we consider the value of qualitative research in the classroom as a way to make connections to the larger community as well.

Ethnographic Practices: The Potential of Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative Inquiry methods have grown in popularity in writing programs and universities over the past 25 years. Some universities have started programs that encourage students to engage in various kinds of fieldwork, interacting and interviewing their communities and also investigate university resources. Examples include The University of California, Irvine's Center for Ethnography created to support interdisciplinary use of ethnographic research and writing and Harvard's Sensory Ethnography Lab to provide support for those combining visual media and social scientific practices. Among such programs is the University of Illinois' Ethnography of

the University (EOTU) initiative, which encourages instructors in all disciplines to incorporate qualitative inquiry methods in their classrooms while assisting students in getting to know the history and current make-up of the University more intimately. Students are thus producing writing that is personally meaningful and contributing to an understanding of their positionality at UIUC while also giving back to the community through writing and inquiry. This can be an empowering experience for students and especially in first-year Composition allow them to feel like they are an important part of their surroundings. As I have mentioned, it is this concept of empowerment that can allow students and scholars to create and expand theories of the personal. According to the program's mission statement:

The Ethnography of the University Initiative (EUI) engages students in research on what they know and care about: their own universities. Student work is public and preserved, housed in a dynamic on-line archive designed to encourage future generations of students to build on past student research. EUI guides students to think about colleges and universities in relation to their communities as well as in national and global contexts. EUI researchers reflect on their findings to identify concrete ways that the University can better fulfill its many missions. EUI leads students to become engaged citizens, actively and critically contributing to public life. (<http://www.eui.uiuc.edu/about.html>)

Student work is put into a publicly accessible database, allowing their writing to extend well beyond the confines of the classroom.

In addition to interdisciplinary programs like the ones I mentioned above, the popularity of using qualitative inquiry methods as a way to teach undergraduates researching skills in Composition is also evidenced by textbooks that have been widely adopted in Composition classrooms. *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* by Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, two researchers who in their own scholarly lives engage qualitative inquiry methods as well as teacher research, is a textbook intended to help teachers walk students through the process of writing ethnography. Its popularity is evidenced by the fact that it is now in its third edition and many articles have been written in response to its methods. The textbook, which walks students step by step through creating research proposals, mining and analyzing data and considering their own position in their research, is now in its third edition. For Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater the value of the methods housed in the book are simple. In their notes to the instructor they explain:

Fieldwork invites students to be more engaged and involved in the research process. To a much greater extent than their counterparts whose research activities are confined to the library and the Internet, students who work in fieldsites and archives learn to observe, listen, interpret, and analyze the behaviors and language of ‘others’ around them. Because doing fieldwork allows students actual contact with people and cultures different from their own, they will often be more invested in the topics they investigate. Doing fieldwork also encourages a greater understanding of self as each student reads, writes, researches, and reflects on relationships with ‘others’ in the culture. But the most compelling reason for any

instructor to use this investigative approach is that through the process of fieldworking, a student will become a better reader, writer, and researcher. (to the instructor, vii)

Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater also created the Qualitative Research network at the Conference on College Communication and Composition (CCCC), and other major conferences in the field of Composition have followed suit, devoting large sections of their programming to qualitative inquiry. In fact, a simple Google search for “ethnography and Composition” leads to a large number of articles and websites dating back to the early 80s that deal with the value and pitfalls of using ethnographic methods in the Composition classroom. Of course, much like the rest of the history of Composition, there are issues that arise in this teaching of qualitative inquiry and ethnography. These initial issues were hashed out as scholars began early in the field engaging in teacher research and other qualitative inquiry that involved their students and their communities. A number of edited collections have been published in the field of Composition that explore the role of the teacher as ethnographic researcher, most notably *Voices and Visions: Refiguring Ethnography in Composition* and *Ethnography Unbound: From Theory Shock to Cultural Praxis*.

Voices and Visions focuses on the ethical dilemmas of the ethnographic researcher in Composition studies. The editors Cristina Kirklighter, Cloe Vincent and Joseph M. Moxley attest through their research and call for papers that ethnography despite the predictions of many, has continued to increase in popularity, prompting Composition scholars to further explore the implications and value of this research.

In the first chapter of the collection “North Northwest: Ethnography and *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*”, H. Eric Branscomb begins with an overview of the reaction to Stephen North’s 1987 book *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, a book which in addition to predicting the demise of the field and the imminent failure of ethnography as a methodology, set off a lot of the major ethical discussions of qualitative inquiry in the field of Composition (2). Since the initial publication of North’s book, Branscomb argues that feminism and postmodernism “seem to be directing Composition studies away from paradigmatic models and toward narrative models, of which Ethnography is a prime example” (6). This, according to Branscomb, has led to the proliferation and flourishing of teacher research models and “polyvocality” (6-7). Ultimately, in addition to briefly recounting a popular history of ethnographic methods in Composition, this chapter signals the acceptance and growth of the valuation of teaching narratives and the methods used to conduct and write the research. This is followed up in the rest of the volume by individual scholar accounts of their struggles applying and theorizing ethnography, but always ultimately assigning value to its processes.

In *Ethnography Unbound: From Theory Shock to Cultural Praxis*, Editors Stephen Gilbert Brown and Sidney I. Dobrin strive to make the same assertion, seven years later, that despite continued criticism and questioning, critical ethnographic inquiry seems to be growing and here to stay. The book focuses on the practices of Critical Ethnography, which implicate action, change, citizenship in the actions of the ethnographer. The individual authors in the anthology explore their ethos, decision making and projects but more importantly for my purposes here they explore the *student*

as ethnographic researcher and the implications of teaching ethnographic inquiry in addition to practicing it ourselves as scholars, a move in the scholarship that I would like to explore in more depth.

Almost every chapter in this volume discusses the important fact that conducting ethnography ultimately changes the researcher and the researched. It is an involvement in a community, a change in awareness of positionality. In “Critical Auto/Ethnography: A Constructive Approach to Research in the Composition Classroom”, Susan S. Hanson describes a classroom where she “had organized the order of the reading and writing assignments to demonstrate that autobiography and ethnography operate on a continuum and to suggest that the two forms of narrative are inextricably connected” (183). Here, she breaks down her move from thinking about what the term autoethnography meant to her as a graduate student eager to implicate her own experience in her research to the anthropological definition of autoethnography to her own positioning of the term (changing it to auto/ethnography to more clearly implicate the importance of the self) in terms of Composition pedagogy. For her purposes in this chapter she postulates that: “As a Composition pedagogy, critical auto/ethnography enables subjugated others (read students) to do systematic fieldwork and data production about subjects other than themselves, but without concealing what they learn about themselves in the process” (184). She seeks to combine here two types of writing and research that have come under fire in the field for being too limited and generalizing, namely autobiography and ethnography. By combining the terms, she hopes to create a new way to view the possibilities for the integration of the personal and methods of analyzing communities.

Hanson explains:

My aim in this chapter is to propose that critical auto/ethnography emerges at the interstices of autobiography and ethnography. I incorporate the slash (/) as a way to emphasize that critical auto/ethnography is committed, as is ethnography, to studying other people, but as an account of that process, it bridges the chasm between the autobiographical *Here* and the ethnographic *There* and lays bare the dynamics of self-other engagement...I advocate developing a pedagogical practice that emphasizes what students bring to the classroom by encouraging them to contribute to the production of ethnographic knowledge by becoming participant-observers in discourse communities engendering communicative practices that reproduce or resist dominant notions of race, class, gender, and literacy. Critical auto/ethnography meets this need. (185)

Hanson recognizes the interdisciplinary history of qualitative research and believes that it is because of the many connections that can be made that it is more successful for students trying to learn to write than simply asking them to read and respond to texts. Bringing experiences and multiple methods of knowing into classroom research can help expand their understanding of their communities and themselves. Also, understanding what goes into the creation of the texts they read from other authors can help them gain the necessary authority to create valuable texts. As she continues to explain,

Critical auto/ethnography emerges at the interstice of autobiography and ethnography, but as a research, writing, and reading strategy it encompasses literature, folklore, anthropology, sociology, linguistics, social history, and

cultural geography. Additionally, because ethnographic research is central to much of the work that goes on within the humanities and social sciences as well as across the arts, business, education, law, and agriculture, showing students how the kinds of texts that form the basis of much of the scholarship that we assign as reading are produced makes good sense. It is a premise of this approach, however, that while reading surely improves writing, it is not necessarily the best place to begin in college Composition classes, because to read well, which is to say critically, one needs to understand how language works in writing, how texts are constructed, what the choices are, how the pieces fit together, and to what end.

And to understand writing, one needs to write extensively. (188-9)

Hanson gives an overview of how her class is laid out in a 10-week quarter leading from autobiographical narrative to a final auto/ethnographic essay. She starts with an autobiographical narrative because “it helps me get acquainted with the students and the students with each other; second, it helps me help the students select a research topic that intersects with their own experiences, concerns and interests” (192). She connects these initial pieces of writing to potential topics field research and moves through a series of assignments that will be familiar to qualitative inquiry practitioners, including writing on spaces and description, annotated bibliographies, interviews, “emerging themes”, ethnographies, and self-reflections. (192 -7) This course plan created an increasing level of success with qualitative inquiry assignments. As Hanson explains,

When I started teaching Composition I slipped a few field research writing assignments into the syllabus...Their response to the field note assignments, the

quality and length of their writing compared to the rest of their work, and their level of curiosity about ethnographic methods confirmed my suspicions: student like writing when they ‘get’ the point. The next year I based the writing and reading assignments on autobiographic and ethnographic methods, texts, and theory, believing that undergraduates might actually ‘take’ to academic writing given the opportunity to approach it auto/ethnographically. They do. (197)

Hanson contends that in fact, using these methods has reaffirmed for her the potential of all students to be good writers once they realize their connection to the writing and “perceive of themselves as having authority” (198).

Hanson is not the only one to recount the success of engaging qualitative inquiry in her classroom. In the chapter “Writing Program Redesign: Learning from Ethnographic Inquiry, Civic Rhetoric, and the History of Rhetorical Education” Lynne Lewis Gaillet describes her creation of a course based upon the methods found in Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater’s textbook *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* which I discussed earlier in this section. She created an ethnographic writing course

Inspired by metropolitan university philosophies...The ethnographic approach in this course takes advantage of the unique research opportunities available in Atlanta and surrounding communities. Higher education task forces advocating a metropolitan university philosophy of education indicate that the quality of student learning is directly related to the quality of students’ involvement in their education. It is not enough, in other words, to say that a writing curriculum will involve public issues or demand that students venture out into their communities.

(105)

Gaillet asks students to engage in projects that identify and investigate issues and groups close to home that have importance to them. For Gaillet, “the ethnographic-based writing class answers the call for incorporating community experience in the academic classroom. Those involved in this project are ‘inventing’ a new curriculum and pedagogy – adopting an interdisciplinary approach to writing instruction that is new and exciting for teachers and engaging for students; moreover, we are creating scenarios for conducting primary research and producing writing assignments tied to community experiences” (106). She sees the direct community impact of these projects and the excitement of the students who get to pick their own fieldsite and engage in ethnographic assignments, portfolio work, traditional research, and self-reflective writing (107).

The value and success of this work comes from the fact that the writing students are being encouraged to engage in is the same kind of writing teachers and scholars in the field are engaging themselves. This allows teachers to better understand and communicate the process of writing to the students and how it can best be researched. The time scholars in the field have spent theorizing issues and thinking about important applications has made it possible for successful community-oriented and student-focused inquiry to arise. In “Anti-Ethnography?” Ian Barnard recounts his own experiences with the use of ethnography in the field and how he applied what he knew to a class he taught in social sciences. He believes in an ethnographic pedagogy that makes students aware of the impact of their research and their ties to larger world media and political representation. Barnard believes,

These understandings of the real material impact of ethnographic writing...inform students' reading of and participation in writing in their disciplines and in their larger social and political contexts. Once students realize the extent to which representations of the Other informs material reality, their own rhetorical work takes on added urgency. This, of course, is also a challenge to Compositionists, writing teachers, and all teachers, to intervene into the ethnographic project as it is variously manifested in our cultures and curricula, and to conceptualize this intervention as a question of writing as much as it is a question of history, politics, and sociality. (8)

This larger extension into concepts of citizenship and connectedness to community and reality of their contribution can be hard to communicate and assess and may not be a goal for all teachers. While this is not a necessary outcome of ethnography in all situations, finding ways to understand their work in the world outside of the classroom allows students to again have a sense of authority and value their personal experiences in a broader context.

Looking specifically to the ways that writing can then lead to larger ethnographic projects, Howard B. Tinberg in "Ethnography in the Writing Classroom" advocates ethnographic methods and the ability to create projects that attend to issues of language use, diction, vocabulary and the value of words culturally as a way to make Composition curriculum more inclusive. He explains, "At a time when students are bringing increasingly diverse backgrounds into the classroom, ethnography, which would take as its subject the communities from which these students have come, would not only

educate faculty and students alike in the ways of such communities but would make the classroom a setting for genuine and committed research” (79). This bridging of the gaps between classroom and community is the cornerstone of a more effective and productive classroom for Tinberg as he explains, “It is important to emphasize that in ‘doing ethnography’ students...are actively and genuinely doing research and that they are connected to the research they do. Moreover, in using ethnography teachers send a clear message to students that their communities are worthy of study even in, of all places, the classroom” (82). As he recounts the project of one of his students, Victoria, he is able to give a tangible example of a project that allowed for a greater understanding of the writing process, community awareness, and the value of personal experience simultaneously.

Wendy Bishop, a Compositionist recognized for her work as both an ethnographer and teacher-researcher, created an important resource for students and scholars attempting to make qualitative research accessible for all involved. *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing it Down, Writing it Up, and Reading It* stems from her own experiences engaging research and writing as a scholar and teacher and provides an important set of guidelines for this newly emerging field in Composition. She frames the goals for her study:

This book, in a way, may be seen as one translation, or an introduction to translations. For those initiating smaller classroom-based ethnographies, this text may provide a fieldguide or blueprint, an initial talking-through of issues and decision points. For those already involved in a deeper, long-term engagement

with the methodology, this book will serve as a part of the conversation, pointing you toward issues (that no one can resolve, however much we enjoy and need to talk about them) and sources as you make your own contributions to field discussions in the form of finished ethnographies and meta-analyses of your methodology. (xi – xii)

Bishop attempts to keep the category fluid in order to engage multiple perspectives on the value and uses of ethnography. As she does this she proclaims proudly that the book is “personal and anecdotal” and avoids the “academic highroad” in order to be a piece that helps in thinking through things rather than just instructing or providing evidence (xii). Both her concepts and the way that she engages the “I” in her writing broaden the possibilities for qualitative inquiry.

Although many have theorized its value and application, there are still many stories that recount a marbled history, similar to the history of personal writing in the field, as scholars have battled at different points in their lives to integrate ethnography effectively and in a scholarly way. In her 1992 piece, Beverly J. Moss “Ethnography and Composition: Studying Language at Home” in *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research* edited by Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan, Moss explores her decision as a graduate student to choose ethnographic research as her dissertation method “I knew then that I need my scholarly life to have some real connection to my personal life, that I needed a bridge between what I saw as a rather large gap between academic research and real problems that affected the people where I came from” (153). She was inspired by Shirley Brice Heath’s work on the African American church and how she engaged in an

ethnographic project that had strong personal relevance for her (153-4). These important connections for students and scholars are something I will explore in Chapters 4 and 5 where I will include student ethnographic projects and interviews with teacher research scholars who explain the connections their work has to their personal lives and teaching rather than the differences between them.

What each of these authors explores in their own way is the concept of Critical Ethnography. According to D. Soyini Madison in *Critical Ethnography*, it is necessary to think of the following as we attempt to engage these methods in our classrooms and our own scholarship. She asks us to consider the fact that performance as I discussed in Chapter 2, is not just the doing but also the awareness of that doing. This is essential when we engage the larger community in ethnographic research and it is important for that awareness to be passed on to our colleagues and our students as readers of our research. Madison explains,

One important theoretical view of performance addresses the notion of experience. This view asserts that experience begins from our uneventful, everyday existence. Moving inconsequentially through the daily, colorless activities of our lives, we flow through moments of ordinariness, nonreflection, and the mundane. We brush our teeth, ride the bus, wait in supermarket lines, and generally talk about the weather without excitement or happenstance. But then something happens, and we move to moments of experience. At this point, life's flow of uneventfulness is interrupted by a peak moment that breaks through the ordinariness, and we think and consider what has just happened to us. We give

feeling, reason, and language to what has been lifted from the inconsequential day-to-day. We bring experience to it. The experience is received in consciousness and reflected upon: while brushing our teeth this particular morning, we notice a gray hair growing at the top of our head; while riding the bus, we meet an extraordinary person; while in the supermarket line, the cake box jogs a childhood memory; and while talking about the weather, we discover disturbing news. The mundane becomes heightened when gray hair conjures thoughts of aging; when an extraordinary person brings new insight; when the egg carton reminds us of licking mother's cake pan; and when the rainy weather brings new of tragedy and loss. (151)

We can communicate this awareness in both our writing and our actions, whether we engage simple exercises that move bodies around in the classroom to create connection between the physical and mental or we ask our students to interview members of their community to broaden their ideas about subcultures.

Teachers Including Student Voices: Scholarship and Practice

In the *Performance of Self in Student Writing*, Thomas Newkirk, in discussing personal essays and the difficulty of critiquing them mentions the fear of invading students' privacy and "assuming the role of therapist" as just two unsubstantiated issues critics dwell on when discussing personal writing (19). In fact, he draws on his own analysis of personal writing forms and teaching them in his classroom to clarify his point

of view. Although he is ultimately celebrating their value, he does discuss other potential problems.

