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RE-EXAMINING THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE
IN FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Kathryn Marie Hansler
September 2003


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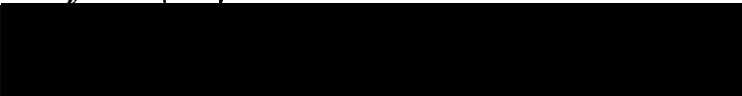
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ABSTRACT

The personal narrative is typically the first assignment instructors require of first year composition (FYC) students, and most frequently the assignment asks students to tell the story of a pivotal life moment. Often the moments students choose to write about are highly personal stories of death, abuse, illness, and even crime. However, even though this essay serves to introduce students to academic writing, once students write this essay, they rarely write other personal narratives in their academic careers. Fortunately, within the last two years, emerging scholarship on the personal has helped compositionists rethink ways to acknowledge individual experiences and the role subjectivity plays in academic writing. In this thesis, I explore current theories on the personal narrative and examine ways this essay is now being used in FYC courses California State University, San Bernardino in English 101. To examine specifically how this essay meets or conflicts with the English Department's guidelines for English 101, I interview thirteen CSUSB professors from various disciplines to discover the relationships they see between the enactment of the personal and academic writing. I also survey 132 English

101 students to obtain their views on the personal. Finally, using this data, I offer a critique of the personal narrative, and specifically the pivotal moment essay, as it is situated in English 101. I propose resituating the personal narrative in FYC as a rhetorical strategy rather than a genre. Further, I suggest that helping students use personal experiences as one form of evidence in their FYC argument, analysis, and research papers could better serve the goals of English 101 and FYC pedagogy and prove more helpful in developing students' academic writing across the disciplines.

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CHAPTER ONE

EXAMINING THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE

IN FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION

Introduction

A review of the most widely-adopted composition textbooks coupled with my observations of students visiting the Writing Center at California State University, San Bernardino indicate that the personal narrative is one of the most common and typically the first assignment instructors require of their first year composition (FYC) students. Most frequently this assignment asks students to tell the story of a pivotal life event.

Advocates of the personal narrative argue that its less formal language and its drawing on the familiar encourages first year students to write in this new setting called college composition, even though many of these students are fearful and unprepared for college writing expectations (Britton, Connors, Elbow, Emig). In contrast, those critical of the personal narrative (Bartholomae, Berlin, Faigley), also sometimes called the autobiographical or personal essay, contend that this mode of discourse has no place in academic writing, privileges

individual constructs over social constructs in creating knowledge, and further complicates what constitutes "good" writing. Some also contend that this mode of writing violates many cultural practices because it is invasive. For example, in some Native American and Asian cultures, making family stories public violates traditions. Thus, although composition theorists generally agree that students need to learn to write analysis, argument, and research papers, they are divided over the personal narrative.

As the personal narrative is now situated in FYC, therefore, it invites several questions about its rhetorical purpose, especially because it so often requires students to write about pivotal moments such as intensely personal or family events. For example, if the purpose of the personal narrative is simply to initiate students into the academic writing process, why, then require an assignment that generates highly personal stories about rape, incest, and physical or mental abuse? Or, once students bare their souls in these personal narratives, why are they then abruptly told to leave the personal behind as they move to writing analysis, argument and research papers? Therefore, the time has come to critically examine

the personal narrative as it is situated in FYC and to ask how it can be reshaped so that it better supports the purposes of FYC.

These questions must be asked particularly in light of the emerging scholarship on the larger issues of the personal that has composition theorists rethinking ways to acknowledge individual's experiences and the role subjectivity plays in academic writing. Within the last two years, a number of composition faculty have expanded the personal narrative in their own writing to situate the personal in historical and social contexts as they write for academic journals. Some have even argued that the personal is always present in writing, regardless of mode of discourse or genre, and regardless of whether it is written in subjective or objective point of view, and thus it should be acknowledged. This movement is visible in a number of publications. For example, *College English* devoted its September 2001 issue to "Special Focus: Personal Writing" and plans an upcoming second issue "The Personal in Academic Writing." In addition, the July 2002 issue of *College English* featured Julie Nelson Christoph's effort to reconceive of ethos in personal writing, and Chikako Kumamoto examines the "eloquent 'I'" in the

September 2002 issue of *College Composition and Communication*. Add to this two books have been recently published on the personal in academic writing, Karen Suman Paley's *I Writing: The Politics of Teaching First-Person Writing*, and Deborah H. Holdstein and David Bleich's *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing*, (Logan: Utah State UP), a collection of essays by composition theorists on personal writing. The role of the personal in academic writing also has been a recent topic of conversation on the Writing Program Administration listserv. While for the most part this current discussion on the personal in academic writing focuses on professional scholarship, the issues being explored easily transfer to FYC and raise many interesting questions about the personal narrative's complicated role in FYC.

The personal narrative has been a part of FYC courses for more than a century. Until the late nineteenth century, though, the personal and the narrative had not been united as a single discourse mode. Composition historian Robert Connors notes that around 1870 the personal became wedded to the narrative as a tool to develop invention and to "break up the stiff formality to which beginners are liable" (311). Connors contends that college instructors

embraced the personal narrative in FYC as an alternative to help students, who were not trained in classical studies, make the transition from high school to college writing. Over the last one hundred and thirty-plus years, this construct has infused much of composition pedagogy. Here at CSUSB, for example, the personal narrative continues to be a part of many FYC courses, usually as a first assignment, even though the English Department does not mandate in its 101 guidelines the teaching of any specific genre or rhetorical discourse.

Therefore, I purpose to re-examine the personal narrative as it is now situated in FYC. I will use current composition theory to examine the ways the personal might be included in academic writing without tying it to personal narrative and especially pivotal moment conventions. I will explore how FYC students can use personal writing to generate knowledge about a subject topic or an issue that goes beyond the current confessional pivotal moment personal narrative. I also will examine the multiple ways the personal exists in writing, even when it is framed in an "objective" voice, when writers determine their topics, their arguments, their evidence, and their sources. Thus, I hope to show how the personal could be

more than a first but quickly discarded mode of discourse. Recognized as more than a narrative form, it can help students create writing—in multiple rhetorical forms—that matters.

In so doing, I will make specific distinctions between the "personal narrative," the "pivotal moment essay," and "the personal." Although in some discussions, these terms tend to be conflated or even interchanged, in this thesis I refer to the personal narrative as a rhetorical strategy. When I speak of the pivotal moment essay, I am referring to a specific writing assignment, and traditionally this assignment uses the autobiographical essay as a genre. Finally, when I refer to "the personal," I mean the subjective voice that is always present in writers' texts.

Chapter one begins with a brief history of the personal narrative and its evolution in FYC courses. I then explore the current theories on the personal narrative and ways some compositionists are reimagining the personal as more than and not necessarily linked with the narrative. In chapter two, I examine how the personal narrative is now being used at CSUSB in first year writing courses and particularly how it meets or conflicts with 101 guidelines. I ask instructors what relationships they see between

enactments of the personal and their assignments, looking for a link between their assignments and English 101 guidelines. For example, I examine how the personal can be infused into an essay through (1) a personal narrative of an incident that explains personal history; (2) a short personal anecdote that evolves into an essay on a larger issue, or (3) an argument that explores an issue in an objective voice. Chapter three examines English 101 students' perspectives on the personal narrative. I interview English 101 students to extract their views of the personal narrative. I include this in part because several composition theorists (Ramage and Bean) have noted that the personal narrative is actually harder for some students to write. Finally, in chapter four I analyze these data alongside current theories on the personal. From all of this, I will propose ways of situating personal writing in English 101 courses so that it complements rather than contradicts the courses' rhetorical purposes.

Emerging Scholarship on the Personal in Academic Writing

The emerging scholarship on the personal focuses on three distinct ways of situating the personal in academic writing. While a good deal of this conversation centers on scholarly writing, the dialogue taking place currently could easily be transferred to FYC and raises interesting questions about the personal narrative's limited role as a self-reflective essay. In most FYC classes, students are required to write a personal narrative, often either describing a pivotal moment or recalling a literacy history, and then they are told to leave their personal experiences behind as they write argumentative, persuasive, and research essays.

The current conversations in academic journals, though, expand the personal narrative beyond this traditional self-reflective narrative. For example, some compositionists situate the personal in historical and social contexts (Jarrett, Cushman, Miller, Herrington, Paley, Grumet). Others assert that personal experience is valid evidence in analysis, argument, and research (Spigelman, Paley, Lu, Kirsch, Ritchie, Handelman). Still others argue that the personal always exists in writing,

regardless of mode of discourse or genre, and regardless of whether it is written in the subjective or objective point of view, and thus it finally should be recognized by the reader and academia (Bérbué, Hindman, Holdstein and Bleich). The current dialogue about the personal in academic writing comes after a decade of wrestling with how to locate the personal in both professional and student writing, and a good deal of that debate focused on whether the personal should be permitted in academic writing. This conversation can not be fully understood, though, without first taking a brief look at the history of the personal in academic writing and its evolution in FYC courses.