Perhaps these concerns do go back our own classrooms, where it can be difficult to evaluate the personal writing efforts of our students, even though that is what many of us strive to elicit from them. How can we ask our students to be creative learners, perhaps participating in a Composition classroom where we ask for alternative methods of inquiry, when we as scholars are often wary of how similar efforts outside of the classroom will be evaluated by our peers? Since this use of the personal and qualitative methods is debated pedagogically within the classroom, perhaps it should come as no shock that it is debated outside of it.

Including our students in our scholarship and teaching them the methods we theorize can be the first step for creating more space for those who do not necessarily have the power to create it for themselves. For Kirsch, “It is exactly this kind of change – a move away from competition and toward building connections between lived experience and academic subject matters – that educators...advocate in their model of connected education” (133). The people we have the most interaction with and share the most personal experiences with are often in our own classrooms.

Enacting some personal performance practices and engaging qualitative inquiry can still be considered risky, but in discussing the successes and the failures we can establish critical value and theory. Teaching as a practice in and of itself is not always easy, and perhaps one of the things teachers are most loath to discuss are failures in their classrooms. They are certainly not as likely to publish articles about failure, unless the

lack of success was ultimately overcome. For Susan Hunter, “Even within our field there are dangers associated with talking and writing about teaching unless we authorize it in relation to some mode of inquiry” (Hunter 80). Hunter feels as Composition teachers, we are constantly engaging in teaching practices that make us very prone to failure because students are unused to methods, we are inexperienced, or we are relying heavily upon writing our students have had no prior exposure to. But admitting problems, especially in published articles, and telling others about our personal struggles in the classroom might be difficult.

While theoretical perspectives, programmatic and disciplinary histories, and success stories are informative and necessary, we also need to credit the personal histories of teachers, even if they are less than encouraging about where the field of Composition stands in relation to the center and the margins of the academy. Their accounts can give us a localized perspective, which we should value on a par with other kinds of perspectives because they capture the reality of the Composition classroom. I know I would like to read what some of my freshman students clamor for: stories written by better storytellers than I am with characters and situations I can identify with. (82-3)

Just like our students, it can be valuable to read how other people are experiencing their jobs and their classrooms so that we can better understand where we stand in relation to our peers, and often find some kindred souls and personalized advice. Engaging in teacher-research and recounting personal experiences in the classroom are important

steps to creating a body of knowledge and the groundwork to critically appreciate our students' personal writing.

How to encourage students and ourselves to share these experiences without a fear of failure is perhaps the most difficult part. Carol Lea Clark in "Student Voices: How Students Define Themselves as Writers" believes that the best way is to get students to write and get them and ourselves involved in the writing process. "Whether these students know it or not, or whether anyone else recognizes it or not, that pride in their words does make them writers" (228). It is not only important to ask our students to consider their personal experiences, but for us as scholars and instructors to place the work of our students in the context of our own professional writing. Instilling a sense of authority into personal writing can demonstrate the critical value of this writing. Students can learn a lot by reading the experiences of other students, and since we ask students to read much of what we ourselves are writing, students' stories are a valuable addition. This kind of incorporation can be a first step to recognizing the value of their personal participation and writing.

In "Students' Stories and the Variable Gaze of Composition Research," Wendy Bishop is able to clearly articulate the potential value of student stories. She explains, "This kind of research will change Composition studies. When teachers become researchers and students' stories, interpretations, and contributions count, then knowledge making and professionalization come into balance... And I do not believe a research methodology is useful unless it encourages and achieves some

degree of methodological metaknowledge. Without such self-knowledge, something gets lost. (210)

This “metaknowledge” can come from the ways that we actively theorize our expectations for student writing both for them and for ourselves, something I will demonstrate in my interviews in Chapter 5. This student writing we encourage is often not preserved as they submit portfolios and never collect them, drafts are lost, and we are forced to throw away thousands of papers if only for room on our desks. We are constantly bombarded with writing from our students that never makes it past our classrooms. Bishop discusses the need to have student voices in all research in order to make it valuable for the field and warns against the dangers of “student vacant” research (197).

A research report based in student writers’ experiences, which respected students’ views, gave my students support for exploring their own writing. They felt that their dirty linen could finally be aired and the generally not-talked-about-but-important aspects of writing, like procrastination or grades, could be raised. They were pleased to encounter a Composition article that spoke to them and appeared to detail student writing experiences authentically. (199)

The kind of research and writing that includes student concerns and writing can encourage student interaction and empower us as researchers by demonstrating how we value this work. The key to the success of any methodology is theorizing our successes, failures and actions. This is important not only in our own scholarship, but an essential thing for our students. Providing models will give the methodology the groundwork it

needs to be critically successful. For Bishop, “Listening to students’ stories helps me to remember that we occupy only a small portion of their lives, while they loom large in ours” (212).

Janice Hays believes that our ability to learn and interact begins when we are children and that it is just a matter of staying aware of our natural tendencies that will allow us to be effective instructors (161). This awareness is something that allows us to realize our own transformation along with the transformation of our students (161). Hays believes you need to simultaneously “support and challenge” (168). She describes, “In teaching writing, such a pedagogy would regard discourse as a meaning-constructive activity, dialogic, a mutual construction of ‘truth’; included in this dialogic process is the instructor’s parental status as one who has greater knowledge and experience to share with students, while recognizing mutual participation in the process and mutual transformation in the process” (161). In this way, you are not divorcing yourself from what you know, you are building upon it. Like Bishop’s concept of “metaknowledge” you are tracking not only developments in student writing but your reactions to this development and how it shapes your teaching practices. As Andrea Lunsford suggests when talking about this student/teacher awareness, “Within this context, the embodied practices that dropped out of Composition’s regular curriculum in the nineteenth century (i.e., the recitation, declamation and speech making, extended reading aloud, and other oral forms associated with rhetoric) become significant tools for working powerful classroom transformations” (Lunsford 232-3). As I have explored in this chapter, it is a reintegration of the self and outside experiences in the classroom that can lead to the

success of performance methodology that encourages teachers to clearly identify goals and values for personal writing, performance and qualitative research methods in the classroom and in our writing. This definition of criteria is the first step in creating a clear vision for how we value our own experiences and those of our students and I will continue to explore in Chapter 5.

Compositionists strive to position themselves in the field among their students and to thus broaden the “academic community” to include the classroom. The teacher of Composition is unique, as Susan Hunter points out, in that she is constantly involved in “Conferencing, responding, collaborative learning, peer review, portfolios, journals, dialectical notebooks, freewriting, writing to learn, workshops...the currently preferred ways of teaching writing that I use enable my students to form a community of writers, collaborating to make knowledge.” (70-1). As we encourage students to tell their own stories we can help them by devoting publishing space to them and their writing. This can also help us to demonstrate how our life stories work and combine with the experiences of our students.

In looking at my own classroom practices, I intend to demonstrate the value of my moves from performance studies and autoethnography to demonstrate potential for these kinds of projects in branching out our ideas of personal writing and the use of personal experience in the classroom. I contend that the melding of our traditional Composition practices and new ideas from performance studies can help our field strike an ethical balance and critical awareness in our teaching and utilization of personal writing in our classrooms and scholarship. We can combine writing intensive assignments, with

community engagement, analysis of positionality and use of the body to create a holistic education model.

Chapter 4 – Investigating my Classroom: Incorporating Student Voices and Visions

In the Fall of 2006, I was assigned an advanced composition course, Rhetoric 233: Principles of Composition, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. This is a second level composition course designed for students who either placed out of their Rhetoric 105 requirement, the equivalent of first year composition, or who were looking for an advanced level writing class. The description of the course as laid out by the English department was:

This course gives further practice in exposition, with an emphasis on organization, paragraphing, and sentence structure. Other topics appropriate for this class are critical reading techniques, sexism in language, finding and evaluating sources, responding to readings, anticipating your audience, planning and shaping a draft, argumentation and documentation, receiving and incorporating feedback, revision, and editing. Rhetoric 233 is designed for the student whose career will require competence in writing clear, precise prose as an adjunct to another professional activity. Maximum class size is 22 students. Students will write 5-6 expository essays during the course of the semester, together with other, shorter assignments; several of the essays will be revised at least once. Students will produce a minimum of 25 pages of finished writing. Some papers will involve research, but there is no formal research paper required. Prerequisite: completion of campus Composition 1 requirement. **This course fulfills the campus Advanced Composition requirement.**

(<http://www.english.illinois.edu/undergraduate/courses/sp08/rhetoric/>)

Teaching this class allowed me to design my own syllabus. I took this class as an occasion to engage personal writing, performance, ethnography and performance methods in the writing classroom. It is the results of this initial engagement of personal writing and performance in the classroom that led me to conduct the study of over 100 students in English 121 at the Fashion Institute of Technology, where I am currently an Assistant Professor and the Writing Program Coordinator from Fall 2007- Spring 2008. I will briefly introduce the layout of my Rhetoric 233 class at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a successful student project, which was the catalyst for my study, before introducing in more detail the English 121 classes I subsequently taught as part of my study at the Fashion Institute of Technology.

What I discovered in my first attempt at teaching the combination of personal writing and performance in the writing classroom was an increased level of engagement from the students in my class, and an ability to draw effectively and critically on the personal in their writing. This was before my IRB approved research, but with student permission I analyzed their projects in conference presentations, which helped me form some of my baseline observations and idea for the study. During that preliminary semester, I noticed that when students have the opportunity to engage in research and exploration of topics that were personally meaningful to them and engage multiple methods of knowing coming from performance studies greatly improved levels of critical thinking and written engagement and had emancipatory potential. Over the course of the semester, students studied personal texts, texts on performance and engaged in

ethnographic fieldwork, ultimately culminating in a large personally motivated performance project.

The definition of performance here follows up on the ideas introduced in previous chapters. In my classroom, I expose students to a variety of “performances” ranging from performance art, such as Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez Pena’s “Couple in the Cage” to traditional texts on performance theory coming from the then new compilation *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies* edited by D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera. I introduced theories of performance alongside ideas about ethnographic research and personal writing that I have already introduced in previous chapters.

Over the course of the semester, students engaged in freewriting and completed an autoethnographic study of a subculture that they felt they were currently a part of. After this project, students were then asked to take this engagement with the self and translate it into a performance piece that “would have a larger impact beyond themselves.” In more specific terms, students had to imagine audience and larger implications for their classroom projects and how they hoped to achieve these goals. They were incited to engage in collaborative writing, oral performance, engage the university community, critique and discuss performances and then personally reflect on the process. In addition to the performance of the project, students generated approximately 40 pages of critical writing in which they planned, analyzed, identified an audience for and reflected on their own and their peers’ projects.

That year, I presented a conference paper at Computers and Writing on one of the most remarkable student performance pieces. A group of five students created an image

event in response to the final assignment of that Fall semester in 2006 which rallied over 50 student volunteers. The project built on their autoethnographic inquiry pieces and asked students, in groups, to collaborate on a written and performance piece that engaged an idea they were personally invested in and they felt would have a larger impact beyond the self. This particular project was a protest against genocide in Darfur entitled “Silent Darfur.” The performance piece was based on Truth.com commercials and meant to demonstrate both the silence of the victims of genocide and the students’ perceived passiveness of our governments.

The following photos are taken from the Daily Illini, November 13, 2006



Figure 1



Figure 2

The “Silent Darfur” group created an RSO (Registered Student Organization) for awareness of the genocide in Darfur and teamed up with other student groups at UIUC who were already involved in Darfur activism in order to form connections and broaden their ideas. They contacted local media, flyered the campus with images and created a Facebook page. They then staged an image event on campus where they took 50 volunteers in white shirts to symbolize the many nameless who were affected by the genocide and marched them into the middle of the UIUC quad at noon. One student, dressed in all black with a Sudanese flag painted on his face acted as the government and one by one struck down the victims until they were lying motionless on the quad. Another student dressed as George W. Bush looked away the whole time while walking alongside the government figure. When all of the students had fallen, one student called out over the loudspeaker “Silent Darfur, we allow genocide.” After a few seconds the

students stood up and entered the crowds of students as if nothing had ever happened. One student remained on the sidelines, handing out flyers and information. All members of the group who organized the image event stayed afterwards to talk with interested peers and media, disseminate information and make connections with the student body. A crucial part of this project was the interaction with the audience, the importance of which I analyzed in Chapter 2, in that it allowed them to tangibly direct their rhetoric as well as their planning of the image event. In addition, the feedback students received from both the audience and the campus community had lasting effects on the way they continued their engagement with the activism.

This performance had a widespread effect on the campus and the students involved – it was covered on the front page of the student newspaper *The Daily Illini* on November 13, 2006; a registered student organization (RSO) was created and continued after the class had ended; crowds took in information and signed petitions for university divestment (which happened soon afterwards); and the students felt the piece was rewarding as evidenced by their own reactions and continued involvement outside of the class. The quality of writing and thinking generated by the process and reflection gave a strong focus to their ideas and awareness of audience. To make this happen on such a large scale, the student group had to be particularly motivated and have a strong disposition to bring about campus awareness. Other projects had less impact but were successful in other ways, bringing to light the role of charity work on campus, reactions to a popular undergraduate drinking holiday and questioning the place of technology on campus.

That original performance-based class and subsequent courses whose methods and outcomes I have studied more deliberately, and that I will discuss in this chapter, have led me to the following argument: combining performance and personal writing allows a new level of engagement for students since it allows them to pursue interests they already have, work collaboratively, engage in multiple types of critical writing, and articulately present ideas orally and draw on non-verbal skills, non-textual criticism as well as textual analysis, classmates and the larger university community. Drawing on multiple literacies to strengthen critical analysis is one of the ideas I have presented throughout this chapter that I believe is reinforced through the use of performance methodology. This combination of available resources allows students to create lasting impressions on their classmates, me, and the larger campus and often to create pieces that will encourage the same kind of critical inquiry to continue once the class has ended.

The Darfur event, however, was simply the catalyst for what would be my study of how engagement of the self in forms of personal writing and engagement of performance based on the self, operated in my first year writing course. The self, in this case, extends beyond traditional ideas of the personal found in Composition Studies and goes into ideas from performance that include the concept of personal investment, speaking on behalf of a community as the self and integrating multiple literacies to explore personally motivated issues. In this chapter, I will describe my plan and goals for my composition classes at FIT and examine four different student projects, including performances and writing that went into these performances to assess the value of personal writing and translating personal writing and investment into performance.

I will discuss two individual autoethnographies and performances from my Fall 2007 semester classes where I asked students to engage in autoethnographic inquiry for their final projects. I will discuss two group performances from my Spring 2008 semester classes where I asked student to create community-based performance pieces to engage local audiences.

I have chosen to focus on just a few projects that I believe are representative of the emancipatory potential of this kind of research. This is not to discount the difficulties in this kind of work and adaptation in the classroom. Each time I introduce any new curriculum into my classroom, there is a learning curve for me, and my students. My hope with this chapter is to showcase some of the possibilities by analyzing successful projects and why they might have been successful while not discounting the issues surrounding their production. I will be sharing a narrative of my overall experience and some student projects that came out of our collaborative classroom experience to hopefully give one small example of personal writing and performance projects can operate in the classroom. In my fifth chapter, I will then broaden this perspective in my analysis of eight interviews I conducted with scholars in the field who are using similar methods in their own writing classrooms and scholarship.

The Research Plan: Goals and Expectations

Students were handed IRB permission sheets on the second day of class, where they were invited to participate in the research study. Even if students decided they wanted to participate, they were free to withdraw their participation at any time. This was

a low-stakes study in that my collection of data did not interfere with any of the normal day-to-day processes of the class, it only required students to give permission to me to photocopy any assignments they turned in and to record final performances for my own use. With student permission, I photocopied all participants' written assignments including online posts, freewrites, drafts, peer evaluations and final papers. I videotaped final student performances for review and kept a teaching journal to record day-to-day interactions in the classroom.

My goal in designing the Rhetoric 121 course (the equivalent of First-year Composition) at the Fashion Institute of Technology was to have students spend the entire semester investigating their own subjectivity and analyzing definitions of the "self." For this reason, the course was subtitled "Identity." The goals of the course as outlined by the college are as follows:

This course encourages students' confidence, writing fluency, and the development of a competent writing self by focusing on the writing process. A number of forms are employed, including brainstorming, freewriting, journal writing, reading response journals, and formal essay writing. Classes are conducted as workshops, and both peers and instructor offer constructive feedback.

(<http://www.fitnyc.edu/asp/Content.aspx?menu=Present:SchoolsAndPrograms:SchoolOfLiberalArts:EnglishAndSpeech:CourseDescriptions>)

Students were told from the beginning of the course that they would be asked to engage in activities they might find different from other writing classrooms in which they had

been previously involved, most notably personal writing, autoethnography, qualitative research and performance. For the class I taught at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, I had asked students to complete a large autoethnographic project in addition to a researched performance piece. While each assignment was beneficial, I believe that this was too much to ask of first-year students in a single semester. For this reason, in Fall 2007 I asked my FIT students to create an autoethnographic project with an element of performance for their final project, and in Spring 2008 I asked my students to create a large-scale performance project based upon qualitative research methods for their final project. In each case, I wanted to understand the value of the combination of disciplines without overwhelming the students with large amounts of research. Each project relied on the same principles that come from the study of personal writing and performance.