The Personal Narrative's History

Prior to the late nineteenth century, when composition instructors first embraced the personal narrative to initiate college freshmen into academic writing, college composition focused on classical studies and the personal narrative in college writing did not exist, even though the genre of personal essays had gained acceptance as a major literary form in the sixteenth century with Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (Lopate xxiii). According to Connors, classical studies, which were principally the study of

Aristotle, positioned the narrative as the second of the four sections in argumentative rhetoric. Aristotle held that the rhetorical purpose of the *narration* was to form the outline of the subject and provide the statement of case (Lindemann 43). As Karen Surman Paley notes, Aristotle advocated using narrative examples in "oratory to depict character and demonstrate moral purpose" (156). Later, under the Roman philosopher and speaker Cicero, the *narratio's* rhetorical aim was to discuss "what has occurred to generate issues to be resolved" (Lindemann 43). Therefore, from its earliest beginnings, the narrative's rhetorical purpose had been to provide the background story to establish an argument, and this was always done from the objective point of view. The personal was not to be involved. Connors sums it up this way: "There was no branch of classical learning that meant to teach students how to express themselves in any personal way" (303).

Classic Greek and Roman rhetorical traditions continued to be influential for some twenty-five hundred years, greatly influencing how American colleges taught writing in composition courses before the Civil War. As Sharon Crowley points out, composition courses, involving both oral and written discourse, had been an integral

aspect of college curriculum from the founding of America's first colleges in the seventeenth century (57). Students were required to exhibit their knowledge of civic and moral issues in pre-Civil War composition courses (49). This emphasis on civic and moral issues all changed after the Civil War, when colleges' open admissions policy drew a wave of students not educated in classic Greek and Roman studies (310). As Connors tells it, college instructors revolted against the existing traditions and turned to the personal, asking students to draw on their own experiences when writing (310). At the same time, teachers became attracted to Alexander Bain's 1866 modes of discourse—narration, description, exposition, and argument. Connors notes that then, "the two personal modes—narration and description—became the first elements of composition taught in most classes" (310). What is more, narration and description, Connors says, were the "gates through which personal writing entered composition instruction" (310). Connors cites John M. Hart's 1870 *Manual of Composition and Rhetoric* as placing new emphasis on personal narratives—essays that asked students to privilege the personal pronoun in a new way (311). In *Manual of Composition and Rhetoric*, Hart describes the personal narrative as being

"well suited to develop invention, as well as to break up the stiff formality to which beginners are liable" (qtd. in Connors 311). Calling personal experience writing "one of the most important definitions of Postwar composition-rhetoric," Connors says that by the turn of the twentieth century, the personal narrative and Bain's four modes of discourse were firmly entrenched in American composition (318).

Fundamentally, not much has changed in the last one hundred and thirty-plus years. Composition remains one of the few college courses required for matriculation, Bain's four modes of discourse remain central in a large number of today's FYC pedagogies, and many instructors embrace Hart's belief that the personal narrative is well suited to develop invention, because recounting and sharing stories is a natural and universal technique. Therefore, it is thought that if students first begin writing about something they know and in a format familiar to them they will find their introduction to writing easier. This philosophy that the autobiographical essay is well-suited to developing invention has been so grounded in freshman composition courses in the past century that typically the personal narrative is the first writing required in FYC.

This is not to say that teaching personal writing in FYC has not had its detractors over the years. As Connors points out, even in the 1900s, when personal writing constituted a major portion of FYC, it never dominated other modes of writing for the very reason that personal writing had been permitted in composition courses in the first place—the modes of discourse (318). That is, a well-structured course requires all four modes of discourse be taught and that no single mode dominate the other modes of writing.

In the past thirty years, however, the debate over the personal in academia has grown, with the most heated discussions taking place in the past decade, perhaps as a backlash to the enormous popularity personal narratives enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s. This popularity stemmed from two related teaching philosophies popular at that time with college writing instructors. One, inspired by contemporary developmental psychologists, held that writing was a valuable tool for developing analytical and synthesis skills (Emig 7). Undergirding the theories of the teaching of composition in college and specifically the popularity of the personal narrative was the work of scholars such as Janet Emig, who recognized that writing offered a unique

learning experience, and James Britton, who contended that the most "natural starting point for beginning writers" was to write about themselves, beliefs that also framed the theories of the expressivist movement (Britton 147). The second approach, the expressivist moment, held that writing was a means of self-actualization of learning and discovering one's own meanings or truths. These composition theorists advocated that students use personal experiences in their writing, arguing that it produces "honest," "authentic" and "true" writing and that it empowers students (Elbow, Macrorie, Miller and Judy, Coles). As Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff note in their 1995 book *A Community of Writers*, "personal writing contains within it the seeds or potentialities for public writing" (46). Their idea reflects the more recent use of personal writing as a way of helping students to find and situate their ideas and voices into their public, academic writing. At the same time, they asserted that the traditional academic essay produced impersonal, dry, stiff writing. As Connors notes in his 1987 *College Composition and Communication* essay,

Learning that one has a right to speak, that one's voice and personality have validity, is an important step—an essential step. Personal

writing, leaning on one's own experience, is necessary for this step, especially when one is being encouraged to enter the conversation at age eighteen. (181)

Connor's argument characterizes the thinking then (and now) that personal writing empowers students.

The Personal in Academic Writing

The question, though, for many compositionists in the last decade has been about the role the personal narrative, and personal writing in general, ought to play in FYC. Perhaps the most notable (notorious?) "public conversation" (as David Bartholomae frames it) about the personal and academic writing in composition circles is that between David Bartholomae and Elbow, who began their "public conversation" at the 1989 CCCC, followed up again at the 1991 conference, and went public a third time in the February 1995 *College Composition and Communication*. In this discussion, Bartholomae argues against teaching first person narrative writing, what he calls "sentimental realism" and defines as "the true story of what I think, feel, know and see" (486). "I don't think I need to teach sentimental realism, even though I know my students could

be better at it than they are. I don't think I need to because I don't think I should. I find it a corrupt, if extraordinarily tempting genre" (488). Bartholomae seems to argue the genre is corrupt because sentimental realism allows students to focus on their own lives rather than study human society, which he thinks should be the focus of composition courses. Finally, he contends that he would rather "teach or preside over a critical writing, one where the critique is worked out in practice, and for lack of better terms I would call that writing, 'academic writing'" (488). Elbow, in contrast, sees the issue of the personal more in the terms of the roles of academic and writer. He argues that the structure of the academic "tends to militate against that stance," and he thinks that "there are problems with what it means to be an academic" (499). This is particularly true, he says, when students are asked to analyze a piece of literature, because students must "write 'up' to an audience with greater knowledge and authority than the writer has about her own topic" (498). As a result, Elbow says students write essays that are always framed around the question "'Is this okay?'" (498). Elbow asserts that writing in this setting naturally sets up an issue of power. "Even if the student happens to have

a better insight or understanding than the teacher has, the teacher gets to define her own understanding as right and the student's as wrong" (498). For Elbow then, personal writing allows students to write about something that they know so well that they may have more knowledge than their instructor. Elbow writes that

Therefore, unless we can set things up so that our first year students are often telling us about things that they know better than we do, we are sabotaging the essential dynamics of writers. We are transforming the process of 'writing' into the process of 'being tested'. (498)

He says he wants his first year students to be saying in their writing, "'Listen to me, I have something to tell you' not 'Is this okay? Will you accept this?'" (499).

Advocates of the personal narrative, including Elbow, assert that this mode of discourse not only provides students with a foundation to enter academic writing but also allows them to enter into a discourse community where they have some power and share some "common ground" with their instructor and other students (Spellmeyer 265).

Some compositionists argue, however, that the personal narrative actually masks the teacher's power in the

evaluation of what constitutes a good essay. In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, Lester Faigley asserts that since World War II colleges have moved away from canonical literature as the source for writing and instead have a "strong preference for autobiographical essays" (120). What concerns him here is how these personal essays are judged, with instructors using adjectives such as "honest," or "authentic voice" or "integrity" in determining an essay's worth. Faigley asserts that "The teacher as receiver of truth takes the position of bearer of authority who can certify truth" (131). In citing Michel Foucault's theories of masked power, Faigley argues that "If the goal of teachers of writing who speak of 'empowerment' is to create more equitable relations of power in our classrooms and in our institutions, then they might begin asking what relations of power come into play when they give a writing assignment that encourages students to make revealing personal disclosures" (131). Faigley's ideas of masked power resonate in Crowley's assertions about FYC in general. She notes that college composition courses have dealt always with this issue of power in a unique sense. She says that while most universities have dealt with this issue of power