The basic structure of the course remained the same each semester. We analyzed a series of texts that included excerpts from *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* by Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater, a series of portraits by artist Stella Vine, essays by Joan Didion and Philip Lopate, performance pieces on Youtube by performers from Reverend Billy and his Stop Shopping Choir to silent raves in Union Square, analyses in the New York Times of Facebook and MySpace as well as their user agreements as documents. The goal was to provide a variety of texts, visual media images and performances that deal with the concept of identity formation, first how we create different on-line identities and representations and then the personas we develop in day-to-day life and finally in a way specifically to engage a larger audience.

In addition to small weekly response papers and freewrites, students were asked to write two larger scale essays of five to six pages. The first essay asked them to create an argument based upon class experiences, personal knowledge and texts about the differences between on-line identity formation and real life identity formation. The second essay, based upon the same types of information and criteria, asked students to explore the relationship between cultural influences and identity formation.

From day one, students wrote about the concept of “identity” as something that we create and form and that society influences. Students were asked to analyze their place in society, their on-line identity formation, cultural influences on identity, and how visual categories help create identity categories.

In each class, we began the semester by doing a freewrite on their definitions of identity. I asked the students to sit down and spend fifteen minutes writing continuously about what identity meant to them. Out of the approximately 50 student participants I had each semester, at least half wrote about the concept of identity theft. They went from larger, broad concepts of what constitutes our identity to the fear of its loss – what might happen if somebody stole those things that the media tells us time and again constitute our identities. They brought up our social security numbers, our dates of birth, our credit cards and the various numbers that construct who we are for the government. It is not surprising that the way students entered this complex subject was through images projected and publicized by large corporations dealing with the power of fear to garner new business customers.

I used the concept of “self” and “identity formation” to make the concept of the personal intrinsic to all assignments for the class. Students were made aware from day one that we would be looking at the self as something culturally influenced, changeable, multi-faceted and differently interpreted by many authors and performers. It was my hope that by making identity and self the central theme of the class, students would consistently be thinking about their own positionality as we looked at the concept from many different viewpoints.

It is currently commonplace for our students who have regular access to various forms of technology on home computers, laptops, phones that advertise the advantage of being able to check Facebook anywhere and iPhone’s feature that lets you keep a live map of where all of your iPhone-toting friends happen to be at any given point in time, to develop very personal aspects of their identities in the public eye. For this reason, I believe they are well prepared to engage in a critical analysis of the use of the personal in public spaces. Many have been engaging in this kind of performance of personal identity for a number of years by the time they attend college. They may have different social-networking pages, be enrolled in an online dating service, play interactive role-playing games. In addition most have had middle school and high school assignments which try to incorporate an analysis of these activities.

When I bring up these out-of-class activities, I am hard pressed to find even one student who, if they don’t have a page of their own, does not know a person who does. Using social-networking as common ground to understand why and how we can interrogate these personal identities and what role they play in our larger critical class

discussions is not a big jump. It requires students to take a look at activities they are already engaged and involved in. It does not ask them to engage in completely new material as well as learn the critical methods to analyze it. Prior to the advent of social-networking on campuses, I might have been hard-pressed to find an issue that so many students could readily relate to.

In the following sections, I will discuss the larger projects students were asked to produce the last half of the semester based upon their semester long interrogation of identity and the self. I will then look at two examples of student projects from each semester in order to provide an example of the possibilities for this kind of personal research and writing.

The Autoethnography Assignment

One of the biggest problems with teaching ethnographic writing can be having students understand their own positionality in the research that is being conducted. For this reason, in my own classroom, I have decided that a form of autoethnography provides one of the clearest ways to analyze not only a subculture or aspect of society but to also investigate one's involvement in that community. I define autoethnography in this case as a qualitative investigation of a subculture they are currently involved in. Students are asked to analyze their position in the subculture as well as the positioning of others and how this affects attitudes. Autoethnographic analysis in the case includes interviewing other members of the subculture, conducting fieldsite observation, analyzing textual materials, investigating histories, and self-reflection. Previous involvement in the

subculture gives students both a vested interest in the project, a sense of authority, as well as a position to analyze.

When conducting autoethnographic research versus traditional ethnographic research, students are somewhat empowered in that they hold a certain amount of knowledge about the subculture they are investigating to begin with due to their involvement. At that same time, because it is necessary for them to communicate the subculture to those who are unfamiliar with it, they must learn how to translate their knowledge to an outside audience. In addition, by conducting observations they need to look at the subculture afresh and describe elements they take for granted. They need to account for rituals, language and subtleties that make it operate as something unique and situated. By interviewing members of the subculture who inhabit a different position they are confronted with new perspectives from insiders that will help them to further articulate their own ideas and positions and question their own authority in communicating exactly what the subculture is. Interviewing and conducting observations simultaneously empowers and decenters them from their own experience by forcing them into a position of questioning and representation to an intended audience (me their instructor and their classmates who will see this writing at multiple stages).

Asking students to draw on visceral experiences as well as textual evidence complicates their analysis and keeps them constantly involved in what is being communicated. Students come out with a richer understanding of the subculture, an ethical responsibility to convey its multiple facets and to avoid being reductive. This often has an impact of increasing students' level of understanding and involvement in the

subculture and brings about new appreciation for an activity that has been perhaps a previously unexamined part of their lives outside of the classroom. In this way, the writing carries an impact that extends beyond the scope of the assignment and its evaluation via classroom standards.

In “Making the Personal Political” Stacy Holman Jones points out the major differences between telling and showing that are key to successful autoethnographic research. She points to criticism of autoethnography and calls for the performance not to just express, but to engage mimesis, poesis and kinesis or move from a stage of recognition to action, as performance scholars such as Victor Turner and Dwight Conquergood have suggested. Jones uses stories of her grandfather to show how she was engaged in this kind of autobiographical and autoethnographic knowing and text from an early age. She points out that many of us have been involved in the kind of appropriation of ourselves in texts we have written throughout our lives in reflection making them somewhat autoethnographic even if they were not originally intended that way. According to Jones, it is important to remember that all of these texts are partial views and that that is okay, as she explains, “You can’t do it all, you need to do a version” (760). Through a combination of making students aware of their presence in already constructed texts and the place they currently hold in the subculture they are investigating, engaging this kind of project can be more organic.

In the classroom, you can show students they are already involved and invested in subcultures but investigating these different versions and help them recognize that they that they have an immediate investment in the ethnographic research and potential to

develop their perspectives. Making students aware that like all other writing, autoethnographic research involves focus and decision-making allows them to understand they are creating a version and not representing every aspect of their subculture.

For their final projects in the Fall of 2007, my students were required to choose a subculture that they felt they were currently a part of and felt connected to. In addition, there needed to be a fieldsite for the subculture that the students could physically visit at least twice over the course of the semester to conduct detailed observations. Accessibility was a key factor in that the students had only six weeks to conduct the research and analysis necessary to successfully complete their assignments. There needed to be documents related to the subculture that they could analyze and review so that they could work from written history and their own experiences. Students were also asked to interview a minimum of two people who held different positions in the subculture in order to get different perspectives. They had the opportunity to practice interviewing skills and writing questions to elicit the best information for their larger projects. They also had the option of interviewing or surveying people outside of the subculture in order to incorporate more positions on the subculture. Again, due to time restraints, they were not required to do this.

Each aspect of the project was conducted as a separate assignment and students were then asked to amass the data in a portfolio and create a final autoethnographic piece of writing that drew on their accumulated research and analyzed the process of creating the materials and writing the paper. Analysis of rituals, language and routines were a part of these small assignments and self-reflection, reflection on process and analysis of

research were all key elements to the final project. In addition, students were asked to create a performance for their classmates that they felt would best express an aspect of the project and allow their peers to experience the subculture rather than just listen to a report. They developed performances based upon models they had analyzed over the course of the semester.

Requiring students to investigate a subculture in which they were currently involved gave them the opportunity to choose from among many different topics for their study. Some students chose subcultures that were very personal and involved family, friends and religion while others preferred to study school clubs, hobbies or neighborhoods. In each case, students could pursue a topic that interested them and increase their understanding of the subculture while staying within their own determined comfort zones.

Student project topics ranged in focus from cosplay to singles culture and specific academic clubs. The two projects I have chosen to discuss are striking because they are strong examples of an evolution that can happen as a result of this kind of research. They each focus on a subculture that had a large impact on the students' lives, yet each student had not taken any sort of formal opportunity to reflect on this impact. They reflect on subcultures that involve their family members, giving an immediacy to the writing and analysis. Here, I give an overview of the student projects, excerpts from their writing and analysis of the process of each student.

Sheila

Sheila decided that the autoethnographic project would be a great opportunity to investigate a subculture that she had been a part of yet an outsider to her entire life. Her family, namely her brother and her father and their large friend group, which spent a lot of time at their household engaged in drag racing. Sheila had always been present but not involved in the activities surrounding it. It was mostly the domain of the men in her family and while she was not a direct observer or participant in the racing, the drag racers, their friends, the conversations and lives of her father and brother affected every aspect of Sheila's daily life.

Upon entering the project, Sheila had some hesitation and a curiosity. She thought it would be a great opportunity to participate but from a sort of distance. Sheila had always wanted to know more about the subculture but found she had no real excuse to enter it. She talked to her father about going to an event one night, and to her surprise he was very excited about the prospect of having her get involved in the whole process. What happened that night provided the catalyst for Sheila's paper and her final performance piece.

In preparation for her project, Sheila conducted interviews with her father, brother, sister, and two friends who were also involved in drag racing. In addition, she solicited opinions from those outside of the subculture to provide a catalyst for perspective analysis. Her research culminated in an observation of a race and all of the preparation and aftermath of the race. Her interviews, observations and final paper all

share a common awareness of her place as an outsider and simultaneous insider to the subculture. Her final paper starts off with a kind of blunt factual interaction between her and her father and her constant reflection on her position while conducting the research. She moves between narration and observation, bringing us into the story while making us aware that she is outside of it.

November 28, 2007 and it's 10:45 pm. 'Sheila, come on. There's a race going on tonight,' my father says grinning. I've been asking him if a race will ever happen before my project is due, so I know that he's happy I can get off his back. I rush to put on my sneakers and coat because I'm so excited and I don't want to miss anything. I walk to the window in front of my house, and I see a crowd of over fifteen people. Seeing all of the people outside of my house made me realize that a race will happen. 'Make sure you have your camera and everything,' my dad blurts out. Quickly I run back to my room to get my camera, but when I reach back to the window in the front of my house, no one is there.'...

Observation

It's brisk and very cold. It's dark out, with a little light coming from the street lights that line my block. With my pen and pad in hand, I take a seat on the stoop in front of my house. I see about four cars pull up, there's a group of ten males, and they come to my right. One of them is very loud and active. My dad is sitting down on the opposite side of the stoop, so all of the guys stand around him. 'He go the break. You gotta put the money up.' he screamed. 'What is that about?' I

ponder. I have no clue. 'Gimme my money, he blurts out. 'Stop bitching' follows. I observe and listen to what he says. As I write some of what he says in my note pad, some people in the group of guys look at me and then turn away. A few minutes passed and I realize that the group moved further away. They were on the sidewalk when I first came out to observe, now they're practically in the middle of the street...

I focus on a group of seven different males to my left, in the middle of the street. The scent of cigarettes fill my nostrils. One of the guys look sat me as I write, so I stop. When he looks away I continue. As I write, my leg starts to shake.

Sheilas' writing is filled with a kind of immediacy. It's easy to see her thinking through the process as she writes: her circumstances, identity through cultural markers, language, actions. She in constantly present and aware in all aspects of her writing and the people she writes about are constantly aware of her, whether her father is telling her to get her camera or a guy is staring her down as she writes notes on him.

This project is interesting for a number of reasons, not least of all is the fact that Sheila's family, participating in illegal drag racing, never actually gets to race. Instead, there is a showdown with local police right in front of her house and people flee and break apart and nobody ever gets to drive. The real interest in the piece however comes from Sheila's growing awareness of this world that has for as long as she can remember been a part of her life. Although always present, she never really asked any of the people

in her house or in her family what it was all about and managed to avoid ever watching it happen.

In her reflection, Sheila was surprised by how eager those around her were to share what they knew about drag racing and how excited her own father was to have her watch and take an interest in what was going on around her. Throughout her transcript of interviews, she comments on her need to “brush up her interviewing skills” always maintaining a dialogue with herself and with her readers. She chooses to do many more interviews than the assignment requires and gets perspectives from those who race, those who are fans and those who are outsiders to the entire subculture.

Sheila is very quiet and often keeps to herself in class, although she is always the one to participate in a thoughtful way when the rest of the class is either unprepared or silent. She is reserved but very energetic in her own way, usually sitting to the side of the room in a zippered hoodie, smiling the smile of someone who always does her work and fully understands what is going on, but doesn't let others know this. Because she has been rather quiet, the nature of her project and the language she presents in her spoken word piece come as a surprise to her classmates who are fascinated by the scenario and the actions of the piece. Sheila's piece is informed by a sensitivity to character and surroundings, to identities and the positionality of herself and those otherwise involved in the subculture.

For her performance piece, Sheila performed snippets of the dialogue she overheard at the race, giving a spoken word performance that was often brazen and confusing in its meaning. After her performance of the fast paced language, she stops to

explain to her classmates what the words mean and where they came to play in her observation of the evening of the drag race.

He go the break, you gotta put the money up

Gimme my money

Guaranteed break means he has to leave

He's scared

I'm not taking no 500

Anyway, I'm a get my money

They getting money up right now

The fast-paced dialogue, the unfamiliar vocabulary and the nature of the activities interest Sheila and her classmates. The performance engaged her peers and made them consider how their classmates came to be involved in this subculture and what that means. Sheila felt like she has found a way to bond with her father and brother yet keep her distance, just like she did in the classroom. Considering my goals for the assignment, Sheila's writing became increasingly critical and experimental, allowing her to express herself on multiple levels. She had an opportunity to explore a subculture she was otherwise too timid to enter and create a stronger relationship to the members of the subculture as a result. The experience thus extended into her daily life and helped her produce insightful writing and analysis for her peers.

Kelly

Kelly was a student who was struggling with her first semester at a college, wondering where she really fit in. With a family history that included a father who was a graffiti artist and a mother and siblings who were also visually artistic, she felt the pressure to also show her own artistic talents. She shone in her writing ability and decided for her project to investigate her own neighborhood where she grew up and the influence it had on her life. She struggled a long time to figure out what kind of project she wanted to engage in, feeling like almost all of the students do in the beginning like she was not part of a subculture and didn't know where to begin.

Through numerous conversations with Kelly, I came to understand her ambivalence about college and her difficulty negotiating her living environment. She was constantly trying to balance her family's goals for her with figuring out where her own talents and ambitions were. When Kelly decided to focus on Brooklyn, she was able to simultaneously focus on her family and where she was raised. It is not uncommon for students to choose to do their projects on a neighborhood where they were raised or a childhood home or some aspect of family life. What made Kelly's project interesting was the way she was able to engage her surroundings and through the process learn what her neighborhood meant to her on a larger level.

Kelly relates her paper through the lens of her family – a family with strong artistic capabilities and a desire to be free from the projects that they all call home. Recounting episodes from her childhood, talking through her father and brother and mother's perspective, Kelly is able to give a picture of an identity in flux – one where she

struggled with interactions with drug dealers, being a high achiever in school and struggling to earn family approval for her involvement in academic achievements. She conducted interviews with her father, mother and brother and explored her own memories of her neighborhood. She conducted fieldsite observations in the areas surrounding where she grew up and drew on other texts that reflected on the nature of home to develop her final project. She begins her piece like a much older person reflecting on their childhood experiences.

I always knew that one day I would be writing about Brooklyn, I just didn't know how soon. I connect Brooklyn with who I am and who I am becoming like every hair on my head, it's just natural. Even though I've lived in Brooklyn for all 18 years of my life, I still feel like a part of me is indifferent. I think it's really me searching for the true me.

Kelly embodies her environment and analyzes her relationship to her surroundings by looking at Brooklyn as a home, something that cares for her and something that keeps calling her back, inviting but also disingenuous. In her reflection, Kelly discusses how the project gave her the opportunity to reflect on her surroundings and how she felt about school and her family and how her identity was tied in to her neighborhood and how she was raised. The interview with her mother and father gave her the opportunity to talk to them about their goals and background in Brooklyn and the way they felt about their relationship. Kelly's reflective observation paints a picture of the connection she has with her surroundings as well as how she struggles to bridge the gaps.

I am a little hesitant to approach my mother to do the interview, especially while she's watching the news, but I should get it done since it is due tomorrow. I tell her what I have to do and she gives me that look. It's a special one that only mothers can do or just the women in my family, and I know I already have it, people told me. While I asked her the question, she looks up at the ceiling for answers, like clouds are floating with memories on them, only if it was that easy. Her gestures are flowing and have movement like a mob boss. It scares me a little bit. She smiles at me but she is really looking through me. She sees someone else with every question, I was a new person, and maybe I was her. She was free within me, the youth that just disappears after a while, without saying goodbye. I got to not only see another side of her, I felt like I was like her. Everything she was and everything she could have been. I wished that we could have talked more, but it was time to go to sleep.

My father and me just finished the beginning of the food for Thanksgiving, even though we don't celebrate it. He is obviously tired and that usually happens when he has his drink. We're watching television and I pop the question. He looks at me as if I am crazy. Well I believe that I am for helping him with cramps, so I think he can do this for me. He takes a sip of his drink and motions me with his eyes for me to begin. I start off with the questions and he grows sleepy. I was dual thinking at the time, I could clearly remember when he suggested that journalism wasn't for me, and this interview proved that for him. I guess when he said that all

of the questions sounded the same, it wasn't good enough, I'm not sure if it ever is. We go through the questions and I know he loves to talk about his lifestyle and former adventures as a graffiti artist. I could see from the pictures that I found of the family how things really used to be and he misses that. He is frustrated by the change in the environment, but if anyone knows best he does, that things are bound to change. He looks at the television while he is talking to me and always has that know it all, catch me if you can smile on. Hey, what can you say that's his signature, just like Brooklyn is for all of us.