by stressing research, "composition teachers are the only teachers who are still asked to evaluate students' character rather than their mastery of a subject matter" (57). She goes on to say that some compositionists attempt to minimize this character issue by evaluating essays solely on the "mechanical correctness or formal fluency, rather than on the quality or merit of their arguments" (58). Crowley concludes that "Freshman English was (and is?) a 'political technology of individuals,' a pedagogy designed to create docile subjects who would not question the discipline's continued and repeated demonstration of their insufficient command of their native tongue (Foucault 1988)" (77-78). While not addressing the personal narrative directly, Crowley's summation of the politics of FYC in general must be raised in large part because in the last thirty years FYC courses have required students tell their stories, often with prompts suggesting that students choose a pivotal moment in their lives, which is the typical type of story Faigley questions in his examination of what qualifies as "good" writing.

The so-called pivotal moment personal narrative essay has been one of the most common FYC assignments, as a review of the most popular FYC textbooks demonstrate. For

example, in the most current edition of *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, authors Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper suggest as their first writing assignment that students "Choose an event that will be engaging for readers and that will, at the same time, tell them something about you. Tell your story dramatically and vividly, giving a clear indication of its autobiographical significance" (29). While these instructions are broad and offer students a seemingly open arena of choices to write about, students typically take one of two approaches. They either, for lack of a dramatic event in their rather short lives, write about their proms or high school graduations, or they write about extremely personal matters. Writing in the 1994 *Journal of Teaching Writing*, Marian MacCurdy says most students select emotionally charged topics rather than look at an insignificant event and weave this insignificant event into a meta-comment about life (78). She argues that often students write about these traumatic events "to make the unknown known" (78). "To the students these topics have great intensity, and I have often wonder why students lean in the direction of emotionally charged topics" (78). Much has been published in articles about the traumatic subjects students often write about when asked to write personal

narratives. Teachers report that students write on everything from physically and sexually abusive men to alcoholic parents, rape, and the death of a loved one, such as a child, parent or sibling, but only a few of these articles suggest ways instructors might deal with the subject matter these personal narratives assignments elicit. Dan Morgan names our culture's obsession with private revelations as the reason students choose to reveal so much. "In our popular culture, private issues are no longer private, and public self-disclosure seems to have become a means toward personal validation" (324). Marilyn J. Valentino says another reason more students choose to write about these topics is that there has been a rise in the number of high-risk college students reporting violence, family abuse, and drug use. She says that college instructors face more students suffering from "hidden psychological or mental disorders-schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, manic depression, and suicidal tendencies-or more common mental disorders stemming from drug addiction, depression, or post-traumatic stress from war, abuse, or rape" (275). However, neither Valentino nor Morgan suggests eliminating the pivotal moment personal narrative from FYC; in fact, both still view the pivotal moment personal essay

as valuable writing for students. The two do encourage instructors to restrict writing assignments or provide alternative topics if instructors do not wish students to write about these topics, offer comments on students' papers that are reflective ("This must have been horrible for you"), as well as maintain professional limits and actively help students seek out the college's support service specialists (Morgan 321).

Given these likely outcomes, why require students to write a pivotal moment personal narrative that presses students to reveal such personal matters? Many instructors share MacCurdy's contention that students find it cathartic "and helps the healing" (81). MacCurdy contends these personal essays help students share their experiences and discover others may share similar experiences (86), and through the process students "move toward wholeness in the writing process" (101). Finally, MacCurdy asserts that no other writing genre can help students to discover their voices faster and more directly than probing their history to seek the truth (105). Carole Deletiner views these pivotal moment essays as helping students understand themselves. "Writing about our lives, writing in a personal voice, enables us to communicate, but not necessarily with

one another. Writing lets us talk to ourselves" (814).

MacCurdy and Deletiner assume, though, that a majority of students enjoy writing personal stories, and that may not be necessarily true.