For Kelly, the interviews with her parents both reaffirm her assumptions about their attitudes towards the importance of her schoolwork and at the same time make her long to make more of a connection with them and understand how their worlds have changed. She uses her parents as representative of the fabric of Brooklyn, at once engaged in memory and reality, stand offish but reflective of herself and her life.

For her performance piece, Kelly decided to do a spoken word poem that explored her feelings for her home and her family while also showing her struggles to identify who she is and negotiate this with her environment. She performed a five minute long poem which I have excerpted here.

Every word I write/ The way I speak/ The style I have/ You're a part of me/ It originated, generated, and/ Cultivated from you/ You first rated and now it's dated/ Never hated --- maybe a little/ People played it/ They're all jaded/ Soon you'll be faded/ Hopefully not so much/ I hope you'll remember me/ And

everything I am aim to be/ Who I once was/ The transition you see/ Cause like
you we all change/ It would be a shame

Kelly's dialogue with Brooklyn, incorporating her memories, aspirations and her hopes for the future was touching for the whole class to hear. She was able to effectively translate the emotion and exploration of her written project into a piece that engaged and excited her audience. It was a thoughtful reflection of the changing nature of her subculture and the changing place of her in it. While she would always maintain a connection to Brooklyn, she didn't know if Brooklyn would always be there for her. Her nostalgia for a past recounted to her by her mother and her father reflects an uncertain connection for Kelly with Brooklyn in the future.

The goal of this project was not to come to any conclusions about her upbringing, but rather to explore a place that informed her life and her goals. Kelly's relationships to Brooklyn and her family remain unresolved and thus realistic. She doesn't try to force any conclusions on her project, but rather embraces it as an opportunity to explore, connect and share her subculture with her classroom community.

The Performance Assignment

The performance assignment differs from the autoethnographic project in that students are asked to make a large-scale performance and the planning and analysis of this performance the central focus for their writing project. Instead of investigating a subculture, students were asked to become part of a subculture that they found meaningful and to create a performance piece that would engage the larger community

directly. The intention of this project was to have a bigger effect on their surroundings and to focus on how to engage an outside audience in a project that was personally significant to the students. They were required to be informed of their subculture and the members of it through qualitative research and to ultimately create a new perspective in their performance piece. They created over forty pages of critical writing in preparation for the performance and in reflection on the process.

I argue that the performance of a personally meaningful project puts students in a position where they have to engage in multiple kinds of writing and interaction with their communities. Initially, there is a the planning process for the projects, where they have to consider both what it is that they feel they are personally invested in or affected by and how they can investigate this topic and present something new to an audience. Students are already familiar with this concept at this point in the semester, having written two major essays where they are asked to interpret a large number of texts for their implications for the self and the community at large. During the final project they get the opportunity to create something that directly involves an outside audience.

Since the students work in groups, it is a collaborative effort and the students have to find common ground with one another before beginning to lay out the details of their project. Students are asked to draw up a proposal, where they outline a number of different important elements. They need to think about the topic of the project, what research will be necessary to fully understand their topic and to respond to any audience members, what their ideas about the topic are, what they want to communicate about the topic, who they anticipate their audience to be, what they anticipate that audience's

response will be, how they will divide the writing and the planning, who will be involved, what props or items they will need for the performance, how they can create the biggest impact, location, distribution of materials, and how they feel about collaborating.

The focus of the project is not the success of the final performance or their ability as performers, but the details of the planning, their writing up of these different elements, and their ability to be self-reflective about both the successes and failures inherent in live performance. In addition to reflecting on their own process, their peers have the opportunity to not only view the live project, but to give them written analysis of its strengths and weaknesses and engage in a talkback session after the performance has finished. In classic workshop format, peers will be allowed to voice their opinions of the student performance before the project members will have the chance to engage in the dialogue and respond to questions.

I contend the project itself gives students a visceral reality where not only have they been asked to assemble and utilize the tools I just described on paper, they are also given a chance to perform live so that they can more tangibly experience what their own authority means, impact on an audience, and the importance of researching an argument as they respond to their audiences responses. It is a way to allow them to take something they are personally invested in, learn more about it, and enact opinions. In this way, they get to experience the difficulty of creating and conveying a message to an audience and how critically thinking through process can prepare them to achieve their goals. It differs from traditional oral presentation in that it allows them to creatively engage multiple

performance methods, including everything from protest, to masquerade and image making.

As I have argued throughout my chapters, there are many benefits to performance and the performance of texts. Since this project requires planning for an outside audience, the students need to consider their positionality and who they are trying to target and then interact with a responsive audience. According to Ron Pelias in *Performance studies: The Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, it is this “genuine dialogue” that is so productive for the performers:

When genuine dialogic engagement occurs between a performer and an aesthetic text, the performer encounters another voice. The aesthetic text enters the performer until its words can be spoken as if they were the performer’s own. To allow another voice to speak in one’s presence, to have genuine conversation with another, to enjoy and intimate merger of self and other - that is the performer’s ultimate goal. When performers neglect this goal, they deny their human potential and silence those who seek to be heard. (17)

According to Pelias, this conversation and interaction between performer and audience allows for a deeper understanding of people and content and opens up a space for communication where one was lacking. He writes, “Performance offers an experience, an encounter with another sensibility. Experience allows for learning, for new knowledge” (20).

Student projects covered a broad variety of topics including images of homosexuality in popular media, the impact of the war in Iraq on campus life to

vegetarianism and animal cruelty. I chose the two projects I will be discussing in this section based upon the interaction the project afforded with the college community. Each of the two projects represents a true collaboration among the students and their immediate surroundings.

The Green Fashion Group

Four students got together to create a piece that reflected their interest in recycling and a large focus for the college – sustainability. Each year, FIT hosts a sustainability conference, which looks for ways to make fashion and related industries greener and more socially conscious. This is a big part of the students' lives as they are consistently asked to consider sustainability in their class projects and their daily actions and interactions on campus. After a lot of discussion about different topics that were important to them, the group came to a consensus about recycling as something they all felt personally affected by and something they wanted to create awareness about. They also felt that due to the popularity of the subject on campus, they would have a willing and interested audience.

Even though FIT promotes sustainability, the students saw an inconsistency with the focus in their classrooms and the reality of the school. Recycling bins are almost non-existent on campus and from a survey they conducted they found that students did not have many accessible options to recycle materials.

In order to communicate their message, they created four superhero characters with accompanying costumes made from recycled materials to grab the attention of the

community and get them curious about their project. They decided to draw on how people identify the causes they are interested in and decided that fashion would appeal to the surrounding community. For this reason, they spent a large amount of time creating and outfitting characters to engage their audience. This was a tangible way to convey the message that recycling is indeed possible and can be done creatively and effectively. The characters as described by the students were the following:

“Brown Bag Betty” reuses brown bags and makes a fashionable dress out of them.

“Newspaper Nancy” shows people many ways to use newspaper over again.

“Aluminum Can Andy” shows how recycling can be artistic.

“Recyclable Rita” cares most about sustainability and shows how recycling benefits the earth so much.

Creating and wearing well-crafted outfits made out of the recyclable materials appropriate to the mission of each character, the group went out onto FIT’s campus near 27th st. and 7th ave. Armed with a slogan on small cards which gave a link to a Facebook page the students created on sustainability, the group called people’s attention to their cause and encouraged drivers to “Honk for the Earth.” They answered questions, provided information, back story for their characters, and surveyed passersby for their knowledge of environmental issues.

With a central goal of creating awareness, students crafted a plan that took into consideration their audience, surroundings and a way to follow-up their visual performance with information that might allow people to follow-up on suggestions and ideas they had about ways to be more sustainable and recycle. All plans for the

performance and the project were contained in a larger project paper the students collaboratively wrote. In addition to the planning of the project and reflection on the process, this document included response to audience interaction. The mission statement for the project was as follows:

We are a generation of advancement and technology and we want to improve our future by making people aware of going green and saving energy. By performing our concept we want to gain support of others, show people that every little bit counts, it's not hard to do, it's fashionable, and it is a way of expressing yourself.

We wanted to raise awareness to inform the public about sustainability.

In their reflection pieces, the group discussed the level of involvement the project required and how they assessed its overall impact.

Recently FIT held a sustainability conference and they tried to get more recycling bins in the schools and teach people how to be green in the fashion world. We thought we would expand on this and show FIT students that this wasn't just a one-time thing; it is a movement and we feel that things need to change and we are supporting it. Currently, FIT doesn't recycle well, according to our results most of the student body doesn't really care and just puts their trash all in one bag because it is easier and saves time. If recycling was more available then they would be more willing to recycle. On the other hand there are those who do care about the environment and support us. With our movement and our Facebook group and their support we feel that we have done some good for the environment around campus.

They took photographs of the performance piece (which all members had been invited to attend in person) and gave an oral presentation for the class where they recounted their topic, the planning that went into the performance piece and showed the photographs, Facebook page and costumes they had made to attract passerby attention. Overall during their live performance, they had 94 honks, 46 members sign up to be part of their Facebook page and numerous interactions with passersby and students. They considered the project a success as they feel they successfully raised awareness in the local community – leaving people with a strong visual picture and providing them with important information on recycling and sustainability. Their peers had the opportunity to respond to the project and their mission and raise questions about how they would have changed or adapted the performance to further serve the needs of the surrounding community.

In this project and the subsequent project I will discuss, the writing that came from the planning and execution of this project was extremely detailed and critically aware. Students had an easier time focusing in on a central argument and intention for the project once they decided on their audience. They were also open to the possibility that things may not happen as they had expected due to the nature of live performance. This awareness is reflected throughout their essay and leads their central mission and interactions to be more complex due to their attempts to be well prepared but uncertain of the outcomes. Since they needed to explain the intentions behind the piece (this was a very important element), they had to take the time and really consider every move they were making in the performance and in their writing. Each action had to have a direct

relation to the topic and a solid reason to be part of the larger project. The interactive nature also provided room for them to enact authority – to actually share what they had theorized and research in the context of the classroom with their larger world audience. The reflection piece gave them an opportunity to think about how they would have changed the project and how it met their initial expectations. The peer critique allowed them to see how their immediate community felt about the nature and scope of their performance. Also, working collaboratively helped students negotiate multiple perspectives for one common goal, figuring out how to maintain their own goals while responding to and incorporating the goals of other group members.

Through this whole project we all worked together to come up with characters, costumes, concept and goals for the project. Working together collaboratively by emailing, keeping everyone updated, and communicating we found time to make this work. We all were very passionate about being sustainable and teaching people how to recycle. This is one of the reasons we worked so well together. We hope we were a positive influence on the people whom we came in contact with. This group was able to come together successfully to create a multi-faceted response to issues of recycling on and around campus. They were able to not only convey their message in their textual planning and analysis, but also interact with their community on an issue that was important to them. The satisfaction the students felt at the end of the project helped them to continue their Facebook page and efforts on campus to make it more eco-friendly. While notably limited in its scope due to time constraints and the

nature of conducting a classroom project, this performance piece is an example of a small project that has a lot of potential for expansion and exploration.

The Style and Identity Group

A group of four students decided to create a project where they would examine the importance of clothing to local community members. They decided to do a take off on Style.com's "The Sartorialist" where a professional photographer takes photos of people on the streets and asks visitors to the website to comment on their style and rank them according to how stylish they are. Based on this, they created a multi-pronged project to interpret the relationship of style and identity. They collected data from a range of people in New York City in order to create a thought provoking performance piece for their classmates. They conducted videotaped interviews where they asked people in three different locations a consistent set of questions about wardrobes, professions and attitudes about the clothes they wore. They decided on the questions based upon what people are typically asked when they are on the runway or at fashion shows and drew from the class projects we had done throughout the semester on identity. In addition, the students took street shots of people whom they also interviewed.

As a group we determined to base our performance piece on the proposal of identity being expressed through clothing, style and physical appearance. We came to this verdict by discussing the contemplation process people may or may not use while they are getting dressed in the morning. Do they put any effort into what they are wearing that day? Do they even care? How would they categorize

their style? These are just a couple of questions we would have them answer, in order to find out how the general population of New York City reveals their personal identity through their wardrobe.

Their subject matter was based upon their own experiences as students at a very fashion-conscious school. Although fashion is in the name of the school, Fashion Design is only one of over 40 fine arts and business majors at FIT. The identification with fashion however puts a lot of focus on the images students portray through their choice of clothing day in and day out. Students consistently express their anxiety over the divisions made on campus among those who care about how they look every day and those who do not. For this reason, there is often a lot of pressure on students to convey their identities through the clothes that they wear.

Since anxiety about personal appearance is a palpable feeling on campus, the group decided that they wanted to create a performance piece that allowed them to interact with their peers and question how much their classmates rely on clothing to determine identity. Once the students planned and amassed all of the interviews, they created a video art project that combined all of the visual and audio media. They then showed this piece to their classmates to elicit their judgments of the people they interviewed solely based on screenshots. They then followed up the judgments of their peers with the actual interviews with the candidates, which revealed information as diverse as how they felt about others judging them based on their appearance, what they did for a living and how they felt style related to identity.

Along with asking a variety of questions to various people willing to take a minute and tell us about themselves, we decided we were going to film this interaction. While videotaping, we would have them respond to our questions and express what they were currently wearing, what progression they used while they got dressed that day, or any day in general, and so on. We shot those interviews in an assortment of locations such as the Fashion Institute of Technology's school campus, Walt Whitman mall in Long Island, NY, and all along the streets of Manhattan. As well as recording these interviews, we chose to take a couple of photographs of other bystanders willing to contribute to this presentation of personal identity through personal style. With these photographs, we decided we would show them to our fellow classmates and have them communicate their first impression of the individual shown in the photograph. What are they basing their initial impression on? Does their clothing mirror a certain 'type' or person? How would they judge this person based on their looks? After the students of the class give us their outlook on the individuals shown, we then plan on letting them know what each individual had to say about their own personal fashion. We hope their answers come as a revelation to everyone and the lesson learned might be that we are not able to judge someone by what they are wearing. Or even the contrary, that we may be accurate in our judgments of people due to their choices in apparel for that day.

The nature of the project required the students to keep an open mind about their peers' responses and to keep an open mind when they were approaching interview candidates.

The video was extremely well done and left the students in the class thinking about how some of the prejudices and judgments they made about one another on campus translate into larger life in New York City. Interviewees categorized themselves with a range of adjectives including “filthy jerk”, “business casual” and “hipster.” The large range of styles and attitudes represented in the film appealed to the class as a whole. Students eagerly participated and there was a pretty consistent split between accurately identifying aspects of identity through style and inaccurately judging others based on appearance. The overall message for the students was that identity is a complicated and multi-faceted idea and while style does not determine identity, many see it as an important element. The group posted the final video on Youtube hoping to reach a larger audience with their project.

As a group we are very pleased with how our project has come out. We feel as though we got our idea across in an entertaining and humorous way...Overall, the main point we wanted to get across was that sometimes the old saying “you can’t judge a book by its cover” tends to be true and sometimes it doesn’t. You never know who you might come across and sometimes it helps to take a minute and really get to know someone before passing any sort of judgment. While some feel comfortable expressing their true identity through their personal style and choice of clothing, some may not care as much about how they are perceived by others. You might be surprised in the people you find hiding beneath all those layers of clothing.

In this particular project, the students were able to focus on their individual strengths and incorporate a lot of qualitative inquiry skills in their performance piece. The interviews were well-planned and informative and the difficulty of conducting random interviews on the streets made the students aware of how willing or unwilling people were to admit to their connections between style and identity. Students were able to draw on an issue that was relevant for their peers and create a visual project based on their research and textual planning to engage their peers and get them to think critically and fashion and identity.

Concluding Thoughts

The critical writing and performing in all of its varieties that emerged during my year-long study of my FIT students demonstrates that there is a good deal of potential in the mixing of performance studies and personal writing. Overall, this year of teaching and analyzing made me aware of the potential for the combination of personal writing and performance in the classroom. In addition to starting my first full-time tenure-track teaching position, I was able to have the freedom to use my ideas for teaching in the first-year classroom with the support of my department, my home institution and college. My goal was to develop classroom methods that allowed students to understand their personal connection to what was happening in the classroom, engage in meaningful writing, workshop and collaborate with their peers and create projects that would extend into the community and their lives beyond our classroom.

At the end of the semester after grades had been submitted, I asked students to conduct an anonymous freewrite that reflected on their experiences in the class including

the topic, projects and texts. Overall, students had a range of responses, most of them finding the curriculum very surprising for a writing class, but being pleasantly surprised by how much their writing and critical thinking improved. While some felt the topic was somewhat repetitive, many felt it helped them to stay invested in all of the projects for the class. Overwhelmingly students appreciated the opportunity to pursue personally meaningful subjects and share their insights with their classmates.

Of course, not all student projects were successful and my instruction was not always clear. Especially when it comes to investigating a personally important subculture in the autoethnographic projects, students can become frustrated by a lack of progress. They may feel initially as if they are not part of any subculture, as I mentioned earlier in my analysis of Kelly's project, and a constant conversation with peers and the instructor can help guide students who have a harder time choosing a topic. The opposite also occurs, where students get so excited about a project that they want to go way above and beyond with their research. It is important to remind students that it is only a semester-long assignment, and that an adjustment in goals can be necessary and beneficial. As a class we tried to plan for the inevitable, including unwilling or reticent interviewees, cancellations, and restricted access to fieldsites. Teaching autoethnography requires a lot of adaptation on the part of the instructor and student and a willingness to adjust expectations based on unpredictable circumstances.

The performance projects held their own elements of surprise, and the students and I had to adjust to changes in schedules, accessibility of performance sites, a shortening of large term goals for a very short-term project and a negotiation of messages

among student groups. Some student groups became frustrated when other groups adopted or were influenced by their ideas and there was tension that arose from a sort of competition in the final performance of the projects. This is something that needs to be discussed openly throughout the process, and a consistent emphasis on process rather than product truly helps. Also, collaboration may not always be welcome by some students and it is important to help students understand that part of the goal of collaboration is using multiple perspectives and energies to achieve a common goal.

The benefit in all projects was that the students created large amounts of critical writing, and many student projects allowed an engagement with as aspect of a larger community and an opportunity to analyze their positionality in these communities. My suggestion in this chapter is that we have an obligation to prepare our students by building courses that can allow them to engage in personally relevant research that they can then share with larger audiences. I believe that students benefit from having the opportunity to think through the subcultures and communities they are a part of, creating not only personal writing but personally invested writing and performance. Often the process of the projects leads them to ideas and feelings they never fully analyzed before.

My favorite example of the personal performance projects leading to new insight is in the case of Charles, a middle aged man with a military background who sat among my otherwise traditional Rhetoric 243 class at UIUC in the Fall of 2006 clearly and rather vocally resistant to the work we were doing. He did not believe in sharing the self and thought the assignments were fluffy. He consistently showed he was simply not interested through both his body language and his participation. However, his attitude

evolved when asked to engage in the autoethnographic inquiry project. Charles decided to talk about deer hunting, something you knew he was a fan of by the many sweatshirts and t-shirts sporting deer that he regularly wore to class. Through his paper, he questioned why hunting was so important to him. To his surprise, as he shared with the class, it turned out that deer hunting was so important to him because it was the primary way that he bonded with his father. He continued the tradition with his two little girls, enjoying the ritual of waiting for the deer and getting them in their sights and often going home without firing a shot. He described to the class that he found out deer hunting was a way for him to bond with his children as well, and he shared their pictures with me the last day of class on his way out, his pride in his family obvious in his expression.

Charles is an example of a student who was able to realize something about his own community and able to engage in personal writing that allowed him the ability to critically analyze his subculture and communicate the depth of the experience to his obviously moved peers and instructor. It was through the process of conducting qualitative research, interacting with his audience and performing his subculture for his classmates that his writing gained dimension and richness and became part of the performance rather than simply a product of it. My point here is that, despite difficulties and successes, I believe all students and instructors can find a way to benefit from this kind of work and evolve as writers and critical thinkers. While not all projects will be as intimate, this is not the point. Projects vary as much as individuals do, sometimes inviting new emotional insight and sometimes engaging equally meaningful insight about their role in society. This kind of work can be engaged on many different personal levels and

have varied meaning for each of its participants. In Chapter 5, I will continue to demonstrate the potential for this kind of work in the classroom by assessing interviews I conducted with eight scholars in the field of Rhetoric and Composition at different stages in their careers. Their insightful comments, creative pedagogy and willingness to explore the intersections of the personal in the writing classroom provide meaningful insight into the potential of this interdisciplinary work.

Chapter 5 – Interviews: Composition Scholars Define Personal Writing

So far I have explored the place of personal writing in Composition studies, Performance studies and the classrooms of both fields of study. Researching my own classroom afforded me the opportunity to investigate student writing and personal investment on a more intimate level, but was notably limited in its scope. For this reason, in addition to reflecting on my own classroom experiences with personal writing, I wanted to engage scholars at different levels in the field one to one to find out more about the ways they use personal writing in their classrooms. My contact with scholars during this project has proved eye-opening as I consistently have experiences with peers who are defining the personal and the use of personal performance in extraordinary ways on a daily basis in their classrooms and their writing lives. In this chapter, I hope to share some these voices and the methods they have used in the classroom, in their scholarship and in teacher training to both theorize the value of the personal and make the process of teaching it accessible and goal-oriented.

My interviewees were chosen based on their scholarship and their classroom practices which have contributed to the field's understanding of how personal writing can be envisioned as an important part of Composition studies. They were also selected based on their experience level in the field, in an effort to give a sampling of how scholars at different points in their careers engage personal writing. Many of my interview participants already have substantial reputations in the field for their scholarship, teaching and professional work. In addition, through the Qualitative Research Network at CCCC, I

had the opportunity to interview two junior faculty members who were also seriously engaging personal writing and the field of performance in their pedagogy and research.

I chose to conduct interviews as part of my research because I wanted to explore the use of personal writing and performance in the classroom in a way that would allow me to make direct connections between what I already knew of the person's scholarship and what pedagogical work they were currently engaged in. The use of the interview as a qualitative research method has been debated as much as the use of personal writing, mostly because of questions of objectivity as I will discuss in this introduction. Even so, interviewing has been a primary way of collecting data for not only teacher researchers but for scholars in the field of Composition attempting to further illuminate the experiences of other scholars.

In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* Irving Seidman explores this debate over the value of interviewing and what the interviewing process has to offer to create a guide for educators seeking to conduct interview research. Seidman begins his book by taking us through his educational history, one that leads him through his own frustrations with formal processes and subsequently developing an interest in conducting qualitative research as he wrote his dissertation. His is a familiar story, and one that many of my interviewees told as they described their own difficulties winning support for qualitative research and personal writing throughout their careers. I will explore the need for institutional support more in my conclusion as I look toward future possibilities for the field and how we can provide adequate support for similar endeavors. Seidman, much

like some of my interviewees, describes how his career has led him to a point where he values interviewing and qualitative research in his writing and his teaching. He explains, “I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories. Most simply put, stories are a way of knowing” (1).

Seidman recounts the history in the field of education and the debates over the validity of interview data and the way it was to be interpreted. He explains, “The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (3). In this way, he tries to battle the notion that there is a loss of objectivity and instead investigate exactly what interviewing has to offer that other research does not. In the same way, through interviewing I sought a better understanding of how my participants understood the evolution of personal writing in the field of Composition and the place of their scholarship within it.

Seidman feels that he is able to more completely understand people’s experiences when he conducts interviews. He writes:

A researcher can approach the experience of people in contemporary organizations through examining personal and institutional documents, through observation, through exploring history, through experimentation, through questionnaires and surveys, and through a review of existing literature. If the researcher’s goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved in

education make of their experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry. (4-5)

Interviewing, thus, provides an important type of information and storytelling that can help us understand other research.

In addition to Seidman, other texts have contributed to the understanding of the value of interviewing as a research method. In “Interviewing: The Art of Science,” Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey give an overview of the history of interviewing in education and educational research. Their text breaks down and elaborates on the possible categories of interview research as well as how these categories can function best in different types of studies. For my research, I conducted what they categorize as “Unstructured Interviews” where I developed a set of questions to understand what I was looking for out of the interaction but adapted my questions and responses based upon the situation and the interviewee’s approach. Although they analyze the use and benefits of each type of interviewing, they believe that “Unstructured interviewing provides a greater breadth than the other types, given its qualitative nature” (56). I found that this flexibility along with a solid foundation of questions allowed me to encourage my participants to speak at length about their experiences. This kind of narrative response allowed me to better understand all of the different elements that went into their theories including personal research experience, teaching, and teacher training.

For qualitative theorist and educational philosopher Steinar Kvale in *Interviews*, this kind of conversation is the basis of all interactions and how we create a knowledge base. He believes that the value is quite clear and relevant to the way meaning making

occurs on a daily basis although different because of the power dynamic. He explains how the interview is able to capture the nature of regular human interaction and extend it in a way that other research methods cannot. According to Kvale:

The use of the interview as a research method is nothing mysterious: An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose. It goes beyond the spontaneous exchange of views as in everyday conversation, and becomes a careful questioning and listening approach with the purpose of obtaining thoroughly tested knowledge. The research interview is not a conversation between equal partners, because the researcher defines and controls the situation. The topic of the interview is introduced by the researcher, who also critically follows up on the subject's answers to his or her questions. (6)

As Kvale explains, the process is engaged in order to obtain specific knowledge for specific purposes. By explaining my own research in and out of the classroom, I attempted to guide and situate our conversations. In this way, I tried to provide a firm background for my interviewees so that they could understand my point of view before I asked them to discuss their own methods.

Before conducting the interviews, I provided each participant with a copy of my dissertation proposal and the same overview of my research so they could better understand the project I was engaging. While I asked all participants similar questions, as I mentioned earlier, the interviews were conducted in a manner that tried to follow the nature of the conversation and elicit what I thought was relevant information based upon my line of questioning.

In this chapter, I have grouped their responses based around the questions I asked them, each section titled accordingly. As I present and analyze the implications of their responses, I will provide some context and back story about each interviewee to give more of a feel for where their ideas and answers are coming from in the larger context of the interview process and their scholarly approaches. In general, I hope to provide enough space in the text to demonstrate the careful and explicit nature of each interviewee's thought process about the value of personal writing in both their teaching and their scholarship. Often, I believe the participant's words speak best for themselves and I have attempted to give them the proper space necessary here to fully articulate their theories and processes.

“Personal Writing”: Personal Definitions

In the interviews, it quickly became apparent that my participants were scholars who were accustomed to defending their work, not necessarily in a negative sense but in a sense that their answers were generally very detailed and comprehensive. In each instance, my interviewees had a thorough understanding of what the personal meant to them and what it did not mean. In addition, each interviewee showed an amazing devotion to their classroom practices and the potential for personal writing to engage students on deeper levels.

For this reason, one of the first topics I introduced in the interviews and the first one I will explore here was my own understanding of what “personal writing” is and what is at stake in my project. Whether in response to, in agreement with or in opposition

to my ideas, most of the interviewees had a carefully developed sense of what “personal writing” was for them, and used different terminology and different methods of analysis to explain and practice their own theories.

My first interview was with Professor Sondra Perl who is known for her concept of “felt sense” – the idea that there is a need to listen to the body and to the self in our scholarly practices – which she articulates in her book *Felt Sense: Writing With the Body*. Perl is a well-known scholar professor at Lehmann College and founded the NYC Writing Project. For this reason, she had pointed ideas about her own writing process, teaching students and teaching teachers.

Throughout the interview process, Perl demonstrated her deeply held belief that the self cannot be separated out of the academic experience. Rather, for her the personal is a part of all professional writing and vice versa. Throughout our interview, she discussed the need to understand how the self is integrated in the writing and how we can encourage others to see the self in the same way. For Perl, the personal is not about the use of the “I” but rather about an understanding of the “knower” as well as what that person is presenting in their writing. As we discussed the nature of my project and my own attempts to incorporate the “I” in my scholarship, Perl opened up about her own perspective on the relationship of the writer to the written. She maintains that there can still be objectivity, even in the use of the personal. As Perl explains,

There can be objectivity, certainly, objectivity in certain situations and one doesn't always have to write from the personal, but I think, particularly in the field of Composition where we're studying composing and we're studying live people, that

who we are has an impact on that all the time, who they are has an impact. And so I'd rather be up front about who I am, what I value and what I see, and people can judge what I see based on what I've said about who I am, as opposed to pretending I'm not shaping what's going on. So I think we're always composing and we're always shaping and therefore, taking who the shaper is at that moment into account is wise, as opposed to pretending none of that's going on.

So for me, it always comes back to who's the knower and how does that knowing get conveyed. And so that can be done without using "I". I mean, I don't think every piece of writing has to have an "I" in it's center, but I think our field needs to embrace the "I" and kind of explore the different "I"s and the different selves and the different voices in a way that celebrates the knower as much as what is known.

For Perl, the sense of "I" is intrinsic to all scholarly work and does not necessarily need to be expressed directly as such. Similarly, Professor Thomas Newkirk of the University of New Hampshire, author of *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* which I analyzed in Chapter 2, practices this kind of experience-making in his own way, openly expressing the sentiment that a lot of what he writes stems from how he experiences the world and the stories that arise from his own experiences. In our interview, he consistently reiterated that many of his ideas for his scholarship and his teaching come from his own stories. Newkirk explains,

I think I see my subject in terms of my stories, that everything I write has some

autobiographical basis--our theories are disguised autobiographies, I think. I think it was Wordsworth who wrote about indelible "spots of time" that stay with us and shape us. So it isn't that I have an idea and find an anecdote for the aid for readers--the stories are more of a base than that. If anything the theories emerge out of the stories--or maybe it goes both ways. How I choose them--I'm not sure. Sometimes it feels like they choose me.

Later in the interview when I ask him if he had any concluding thoughts about the personal he added:

I guess that I want to stress, as others have, that the mark of the personal is not necessarily an "I" or even bits of autobiography. I think it is a kind of energy, passion for the topic, a sense that ideas are actors too. One of my favorite writers is Isaiah Berlin --whose intellectual histories not only include his autobiography, but they FEEL so personal because he seems so invested in, so there in the writing.

While for Perl and Newkirk the personal comes from this understanding of the connection of self to what is being studied, others had different ideas about what the personal meant to them. I met Professor Nicole Wallack, the Acting Director of the Undergraduate Writing Program at Columbia University and a teacher at Bard College at a presentation she gave at CCCC. Wallack's sense of how the personal can function owes to her experiences as a teacher, director of a writing program and teacher of teachers and background working with Pat Hoy at NYU (whom I also interviewed for this study). Wallack created a term, "personal presence," the topic of her CCCC presentation I

attended, that comes from her experiences teaching undergraduates and running a writing program. How that presence gets created in the text and thus illuminates the self is a topic she continued to explore in our interview. Here is what she had to say about that concept and the presentation.

When I talk about their presence in the text, I say that can take any number of forms from the first person to the third, and I just want them to know what that person is up to.

In the presentation that you saw, I emphasize the use of pronouns and how the self is represented--the speaking self in the text is represented through the pronoun choice and shifts in the pronoun choice. 'Cause it's rare that a writer will stick to one--very rare. At least there's usually a movement from "I" to "we" in most pieces, either explicitly or not. And so we want to think about why that might be and what the role of that plays, aside from opening out and people saying crazy things like it makes it universal. Nothing, no pronoun shift is going to make anything universal. But what it says is I want to implicate more that myself in the text. So I'm looking for moments in the text where the writer is writing actual sentences. Those are the places where I see a presence emerging. There's thinking. There's the language of thought.

Sometimes what we call a personal presence sometimes can feel like confession. It can be an emotional awakening, which is important and valuable, but in

academic writing ninety percent of the time it should be an intellectual awakening or have that dimension to it. It can be a political awakening. It can be a sexual one; whatever it is, but it has to have move you from where you were to some new place and it has to have some way of telling us why that would be important to people besides oneself.

Wallack's carefully thought-out term "personal presence" is a way of talking about this awakening in the text, where the student in this case is engaging the material in a personal and meaningful way. Again, such awakening may not happen through the direct use of "I" but in subtle shifts of authority in the writing. For Wallack, these shifts are valuable when they can be made understandable for a larger audience.

For Professor Pat Hoy, the head of the Writing Department at NYU, there is a very specific sense of what the personal means. He began our interview by using his own definition of what I termed "personal writing" taking a stance against my own definition, which led to an engaged interview. Showing an awareness of the field, he discussed teaching teachers and students to write critically and personally.

I'm gonna have to begin by taking exception to the term, because I'm not interested in personal writing per se. I'm actually interested in how all writers use personal experience as evidence so that their aim in my classroom is not to be personal in the autobiographical sense but to use experience in such a way that it becomes impersonal and therefore universal, so that the experience is a piece of evidence as powerful, sometimes more powerful, than evidence that comes from books, poems, movies, paintings, the world.

So I never have much interest in so-called personal except to say that everything is personal and any attempt to be objective is to some degree always illusional, maybe delusional; that we know only what we know and no matter how objective we try to be what we say is tainted by the personal. Academe is allergic to the personal because it has longstanding scientific love affair with objectivity. My way of dealing with that in each writing program is to ignore academe's allergy and to try to teach students how to make use of who they are and what they know. And my vehicle for doing that is the essay, which in this program I always try to get people not to call the personal essay. We call it instead the familiar essay. That term has been around at least since my graduate school days back in the '70's. You can find it in Hibert and Holman's *Handbook Of Literature*, for example. But when those three people write about the essay itself they tend not to use that term familiar and instead use formal versus informal. My insistence on the familiar is simply to turn students' minds away from thinking that when they reconstruct personal experience in my classroom that they're doing it to be personal or doing it the only to tell a story about their lives. They're doing it finally because it has something very important to do with an idea they're trying to develop. So the agency or, no, the vehicle for transforming the personal into the impersonal is the idea of the essay. So that's the essence of the pedagogy actually, and then we can talk for days about that.

Hoy recognizes the debates over objectivity and the personal and blames this desire for

objectivity for the bad name the personal receives. While he is not interested in the direct use of “I”, much like the other scholars I interviewed, he is interested in how experience functions to get students interested and invested in writing. As I will discuss later, Hoy believes that the familiar essay leaves students able to extend their own experiences and communicate with a larger audience.

I also interviewed scholars who were in the beginning stages of their careers. I met Professor Loren Marquez from Salisbury University at the Qualitative Research forum at CCCC. Marquez and I discussed the challenges of being a new teacher and an administrator, and the challenges of bringing ideas about personal writing and performance into the workplace not just the classroom.

I'm just really beginning my scholarship. I like narrative within any arguments that I make. I prefer them because I do believe that arguments do arise out of a personal investment or personal interest and especially given the topic of the conversations that I'm having about how I teach or how I train teachers or the types of writing assignments that are valuable I always draw from my personal experience. I don't know if that needs to be the bulk of an argument or an article that I'm working on but I think it's important to draw from it.

Marquez recognizes the value of using personal experience to relate to faculty that she is teaching and also to her students. Again, for her, the personal is about experience and creating connections with her audience.

Overall, while they had very specific and widely variant definitions of what I term personal writing, each interviewee agreed that first-hand experience was often at the core

of what the term meant for them. While defining their positions of what I term personal writing, it became apparent that it was difficult to separate out teaching practices when explaining and exploring their positions. This interweaving of experiences led me to investigate their teaching practices more in depth to better understand how they communicate these ideas to their students and to other scholars.

Classroom Practices: Student Projects

I was very interested in hearing more about some of the ways that my participants incorporated the personal in their classrooms. In all of the interviews, teaching and scholarship went hand in hand, but when I asked participants to be more specific about how they make the personal useful in their classrooms, I was able to get a lot more insight into how they put ideas into practice with undergraduates, graduates and other teachers.

Professor Carole Deletiner, a proponent of personal writing and a colleague of mine at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and I talked about her own history as the subject of a qualitative dissertation on personal writing, which I will discuss briefly in my conclusion, and how she has altered her pedagogy to bring the best out in her students. Drawing on her own experiences as a subject of qualitative research on personal writing and her own history finding her voice as a teacher, she discusses how she tries to bring out the personal in her students' writing by drawing on specific moments where the pedagogy has really been meaningful in a student's life.

All I want is for them to do the work and that's to do the writing and examine, not only tell the stories of their lives but to examine them in a way that is deeper. I mean, in the most successful version of this, a student had written that one of these: This summer I went to Africa and we stayed in this village and the people were so poor they had nothing, but they were happy. And we take things for granted and they had nothing, but they were so happy. And I remember writing in the margin and asking, could you define who you mean by "we" and could you also think and write more about what happiness means for you and what you thought happiness meant for these people, which led to an incredible critique of being upper middle class from a suburban Chicago background as if he was going to the zoo and he really didn't know or see these people at all. And of course they appeared happy because there were these white people...

It was a different kind of performance and, I mean, he was incredible. This was at NYU. He was a film student and it just blew his mind that he had walked around for eighteen years and had a paradigm shift of huge proportion because he started to question everything. And in the other end of the spectrum are the students who, they just, no matter how you ask the question, they don't want to look at it. They don't want to write about it. They don't want to acknowledge being implicated in it.

Language is a living organism and because I'm a firm believer in an emotional education that is sorely lacking in every aspect of the virtual world that we live in, that I think inviting poor, unsuspecting students into a place where they can talk about things that matter, they can talk about things that are difficult and discover that they are in a community of people who can relate to what they're talking and writing about is incredibly, it's the best thing I can do as a teacher of any kind.

And for a lot of people, even though they struggle with it, at the end of the semester they say that that [assignment] was their favorite.

For Deletiner, the connections that this kind of work allows are extremely valuable to the students. It allows them to gain insight about their positionality in the world around them and to critically analyze using experiences, a goal all of my interviewees seemed to have for their students. In addition to the benefits, she also acknowledges the difficulty students can encounter beginning this kind of writing, since it may be new to them or unexpected in a college writing course. Despite these struggles, though, she feels almost all students recognize the benefits.

On top of the personal writing, Deletiner also asks students to conduct interviews, which she believes allows them to engage the personal on a more meaningful level and create more valuable experiences they can take with them once they leave the classroom.

And then the interview assignment, which they really like, especially students who interview family members because the nature of an interview is so different. You actually have to listen and you don't talk. And it invites the people you

interview to open up and talk about things that you probably wouldn't do with your kids, not that you say anything, but that there's this unconscious transformation and it's not your child. It's being interviewed. And they love finding out things about their parents. And some people have done multigenerational things. Some people have interviewed a parent and then one of the parents' siblings or they've interviewed their own siblings. I mean they have access to people that they thought they knew, that they come to know in a very different way. And I mean, I'm always thinking of those social constructionists who say this is all poppycock and it makes people feel good, but they're examining the structure of, for most people, an upper middle class family and for cultural values, for immigrant students and the distance and alienation.

In this way, for Deletiner, the students can make direct connections to the world around them and also have an opportunity to explore things important to them that they might not otherwise had the chance to engage. In the interview, Deletiner consistently reiterated the connections she made with students and the progress students made in their writing based on these personal writing assignments.

Creating assignments that draw on very specific experiences and aspects of the community can also create a very productive frame for the use of personal writing. Loren Marquez asks her students to create a “personal public” argument that has “larger social significance that connected to you personally or something you have a personal investment in.”

I've done it two ways: where I've given them a prompt that's specifically about education or the culture of schooling, meaning, write about an educational event that was of significance to you and argue why it has or how it has broader social implications. Usually I had students read Richard Rodriguez' "Achievement Of Desire" the excerpt from "Hunger For Memory" so that they are talking about how education separates you from, well, in this instance, cultures you a certain way and separates you from your home culture in certain ways. So they have tons of ideas as a springboard to start discussing, maybe, an educational event which shaped them a certain way. And then that particular assignment has students start with the writing the personal experience first and do a personal experience draft and then they work toward bring in two outside sources and so a four to six page paper where they're arguing why something educationally is of larger importance.

While she admits that students don't always choose the most interesting topics or can struggle with the assignment at times, she finds that overall it helps them to make connections between their experience and how to create an analytic paper.

At the end of the semester they write an argument, I call it a reflective argument, on the kinds of writing they did over the course of the semester: what their strengths were, what their weaknesses were, what types of writing they preferred and a lot of the feedback - I do this so that I can get feedback and so they can articulate maybe a certain approach or a style of writing that they preferred or how they have grown as writers or something to that effect. They usually say that they preferred, I mean, this is broadly generalized 'cause I have no data or

numbers at this point, but they prefer writing about themselves. And usually they'll say things like no ones' ever asked me to write about myself before. Or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, some will say I felt more comfortable writing more researched argumentative papers because I've been taught to do so, or I think that is more academic writing. I've gotten those kinds of comments before. So, I mean, the responses vary. But by and large, they really feel--and I'm just speculating here--but feel invested in their writing when they write using "I", because some of them have never been told you can use "I" before.

As Marquez reflects on the value of this kind of assignment, she is able to see the connections students make to using "I" in their other college classes, further supporting the notion that this kind of work based on personal experience often has larger out-of-class implications for students.

Meredith Love, another junior faculty member who I met at the Qualitative Inquiry network at CCCC is an Assistant Professor of English and the Composition Coordinator at Francis Marion University. In our interview, she first discussed how she uses personal writing in her advanced composition class by asking students to understand the position they already hold as writers.

I ask students to complete a writing log. This comes from an essay by Richard Courage. Basically, I ask students to keep track of all of the writing they do over a period of time. They are to collect as much of it as they can and then look it over, analyze it, try to figure out who they are writing to and how their writing changes depending on the rhetorical situation. They make lists and then write a short paper

discussing what they've done. In short, most students figure out that they are already agile rhetoricians. So, while this assignment might not be personal in the way that some might discuss "the personal"--it does not call upon students to discover their authentic or inner voice--this assignment does ask them to explore the writing of their lives, their personal writing. I believe that there is more to the personal than the authentic. Performance studies, particularly Goffman, tells us that we all play many roles, of course. However, these roles are determined and played out in relation with others.

So, with this assignment, students gain an understanding of the multiple roles that they already play. My hope is that they can see and appreciate what they already know and understand that writing in a particular field or writing for a profession is a matter of learning, studying, and enacting those roles.

This assignment is a great example of the fact that assignments do not need to be complicated in order to be effective. By establishing a sense of positionality for the students, Love is better able to set them up to interact with new audiences in personal performance based assignments I will discuss later on.

Professor Karen Paley, author of *I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First Person Writing* who I discussed in my introduction, considered her own struggles with publication of ethnographic materials, which I will discuss in my conclusion, and the positive aspects of encouraging this kind of work in the classroom. As we discussed what she currently used in the classroom, she gave me a couple of examples of personal

writing assignments and why she thought they were effective, noting that students had an easier time entering the writing experience when they worked from something familiar.

So the personal is, I think, an essay they're most familiar with and most comfortable with. The others have more academic components and coming from weak high school backgrounds it tends to be the one they enjoy writing and feel the most confident about writing. And some of them actually write some good ones.

They have to define a problem in their home community. I don't mean their house. I mean their community, like an issue that's going on, and they have to interview one person on each side of the issue and they have to find some newspaper articles on it and combine the information into a paper which presents the different sides of the conflict and where they stand. So it's tends not to be very personal although it is about their home communities, or it's supposed to be. And they find it interesting since they learn things about their own town that they never knew.

I try to find something that the students will do some academic work and at the same time enjoy.

This emphasis of having students engage assignments that are personally meaningful while also helping their writing was a strong thread throughout all of our conversations. Also, the concept of reaching into the community was an important connection that I will

continue to explore in my performance section. Tom Newkirk remains consistent with his own writing practices when he asks students to draw on stories and personal experiences in one of his class assignments.

In my persuasive writing class one of my favorite assignments is what I call the "Right to Speak" paper. I say that when we have first-hand experience with an issue, we have the "right to speak" and I ask them to describe their experience and show how their opinions and insight came from that experience. In our work with doctoral students at UNH there is a strong tradition of narrative (case studies, ethnographies) that draw on personal engagement and observation. Books like Lad Tobin's *Writing Relationships*.

I think that as students develop they can get beyond conventional interpretations of their own experience--they can interrogate them more. This is hard for beginning students--and I really stress just paying attention to the detail of what they are writing--characters, detail, dialogue.

I feel that one of the most powerful forms of evidence we have for persuasion is an examined life. One of my students wrote about the hopelessness of residential treatment for schizophrenics by describing the unvarying routines he saw during his internship--he did a great job with the numbing repetitiveness of the conversations with those living there. I find this kind of persuasion really powerful--it takes me to topics that matter for students, it builds their narrative

skills, it's profoundly readable. And I think it connects to how real readers (but not always academics) respond to writing.

Having a personal connection to the writing seemed to be important not only for students, but for teachers being trained to teach these writing classes. Professors Pat Hoy and Nicole Wallack were able to discuss not only classroom assignments, but also the way they theorize the personal in terms of running a large university writing program and teaching teachers. Here, Hoy describes in detail the familiar essay I introduced in the first part of this chapter and is able to really break down the theory behind getting students to think from experience before engaging in any other academic writing.

The first essay is the familiar and it's there to teach students how to select moments from their own experience and to recreate those moments almost always in the shape of scenes, by which I mean something akin to dramatic scenes. I want them to learn to latch onto a minute particular of experience, some circumscribed moment, which can be recreated for a reader so that the reader has a sense that he or she has entered into that moment. Once that moment or a series of such moments are created or reconstructed by the student, the student then has a body of potential evidence, which has to be read and those scenes are like good stories. They are stories that are circumscribed. And if they have been constructed well they will reveal to the writer and to the audience most often things that the writer didn't know about when he or she constructed them. So they're rich in the business of making that essay requires the student to learn how to read those scenes out of augment them or connect them with written text and perhaps a

painting--in fact, almost always a painting--so we spend five weeks doing various daily exercises, three typewritten pages usually, all of which are designed to lead students toward that final familiar essay. But we're trying to teach them actually to let us see them think on the page. So when we make that move to the academic essay, which feeds on written texts, we want them to carry forward with them what they've learned about experience but more important what they've learned about the digressive and illuminating play of their own mind as it looks at evidence so that close relationship between evidence and idea and the personal mind reading that evidence is a dynamic relationship that we want to carry forward into the second and third essays as they learn to read more and more complicated texts.

When discussing how he goes about training teachers to instruct students and help them through this essay process, he emphasizes the fact that the teachers really need to experience the writing process themselves in order to effectively communicate the value of this kind of writing. With graduate students as well, he emphasizes the need to demonstrate the value of the essay and the difficulty of getting habits to change on an individual and institutional level.

We have a very extensive developmental program. It begins two weeks before the semester begins with five workshops spread over two weeks and I take them through the whole course and set them in motion to write their own familiar essay. So I'm asking them to do that because I know that most of them haven't

done it. They've written argument after dull argument and I have to take something away from them so that they get excited about their own work again.

So this will work with freshmen, juniors, seniors, sophomores. It works less effectively with calcified graduate students, and it works extremely well with adults seeking to reeducate themselves or refine themselves because it works for them especially because they have enough distance from their own experience to know that it's probably worth as much as five of those books over there. They're perfectly thrilled to write the familiar essay, but when I try to get them to take the lessons learned, the digressive but purposeful mind at work on the page, for example, into their academic writing they can't do it. They go right back to declare and proving and citing snippets from this and that and the other thing. Now, on the other hand, it's very true that people who work in this program long enough will tell you to a person, I think, how much their own writing and their own academic work have improved over time while doing this and that they end up writing dissertations they could not have written without doing this work. But if we just take one group of graduate students and put them in one advanced essay graduate course, they write one familiar essay and one academic one, they don't, that's not enough time.

The vaccination against declaration isn't powerful enough to change the body. They just lapse into habit. And they do it against time pressure because if they're

taking a grad course it's one of four. They're probably working somewhere trying to slug their way through a relationship of some kind and they're hungry. And so it just won't happen. It will not happen in one semester in the same way that freshmen can go through the sequence and do things that are remarkable by the time they finish, but they can't tell you how to transfer it even to the lit course or to the history course.

And so their biggest complaint is that we make them do things they don't have to do anywhere else, which is just absurd but they can't see it.

For Hoy, there is a combined need to be both open to the idea of the essay and not too ingrained in doing a traditional argument. He also mentions the idea that older students, adults returning to take classes, have an easier time writing the essay because they are distanced enough from their experience. In her own discussion of Columbia's writing program and her own teaching practices, Nicole Wallack introduces the theory behind starting off with essays that focus on experience and moving from there. She celebrates the personal as another piece of evidence that can be used in a larger argument.

The first essay in the semester asks students to read contemporary essays, many of which call upon what we call first hand experience, as evidence or as a source, and to distill a concept, idea or a critical lens from that text in order to leverage an interpretation of another event, object, text of some kind, and that thing may end up being a first hand experience. And we use the idea that one's lived experiences aren't the equivalent of a kind of source that you would use to make

an argument about something. That is, our first hand experiences do add to our ethos to some degree because we're live people, we get to say what happens in the world, but we say your lived experience is something to analyze to question, to inquire into in some way, to really look at carefully as and we call them exhibits. It's not an example that means that it represents something that happens in the larger world to everyone else. It literally means it's one thing: an object to look at. It's good to have something that you may have witnessed but you may or may not feel sort of totally implicated in. In fact, your stance towards that event is important to look into. And maybe Said could help you look into that. So that's why we're sort of inviting them--we don't require them--to use first hand experience. Typically, though, for especially for new teachers and especially in their first year of teaching, the use of first hand experience comes and can provoke a great deal of anxiety and that tends to be around not knowing how to help the students to present that experience, to perform the experience for an audience that is not themselves along, and also to distinguish between something that you look at critically versus something that you refer to without any critical intervention at all. So that's the big bone of contention. So now in our teaching seminar every time we show them a student essay that does really interesting work but includes some kind of first hand or personal experience, if there's something wrong with the essay or the logic, frequently they'll say, they'll attach it to the presence of experiential material. So in the paper that I gave for CCCCs one of the distinctions that I try and make in my own work and I'm interested in, is the

difference between helping students to cultivate a personal voice of a personal presence, 'cause I think that voice doesn't quite cover the thing that I'm talking about--with having a thinking presence in your work. And personal sometimes shows up in students' writing and in our own writing as a voice that will narrate rather than reflect. And by reflection I don't even mean I'm standing back and thinking about this issue, but actually doing that kind of probing or searching or doubting; having some kind of skeptical, not overtly self doubting in that terrible way but in the old skeptics version--in the Montaignian version of skepticism—the idea that we have to actually be able to say what does this mean in a meaningful way if you're going to bother to look at it. And I think that's hard to teach. That's very hard to teach.

As opposed to Hoy, Nicole Wallack sees the concept of distancing from experience as the problem. She sees the challenges of teaching the personal and really believes that the key is not restriction, for as she says the personal is always there, but to really train teachers to learn how to help students use experience to their advantage and to recognize their audience.

And when people tell students, well, stand back from your experience, the directive is actually incorrect. Standing back is where the narrative comes from in my sense of it. It's actually, I've written about this in my dissertation, is that you actually have to help people get closer to their experiences, not further away, in order to figure something out about them. But the fact is, as I think we all know, unless all you're gonna ask your students to do close readings of texts that are

purely textual, as soon as you ask somebody to think about something, their stuff is going to start coming in. It's going to find its way in. It's going to find its way in. If you're preoccupied because--you know--your relatives, one of your close relatives has cancer and there happens to be a text like Ehrenreich's "Welcome To Cancer Land", well, but of course, here come the narratives of illness, of course, of course. Even if you forbid it. And then you're in the position to say: It's not really what I asked for but... So I'm making fun of it a little because, unless you restrict the work that students will do, as soon as you have any texts on race or sexuality or political ideology or education, just anything. How about anything. How about anything that any body could actually - As soon as you give students the opportunity to write about things that they could possibly care about, in walks their stuff.

Okay? So I think that we get ourselves into too much of a dither about it and we end up projecting it back onto the student. Oh, well, this student just couldn't get away from this story about--you know--her Grandma. It's like, no, folks, none of us can get away from that story. But the issue is not whether that story has a role to play, but what is the other work that you have to give the student to do so that the only thing that he's authorized to do is not just tell that story.

I'm saying this very categorically, but I don't think that we have sufficiently flexible, imaginative and purposeful ways of asking students to write frequently

that gives them license to do more than tell their story. I look to us to say there's nothing you're going to do if that story wants to come out, to prevent it from coming. But aside from telling her not to tell it, what other things did you give her to do? What did you ask her to do in the first place?

Well, how did you respond to it and what information, in fact, do you think it gives the student or doesn't yet give the student. How are you helping the student to read those stories too. In fact, many times when students generate incredibly intimate and personal difficult material, sometimes traumatic material--a teacher has to be able to have the wherewithall to say: Look, if you're feeling like this is an experience or a concern that you need to pursue in your writing, there are ways to do it. There are ways to do it. Let me show you how two other writers do it whom I respect... So if you look at Richard Rodriguez, and you're looking at *Late Victorians*, where he's really grappling with issues of history and place and sexuality and appearance and all kinds of things simultaneously--you know, for all of his disavowals of how that is a personal essay at some level, of course, it's right there on the surface, if you just really want to look at it. So then we have to help students to learn what else is in this picture besides the emotional overwhelming thing, and also to help them make good decisions about whether they're ready to write about it or not.

In order to encourage a balanced perspective, in teaching training at The Institute for Writing and Thinking, she asks the teachers to do the work they are asking the students to

do. In doing this something familiar seems to happen, they often have revelatory moments of the same kind they are trying to elicit from the students. They are also more aware of exactly what it is they are asking their students to do and how they can best help them deal with intended and unintended personal moments that come into their texts.

I can't tell you the number of times I've been with a group of teachers who've worked together for twenty years and you ask them to do a very common prompt: tell us the story of your name. Tell us the story of your name as an opening thing, as a way of reading, as an active interpretation. And they write these stories and then you hear them aloud. And I just ask what did you hear? What are points of connection? What are points of difference? And they'll say, well, what did you notice or what was it like to hear that and they - I just never knew. Oh my God! That's just amazing! This is where they came from. This is where they came from. So it becomes a window for teachers sometimes, into a set of values for their colleagues that they didn't realize existed. So writing in that kind of way as a professional development tool is a really powerful thing for them. And in these workshops we do frequently see those teachers will end up going on to write essays out of it. But if you ask them you're welcome to write any kind of essay you want out of this. You could write a critical essay back to Cronan that calls on other sources. You could write a whatever you want. If you've given people space and room to work in their first hand experience in a group of fifteen, thirteen people will choose to pursue the essay that allows them to continue to work with their first hand experience. And largely it's because they say I never let my

students do this .Or when my students do this I tell them they shouldn't do it.

And so then we talk about why, what is it. And they're not old enough at some level. They're not looking back enough. I said: So what are the things that you're doing in your essay that help you to not simply tell your story but do something with it. You know? And then we try and say what of those moves are teachable?

Throughout their descriptions of classroom assignments and training methods, my interviewees consistently reinforced the importance of awareness for how our students are interpreting assignments and the best way we can encourage them to look at the personal critically. They referred to their own experiences as writers to judge how to help students engage their experiences. While describing their theories, many also referred to my questions on how they use performance to help students engage other methods of knowing in their personal writing in the classroom.

The Integration of Performance

While two of the scholars I interviewed directly engaged the field of performance studies in their research (Loren Marquez and Meredith Love), I found that many of my other participants also encouraged methods of performance in conjunction with personal writing to create a better environment for connected student writing. Sondra Perl explored how she integrated various performance practices in her teaching to encourage students to participate more fully in their writing and presentation of that writing. Some

of the exercises were planned and some arose from the connections generated in the classroom.

Twice a term, once in the middle and once at the end, I have a read around where everybody performs their piece. And recently I was also leading a workshop at a retreat center, not in the classroom, and someone said, well, why don't we stand up and really perform our pieces. And I realized I had this sort of English teacher middle where everybody sits behind their desks and reads, and I thought, well, let's see what happens. And it really made a difference. I mean people sort of own their own bodies and their piece. And they weren't doing gestures particularly but they were certainly more present physically. So I think I mean, I liked that a lot.

There are two ways I think I've just without thinking about it, encouraged performance is if we're doing book groups, particular around literature, I usually ask each book group to enact the central ideas of a book through a performance. So that would involve text, it would involve music, it could involve costumes, and it's really their decision of how they want to render the book for the class. But it's very much a performance. And the best ones always have some kind of music, or dim the lights or light candles some performance of text and poetry. To understand, say, literature or poetry or whatever, doesn't necessarily have to be in an essay or a written text. That it could also be in a spoken performance. And I've often done that with teachers 'cause I've wanted them to understand what they can do in their classrooms.

And then once, in a theory course on pedagogy, I wanted the students to enact a pedagogy that they thought was important. So they got to teach the class and collaboratively come up with an enactment of a theory, a pedagogical theory, that mattered to them. And those were great. They were just enormous fun. And people are very challenged when you ask them to not be passive; the sort of take a stand and think: Well, if this is what I believe in theoretically. How do I do it? How do I engage people in it?

So that was really fun. I think I probably think that classrooms should be fun. That doesn't mean it's frivolous. It just means that you're engaged and the people there matter and what they say matters. So I think I'm always looking for ways of having the classroom be inclusive and where there's always more than one voice. I think for me I judge my first class of the semester as successful if everybody speaks the first night. I mean, to me that just makes a huge difference about what we're doing. The whole thing is personal! Maybe you can register some different voices, but to me all of these projects stem from somebody's personal interest or stake in questions.

Encouraging students to engage their bodies and also try to “enact” theory helped them to connect to the topic and the classroom environment. She embraces the fact that it also adds a certain kind of energy to the classroom that brings interactions to a new level.

Thinking more directly of the implications for the future of the field of Composition, Perl sees a lot of possibilities for this kind of work.

I think the future of our field--I think it's increasingly going there and I think it's a good move. It should be not just in performance or, I guess, performance defined very broadly to include digital storytelling and new media and fluency in a kind of technology. I think that's maybe a twentieth-century style of scholarship, and I would hope that in the twenty-first century there are these alternative venues. So I personally think digital stories, having students now create/compose in a much larger universe that adds text, voice, sound, music, imagery--I think that it's the milieu that they grow up in and it's our job to learn how to understand that rhetorically so that we can work with them on pre--presentations. So to me that would be exciting scholarship and exciting writing that is much more forward-looking.

Nicole Wallack also discusses how actually performing a piece or using performance methods helps her students understand their personal stakes in their writing in a more direct and tangible way. Having a direct understanding of audience helps the students connect to their topic on a more intimate level and see the implications of their writing. Speaking about performance, she observes:

I have encouraged it because it's hard to have an idea about something only in your head. It's much easier to have an idea about something that you've actually had to grapple with out there in the world. And I guess, before I was here, another course that I used to teach was called Diversity In Professional Life and it was

about people who were going into all kinds of jobs, from nursing to nutrition to educational positions, occupational therapy, all kinds of stuff---here they'd thought about what they'd needed to know to do their job well, but they had never really situated it in any kind of way. So that this notion of putting things in a context, situatedness. And at the same time I was teaching that course I was working teaching writing courses that were linked to Tisch School at NYU and many of our instructors came out of performance studies. So not surprisingly, altogether in the mix of what we used to think about, we developed projects that required students to go out and engage the world, whether it was through looking at a piece of performance that called itself a performance or looked at something that may not have been considered a performance in our strict definition of what counts but in sort of Schechnarian terms does. And that was usually pretty enlightening for all of those students just to understand that thing that you saw on the subway happening, that interaction you saw between three people or that thing that you saw happen between the ticket seller and the couple at Penn Station and the strangeness of that interaction, that's worth looking at. They themselves don't code it as a performance. We understand it as that because it helps us make sense of something that that we didn't have a name for. So I think, yes, in fact I like to encourage students to go out and to identify those kinds of moments or experiences.

For Wallack, asking students to draw on their daily interactions helps them understand that experiences include things that they witness in their lives and gives a broader

perspective to what personal can mean to them and how they can expand this notion to communicate in a larger way.

Building on the earlier performance-based terminology he used talking about the use of scene and visual media to get students writing, Pat Hoy continued to explore the implications for students using these ideas from performance to understand the writing of their experiences.

I've found that when students begin to write about their experience, when we allow them to tell stories about themselves, they write much better than they do when they write to explain something. I'm fond of quoting over and over what an editor friend of mind said: We come into the world coded to write stories. We do not come into the world coded to write expositions. So when we let them loose with storytelling and when we even put the hired man's of recreating scenic moments, teachers swoon because the students are writing so much more clearly than they are used to seeing and teachers are prone, until they are better educated and better experienced, teachers tend to be satisfied with that autobiographical stuff because it's so well written, even rhythmic sometimes, highly imagistic often.

To cure that teacher malady I've decided to start that first series of exercises with a painting instead of a story of pure experience and I did it because well, for a hundred reasons like you too, because these kids are from the generation of image watchers and they are less and less written text bound and more and more image

bound. They can't read the images any better than they can read the text, but they feel close to images and so we have a very good chance of getting them to select even given one eye, an image that has arrested them somehow. And If I can get them hooked to an image and then after that, get them to reveal somehow what their relationship is to that image, I have set up a path of development that's less likely to end up purely personal than if I didn't use the image. The painting saves them from the banal, wallowing in simple narratives that of experience. That's not enough. It's plenty. As you just heard me say, it mesmerizes teachers and students and they will tell stories about themselves forever but they don't ever have to face the harder problem which is to make those stories mean something in relationship to an idea that finally emerges from that.

The birthing of that idea is, it's the kick-ass problem of composition teaching and it's what I would say, conservatively eighty percent of teachers maybe will get to. And I still see it here. We have extensive developmental programs and the biggest problem of all is I/they. They want to know exactly what one is and they think there ought to be a way to say exactly where they come from. And we can't say exactly. We can say where they come from. They come from a fascinating complicated interaction between the mind and the body and all the body and mind carry with them. Reading experience, the use of mind, the interaction between all those things and that body of evidence that the mind must dwell on, how exactly conception arises from that interaction we know way too little about. So we have

to set up the dynamic that will cause them finally to have something they actually want to make sense of. And that's where composition programs in general I think fall short. But it takes so many things set in motion before that active conceiving can take place that it's just much easier to have students perform as mystics at two or three in the morning when they prop their feet up on the desk and look into the void and declare things they're gonna prove.

Hoy finds that students do a good job of taking moments that are important and relatively minor and creating a larger exposition of the experience. He believes that students have a more natural ability to engage this kind of writing and that it is then the teacher's job to push it to be more critical.

I find them extremely receptive to recreating experience, even in tightly controlled scenes. I find them growing weary pretty fast over having to combine those scenes and make them make sense somehow. That is to say, they can recreate the scenes without difficulty most of the time and they can do it in a way that will compel your attention. But when I ask them to combine those scenes with reflection or commentary or explanation, call it what you will, things start to fall apart. The center does not hold. And so that's the time when the teacher earns her money. The teacher must redirect the student's effort back into the evidence and create the habit of mind that makes them actually look forward to making sense of something they didn't know they'd want to make sense of. They do it with their own experience because it's their own experience, but the habit that you teach through that act of conception is the habit you want to take forward to the

second and third essay and into eternity. So in a way, the personal is just a short cut to seizure, to fascination, to giving a damn and it works.

For Hoy, this combination of performance-based and personal thinking allows an integration that encourages students to both get involved in the work and take it to the next level with the right kind of teacher guidance. Meredith Love brings personal interaction into her classrooms and takes this kind of engagement to the next level, drawing on ideas from her performance-based dissertation. Particularly in her business writing classes, she has students to directly interact with the community, using a kind of service learning model that asks students to realize the impact of what they write, personal involvement and have direct interaction with the audience they are addressing. She discusses having students take on characters to develop more realistic attitudes toward their work.

Well, this sounds pretty basic, but I've really adopted the term "character" to talk about the writer on the rhetorical triangle. And I talk a lot about character development instead of "ethos." I feel like the term ethos has become so watered down to mean simply credibility or trustworthiness, and I just think students get a lot out of these discussions about developing character.

I've found this to be particularly effective in my Business Writing classes where students seem to get stuck writing "as students" instead of as professionals. If they can take a step back, think about the rhetorical situations they might be asked to write in, and consider what the audiences might be expecting from them, they can

tackle these writing projects with more confidence.

If students can begin to see that they already perform roles then they might begin to see how they can create new ones for themselves (or resist those that others might attempt to impose upon them). In business writing I'm also a big fan of developing relationships with real clients, so that students can interact with people who have a real need for documents. Students then get beyond rehearsing for a role (like they might do when writing in response to cases, for example) and they can actually perform that professional role and get feedback from an actual audience.

Love goes on to describe a case study where she had a community member with real life business issues come in and work with her class. The reaction of the students varied, but she found that they were able to really more fully understand the importance of their projects through their work with the local businesswoman. She explains how through this work they worked on multiple levels of performance and were able to embody the roles and interact directly with the audience in real life rather than just on an imaginary level.

This past semester one of my classes worked with a woman in town who was starting up her own visiting nurse business. Her father, who lived in another state, had become ill. A nurse herself, she was unable to take several weeks off of work to tend to her ailing father, get him to doctor's appointments, etc. She had no one to help her out. Eventually, she was able to work all of this out, but she decided that there were others in her position and she decided to start her own business.

She was doing this on her own and created a flyer and a business card but she needed more expertise to help her promote this venture.

In came my students. At first, these business writing students had little enthusiasm for this project. The client came to class, explained her services and talked a little about what she needed from them. I think a lot of the students had a hard time imagining the audiences for these materials. They had to work on several performance levels.

First of all, they had to create the character of the business professional. One who would ask smart questions of their client, one who could also make smart rhetorical decisions based on the client's needs rather than the requirements of the professor. On another level they had to write as the client in these materials as they articulated mission statements or the background of this professional. They had to perform a character who was compassionate, trustworthy, professional, and understanding. They had to become this professional nurse. And on a third level, they had to put themselves into the positions of the audiences that they were writing to. They needed really think about what it would be like to have an ailing parent or relative who needed help, help that you were not able to provide yourself. They needed to create a character sketch of this audience which meant understanding what motivated them and what they needed to know.

This was the first semester that I had done this sort of assignment with my students. In the past I had created case studies that they responded to. One of my colleagues came into the class the day that they presented their brochures, flyers, website designs, promotional items, etc. to the client (they did not all do these, but each group created a set of three or four items). Their PP presentations were terrific and the materials were professional. My colleague told me that he's never been able to get his students so engaged in a project. I'd argue that this had nothing to do with me. It had everything to do with the fact that this was a real performance--with a real audience, real consequences.

But, from what they told me, they were happy to have had the experience.

I think that after the students met the client and asked questions, they were a bit more invested. Those who were willing to imagine the potential audiences were the ones who did the best. One group really resisted seeing the rhetorical situation through the eyes of the intended audience. I'm really not sure why.

While this kind of assignment is not problem free, Love points out how much it helps students to have real life connections with their intended audience in order to help them realize the investment they need to have in a project in order to make it successful. By having the students take on multiple performed roles, they were able to more fully engage the project and understand their investment in the writing.

In our interview, Love discussed how the basis for this kind of character-driven performance work comes from her own scholarship on performance studies. She clarifies

how her business writing example embodies her own theories of performance in the writing classroom.

I use performance theory and performance studies in my scholarship certainly. My primary focus in my scholarship is how students construct identity in writing and how performance studies can help us to mitigate that personal writing v. academic writing binary that we've worked ourselves into as a field. Or another way of putting might be that I argue that voice is a metaphor that has outlived its use--thinking about writing as performance offers us more interesting ways of talking about identity.

As others have pointed out, I think that the term voice is problematic, particularly because of how it has been used and misused in the field. Too many now link it to authenticity (even when those writing about it didn't talk about it that way). I believe that focusing on performance is much more useful.

If we discuss the creation of character instead of "finding a voice" it becomes more rhetorical. It focuses on a deliberate, careful creation that is dependent on both the self and the audience rather than on a mysterious act.

Love tries to bring her scholarship into these classroom interactions to more accurately interrogate the value of personal performance for her students. She directly embraces ideas from performance studies to break what she calls the “personal vs. academic” binary.

Loren Marquez also directly embraces performance studies in her dissertation and in her teaching practices and uses these practices to re-envision performance based classroom practices that extend writing practices. Marquez traces how she came to performance studies, giving a brief personal history and explains what she believes the value of performance practices in the classroom can ultimately be.

Basically my work with performance did come out of a personal love and I guess, former life where I was a theater major in college, a double major in theater and English. And I guess I've always believed that teachers are a bit performative in the classroom. And I don't know I draw on that heavily as a teacher. But in terms of in the writing classroom with my students, I've started looking for ways--I guess this is three or four years into my teaching where I guess I just had this aha! or epiphany moment where I realized that the most students talked or presented on their writing or I gave them ways that they could make their writing come of the page, so to speak, that they become more invested or their classmates responded in different ways to their writing than what they did if we just had a traditional textual peer review assignment.

So that kind of led me to follow that kind of thinking and have more presentations in the writing classroom; to have more debates in the writing classroom. If they were writing argumentative papers, for example, to actually debate issues and look at how to case build, but to do it instead of just writing about it, to perform it, to substantiate claims aloud. So that kind of led me to draw on classical rhetoric

and the connections between orality and literary audience. And I think I just started piecing things together.

Like many people beginning their careers, she looked for examples and drew from work that she saw around her and noticed, like I did throughout this process, that people were engaging these ideas a lot more than she had thought, even if they were naming them in the same way. She began with classical rhetorical theory that combined multiple literacies and expanded her notions to include performance studies.

I don't really know how it all happened, looking back on it, just reading different things and I came across this wonderful article by Andrea Lunsford and Jenn Fishman. Basically, it was "Performing Writing, Performing Literacy," where they argued that performance and delivery are really a literacy that we should draw on in the writing classroom. And they had read the same performance people like Richard Bile and Schechner and had drawn from Goffman, and they were saying a lot of the things that I was saying in my dissertation-or was attempting to say 'cause at that point it was just really, I guess I had written a chapter or so. And for me, I guess that article just validated a lot. I mean, when you're at that stage you need validation,--just validated a lot of the things that I was doing, and more so the theoretical connections that I was making. So that's kind of how I came to my work.

But I've always tried to implement some sort of performance-based activity in the classroom, usually through presentations or debates. So what I have students do is

present on the article itself, like, what is the summary of the article in one session, and these are just very quick summaries or what is the author's thesis statement, and then, in a longer presentation, I've had students actually show how using some sort of visual aid, how an author makes an argument and prove to them why their thesis about the argument is correct or not. And then the audience then judges them or gives them feedback on how convincing they were. So that's one example of how I've used a presentation in the classroom that allows them to connect to the audience and the audience to give them feedback.

She draws on basic presentation using visual aids and speechmaking to add dimension to students' written projects. Again, despite the benefits of this kind of assignment, there is a lot of anxiety and getting used to new methods that students have to go through in order to successfully engage the learning style. She explains how hesitant students transform into more competent writers as they learn to embrace performance methods.

I mean, usually they're terrified at first giving presentations early on in the semester, but as we go along and they learned more about each other and they're talking a lot in class and we have discussions, they become more comfortable. And I've had them write some sort of reflective argument, all for me to get feedback on. I've had them write reflective arguments as presenting on their writing and drawing on the audience's feedback, actually helped their writing. And I've had just mixed reactions: like, I really didn't learn much presenting, but I really learned from watching other peoples' presentations, for example. I've had students say: doing a presentation forced me to actually articulate a thesis and

substantiate claims, and I was having a difficult time doing that. So I think overall it's positive, but I think they are hesitant to rely on an oral medium or a visual medium in the writing classroom, whereas I believe they're all integrally connected. So I think it's been positive but I'm not sure everyone loves to give a presentation or wants to, or thinks it's an effective route to take. So those were the kinds of topics they wrote about. So they'd propose what is the problem and they wrote: here's how we would solve it. And the final for the project was that they would give a twenty minute presentation with an aural and visual media. And each one had to take about and prove to their audience that, yes, this is a problem and the solution is feasible. And so we judged them based on their persuasiveness and the feasibility of the solution. And a lot of the work that's been done on delivery in the writing classroom, I feel like that performance is a better, that's probably not the best word, a more accurate description to account for the ways that we're using orality and textuality and physicality and visuality.

Performance seems to help students and scholars understand the connections among different methods of critical analysis that are integral to understanding the world around them. Assignments that allow students to use multiple ways of knowing to connect to their classrooms, the world around them and their own understanding can be challenging but can also help them to understand real world implications for the writing they do in our classrooms.

Concluding Thoughts

If there was a common thread throughout the interviews I conducted, it was definitely the value of experience. Much as scholars look to other scholars for ideas and models to help them succeed in their careers, our students look to real life models to help them understand the connections they can build to their classroom writing. Creating assignments that incorporate student experience can help students understand how to address particular audiences and help them reconsider their position in their communities. This was evidenced by a number of different writing projects my participants discussed and ranged in the levels on which they engaged the personal.

The theory of directly engaging audience and practices did not change when it came to working with peers. When discussing teacher training, my participants stressed the need to have teachers engage in the same personally based activities they ask their students to participate in so that they can understand what they are asking students to do and the impact of this kind of work in community building. This way, teachers can model writing for students and understand what they need to do in order to push the writing to be critical and engaged. It thus seems to be just as important for teachers to embody their practices as it is for the students.

While many of the classroom practices were generated based on small moments, it became clear that those moments were impactful enough to propel these scholars to really investigate what it was about the personal that was so valuable and useful for their students and for themselves. Investigating the value of personal writing has helped them to not only publish texts that serve as models for many educators, but enact pedagogy that

is empowering for students and share conversations that are well-researched and informed. In this way, the participants were demonstrating through their own stories what they were demonstrating in their classroom practices – how small experiences can impact and transform writing practices when theorized properly and enacted with clear goals in mind, thus expanding personal experience into something meaningful and valuable.

Many of the scholars, although they did not embrace performance studies directly, combined their teaching of the personal with performance methods. The use of the personal seemed for many to have an organic start, arising from a student suggestion or an activity. The story kept repeating itself – once they saw the way that performance helped students connect to their writing and their topics, they expanded the ways they used it to build assignments and curriculum. Just like personal writing methods, people were already using performance and becoming more aware of its possibilities and attempting to expand its scope through careful analysis, theorizing and setting goals.

These interviews and interactions stand as useful examples of how successful scholar teachers in the field of Composition were taking steps in their individual ways to not only embrace personal writing, but also to carefully theorize its value, share its possibilities with other teachers and explore its value in the classroom. Not only did my interviewees engage the personal, they each made a concerted effort to expand the personal into the goals for their students' writing and expectations for their own scholarship. They used it to mold larger university writing programs and to change the views of their business writing students preparing to enter the workforce. Each of the interviewees not only talked about the personal, they are in a continuous space of creating

a critical body of information that will expand the possibilities for personal writing in the field of Composition. By sharing some of their practices, I hope to show other scholars the work already going on in the field of Composition on a large and an intimate scale and how envisioning more possibilities for the expansion of the personal through performance methods can help us build an even stronger valuation for experience in the classroom and in our scholarship.

As I move into my conclusion, I want to explore a thread I did not get to tease out in this chapter. Noticeably, interviewees were careful to not negate the difficulties involved in this kind of work, both for students and instructors. This was evidenced through their own struggles to garner support for personal writing research practices and searching for the proper methodology to support their theories. They were not shy in sharing these struggles and in addressing how they now are trying to change the course for future scholars and students engaging in personal writing. In my conclusion, I will expand on some of these comments about the future of the field as I look ahead to what is next for personal writing and performance studies and how we can provide the necessary support for scholars and students seeking to understand its value.

Conclusion – What’s Next for Personal Writing: Strategies and Support

Throughout this study, I have approached personal writing from two very different directions engaging historical viewpoints and examining the possibilities for future expansion of its critical application in Composition scholarship and pedagogy through the application of performance pedagogy. Through my classroom research, I have attempted to address the possibilities for critical written engagement from the student body when invited to invest their time in writing projects that draw on the self and personal experience. Through my interview process, I hoped to offer multiple models for this kind of personal engagement in the classroom as well as in Composition scholarship and teacher training.

Despite the productive possibilities for personal writing, there are still many difficulties to be addressed. As I interviewed fellow Composition scholar teachers, despite their own successes and willingness to use the personal in all aspects of their careers, their stories remained fairly similar. Failure to have proper support and thus to have widely accessible models has made engaging the personal in a meaningful way a consistently uphill battle, one that requires constant risk-taking and a willingness to search for support in unlikely places.

Pat Hoy, who has a clear idea of how personal writing operates in his scholarship and in his writing program at NYU, discussed with me the reality of the situation. Even though he is successful in implementing his combination of “familiar” and “academic” writing, he is frustrated by the lack of support in the field.

For example, I've been working on this thing we're talking about for twenty-five

years at West Point, Harvard and here. The field itself has been battling over this composition field for longer than that. The shorthand way to speak of it is that it's the Bartholomae/Elbow debate, but the real fact is the field itself hasn't made any progress in creating what I like to think of as a marriage between the familiar and the academic. So we draw lines in the sand and fight dichotomously, but we don't fight dialectically. We're not trying to come up with another thing, which is writing that's both elegant and rigorous.

And that's what I'm trying to do. And I don't know actually anybody else who's trying to do that.

So the kind of quiet revolutionary stuff that we think we're doing has to be done quietly. I mean you can't take on a university. Students have to go from here to classrooms able to do things that they expect in other classrooms. Ideally, we can get other teachers to ask students to do things as high powered as we ask them but that's hard to effect--really hard to effect. We do it in Tisch school of Arts more effectively than elsewhere and we do it because the Dean told the faculty this is what I want. We developed this extra course in collaboration, and so it has the full force of the Dean's mind behind it and that's what it takes to change something. And even then it's an uphill road. This is hard stuff, not for the weak of mind or character or soul. But there's no movement in the field to bring the best of these two world together. And it's sometimes one teacher or in my case, a lone

program surrounded fortunately by other like-minded people where the discussion is rigorous all the time and we're not sitting in one place. It's just not that kind of place. But if you try to write about what I've just told you, that is, if I really take up the task of trying to get you or a group of teachers outside my conversational range, it's impossible. You cannot capture the complexity of that process of conceiving sufficiently on the page to motivate the hordes of people out there to want to give up what they're doing and work three times as hard, even if you can promise fifty times the pleasure. That's the real difficulty of what you're looking at, I think.

Despite his notable successes, Hoy still believes that there is not a large enough body of scholarship to support the success of personal writing for Composition scholars and students.

Mostly, my interviewees seemed hopeful for the future, citing models of success, drawing on their own accomplishments, their student writing and looking ahead to possibilities for the field. Another mark of future promise can be found in the area of graduate training. Although my interviewees explained the lack of support and proper models they witnessed and still witness as they attempted to complete graduate work that engaged the personal, they have hope now as mentors attempting to guide their own students through the process of personal writing. Throughout the interview process, many discussed how they felt graduate students were increasingly getting support for personal engagement in the dissertation and explained how this support was operating. Thomas Newkirk was nothing but positive thoughts when looking to the future of his graduate

students engaging the personal while still expressing frustration at the divide between publishing practices and dissertation work.

We have had a great record of publishing success with our grad students--I think that some of the writing skills we have been talking about in this interview are beneficial. I really resent programs that force grad students to write in an over-documented formal way--then force them to take years to turn the dissertation back into something that will be read by others. Why have a "higher" standard for a dissertation than the University of Pittsburgh Press?

In a similar way, Sondra Perl encourages her graduate students to incorporate the self in their research, and when I asked her to reflect on the risks of this kind of engagement she was both honest about the inherent risks but hopeful for the possibilities personal writing presents. She acknowledged that it is easier to take risks once you have job security, but also attempts to find ways to provide the support necessary to junior scholars.

Yeah. I mean, there's a safety factor when you have tenure, when you're recognized as someone who has something worth saying. I mean, it's certainly safer than when you have to be judged by your peers all the time whether or not you can cut it. So, sure. I don't think I would have watered down or sort of soft sold what I was trying to do if I didn't have tenure. It's just that I've been in this field a long time, and before I was recognized there was nobody talking about this. So it wasn't as if I could have done it and I chose not to play it safe. It's more like nobody did it and I learned about the value of sort of a personal stance or having a stake in telling my own stories as the field did.

Starting was a very exciting moment. I mean, all the questions were really important and that we were trying to understand ... And for me, the issues always centered around composing. So how was it ... People--young people compose. What is composing/ Who is the composer? And those questions are still important to me today as they were thirty years ago. I mean, it's sort of for me an essential kind of question. But how I expressed it thirty years ago in a dissertation was very distanced 'cause that's how I was trained. And I was pretty dutiful and I didn't realize there was another way until I stepped back and then began to do ethnographies. And by that time I realized everything I write is already filtered through my consciousness.

I see a lot of my work now in supporting my doctoral students in writing dissertations that are personal or narrative inquiry, where there really is a narrator and trying to incorporate with a writerly skill of say, creative-using creative nonfiction.

So in an English Department your specialization is in composition. I think it's the most natural place to have a dissertation that is writerly, but in the best sense of the word. So I would like to see much more of that. And I suppose that that's something I'm going to focus on until I retire, that there's a place for graduate students to write in ways that come from an embodied place that'll allow them to

explore multiple voices. And I don't necessarily mean limited to autoethnography. So I mean any ethnography or inquiry that has to do with teaching and learning in our field should be composed with a consciousness about who the composer is.

Two of my participants have experienced some of the problems with the development of this kind of research first hand in very detrimental ways to their personal lives and their careers. Professor Carole Deletiner was the subject of a qualitative dissertation that destroyed her use of the personal in the classroom and broke ethical research codes. It was not until she was a student in her doctoral program that she even read the dissertation that would later spark her to write a response to qualitative inquiry and ethics.

Professor Karen Paley whose book *I-Writing* came from her dissertation, has experienced various levels of support for her research related to personal writing. When I asked about her dissertation experience and how the book evolved from her graduate work, she expressed the hesitancy faculty had in taking on her project.

No, In fact, I had to scrounge around for a dissertation adviser. I didn't have the support for doing an ethnography because nobody there felt really capable of it.

And to criticize social constructionism at that time was politically off the wall.

And Elbow and Murray and those people were considered to be pretty inept. So I was taking a kind of unpopular position.

In addition, an ethnographic study she had been writing for the past few years lost support from her publisher because they didn't see the projected audience as being big enough to do a run.

Newer scholars in the field however see the possibilities for support directly as they enter the job market and move in a space between old notions of personal writing and possibilities for the future of Composition. Loren Marquez hesitantly explained her experience writing and marketing a personal performance dissertation that leaves off on a hopeful note.

They were supportive in terms of helping me get through the IRB and saying: Oh, wow. You've made some nice connections here, but in terms of being supportive of the actual scholarship, I don't know if that was ... I mean, they weren't unsupportive but ...

Yeah. I would have to agree that that's been kind of the .. I mean, on the job market I got really good feedback and questions. At the Four C's we were at the Qualitative Research Network Forum . But at the Research Network Forum at my particular table I had a very odd experience there where I just think the woman was, like, why are you doing this and please go home.

So, yeah, I guess it's been received in many different ways. But I remember talking about it on the job market, I guess, to fresh ears and fresh eyes were on me and asking real ... they asked really good questions and it inspired me and it made me think: Okay. What I'm doing does have some sort of importance. You know? Keep going, Lauren. You know? So I needed that.

By presenting not only the positive possibilities, but the inherent challenges for personal writing in the field of Composition, I hope to have provided a balanced notion of a positive future for personal writing and performance and the support that still needs to be established for critical valuation of personal experience.

My own engagement in this project has been fraught with difficulties and contradictions. As I decided to engage the topic of personal writing, I was faced with the fact that my chosen topic was very much something that had continually come in and out of vogue in Composition and to many it seemed very tired. My interdisciplinary expansion into the fields of Literature and Performance studies proved fruitful, but also made my writing process heavy with literature review and the need to situate myself in multiple disciplines simultaneously. In addition, my fears about the job market and whether I would be taken seriously as a traditional researcher dictated the way I structured my final product, putting me in the place of organizing and commenting on my own and others' research rather than actually engaging in the performance writing I advocate throughout my project. These are inherent problems with this kind of research, problems that demand proper support, job placement and security and the careful measurements of risks we are willing to take. Despite a strong support system, I have found myself throughout this project susceptible to those fears. Even in my interview process, Sondra Perl and Pat Hoy contended that although I advocated risk-taking, I was doing very little of it myself. And their point is well taken.

In this way, my own notions of the personal and its value remain unstable and uprooted. My suggestions can be extended my further than they are in this document into

a radical rethinking of the way we experience the self and the possibilities of personal writing and performance for us as scholars and our students. It is my hope that I continue to resist and redirect the cohesive notion of the self I possess as a scholar and continue to grow and evolve as my research does.

Scholars such as Tom Newkirk, Sondra Perl and Pat Hoy have been providing the necessary research that will continue to build the value of personal writing for the field of Composition. Their continued efforts and their support of junior scholars, students and fellow faculty members demonstrate how personal writing gains impact on a grass roots level and can extend its influence when theorized and practiced.

In the future, I see the engagement of performance methodology providing the means necessary to reach larger audiences of scholars and students. As I have discussed throughout this study, creating multiple identities on-line has become commonplace and thus has made identity building a part of everyday life. We are all constantly involved in creating profiles, images, sound bytes, lists that capture who we are and how we want to be perceived. With this constant defining of the self comes the necessity to decide how we can integrate our multiple selves, our networks, our experiences and our beliefs into our scholarship and teaching practices. How can we model this and provide the necessary support for our students to do the same?

CCCCs can extend its Qualitative Research Network to more notably embrace Performance studies, and the field of Composition can more readily recognize the value of traditionally anthropological methods of fieldwork for our pedagogical research. By sharing more of our stories, providing spaces at conferences and in published journals for

junior scholars to explore interdisciplinary connections, we can make more of this private and individualized work with the personal more accessible, recognized and bring people together to create supportive networks that can more productively theorize the possibilities for personal writing institutionally and experientially.

Encouraging students to engage their experiences and to try to translate their ideas to a larger audience, whether on their college campus, hometown or even their classroom can provide opportunities to make personal performance visible and impactful. Personal performance has the potential to not only affect how we teach students writing, but to affect change in their surroundings, invite the use of multiple literacies and encourage students to see the self as something integrated in the class and vice versa. Performance transforms the personal from something singular and insular into something dynamic, engaging outside audiences and viewpoints, which can allow us to recognize the dynamism of experience and the potential for transformation through writing and sharing this writing. Personal experience propels us to sympathize, to develop passions, to include our communities, to make hard decisions and become aware of our surroundings. Instead of treating the personal as something unitary and limited, I encourage scholars in Composition to embrace the possibilities for the dynamic, analytical self that engages its communities and surroundings anew and represents not only valuable experiences but empowers individuals to critically value the “I” and the power personal investment has when examined and shared.

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