While recognizing that many students may want to or are willing to write about personal issues, it also must be acknowledged that some students come from countries and cultures unaccustomed to revealing the personal or using the personal pronoun "I," so these assignments may be invasive. Phillip Lopate notes in the introduction of *The Art of the Personal Narrative: An Anthology from the Classical Era to the Present* that

In many countries and cultures, the 'I' has been downplayed, either because of communal factors (Native Americans have viewed the tribe, not the self, as the key unit of identity) or ideological forces (in communist regimes, individualism is considered a reactionary, bourgeois concept) or spiritual traditions. (lii)

For example, Arabic and Islamic countries also do not have a tradition of personal essays, though poetry uses the personal pronoun "I," asserts Lopate (lii). And Lopate says, "Particularly in religions with mystical traditions,

in both East and West, where the surrender of the ego is seen as a paramount attainment, spiritual striving and the enterprise of the personal essay seem somewhat at cross-purposes" (lii). Lopate's assertions must be taken into account, especially given the cultural diversity of first year college students on campuses such as CSUSB. Lopate's insights therefore pose the question: Why require students write pivotal moment personal narratives that potentially ask students to reveal highly personal information that some cultures or religions might find invasive?

This issue of assigning pivotal moment essays also must be raised in light of some compositionists concerns about age-appropriateness and gender-bias of the personal essay. Richard Beach (writing in 1987) studied the differences in autobiographical essays of English teachers and college freshmen and found that freshmen students tended to portray their experiences as shaped by their feelings, without clearly defined points or intentions for assessing the relevancy (66). "One important implication of these results is that freshman composition teachers need to recognize the wide gulf between their own and their students' development perspectives. As the study suggests, college freshmen may have more difficulty distinguishing

between past and present perspectives than do their teachers" (66). In another study, Linda H. Peterson examined the essays of two groups of students enrolled in freshman composition (one from Yale University, the other from Utah State) and found that women produced "better autobiographical essays" (172). She concluded that the topic choice had a large bearing on the success the student had in writing a "good" essay (172). Women tended to write and analyze a crisis in a relationship, while males frequently chose topics that focused on the self (173-174). Peterson contends that instructors must re-examine their assumptions about "good" writing and acknowledge the links between gender and genre. "In asking students to write autobiographically, we are often asking them to write something that they might not choose" (181). Peterson's contentions reinforce Faigley's concerns about the evaluation process for autobiographical essays.

Moving Beyond Personal Pivotal Moments

Much of the emerging scholarship suggests expanding the role of personal narrative and the role of the personal in academic writing, thus unveiling the multiple ways "I" may be evoked in academic writing. For example, some

compositionists would move the personal narrative from the self-reflective pivotal moment personal story and situate it in the public. Ellen Cushman argues that the personal should be less about individual experiences and more about the relations that make that person (46). During the 2000 CCCC symposium addressing the personal narrative and published in the September 2001 *College English*, Cushman along with symposium participant Richard Miller argues that it is time to expand the personal narrative beyond self-reflection. Miller said at the symposium that:

While it is clear enough that writing can be used to articulate and extend one's sense of despair and discomfort, I cannot help but wonder what a writing practice concerned with constructing a sense of hope would look like. Is it possible to produce writing that generates a greater sense of connection to the world and its inhabitants?

Writing that moves out from the mundane, tragic events that mark any life into history, culture, and the impersonal institutions that surround us all?(50)

Anne Herrington, another symposium participant, argued that the personal should not be used so restrictively. She

contended that, "we should bring 'the personal' into our thinking in conscious and critical ways and then decide for ourselves whether and how to include it in our public writing, whatever the genre" (49). Herrington echoes Madeleine R. Grumet's theory of the personal as well. A self-acknowledged "Miss Subjectivity of 1978," Grumet writes in "Autobiography: The Mixed Genre of Public and Private" that personal narrative should lead us to draw inferences about ourselves in society. She asserts that we can not separate ourselves as private or public, that the two embody the self whether we admit it or not, and that the individual comes to understand themselves in part because of their relationship with and in society. Grumet argues that "Education is about social action" (174), and asserts that:

If the discourse of identity and education will continue and flourish, we will need autobiography to continue to proliferate and differentiate itself, hospitable to authors who will speak from the many places and positions that this wondrous world provides. We will also need autobiography to blur genres with curriculum criticism and foundational studies so that the particularity

and process of an individual's coming to know the world can be in continuous discourse with the world that presents itself to our experience.

(176)

Grumet's urging that writers look beyond self-reflection to juxtapose their world views with the self helps writers and readers see that individual stories are often stories of all. That is, to see the individual and the social constructs are not mutually exclusive.

In *I Writing, The Politics and Practices of Teaching First-Person Writing*, Paley also points to the expansion of the personal narrative beyond a pivotal moment essay. In part, Paley defends expressivist writing, but she too says FYC students can use the personal narrative to examine social issues, as she demonstrates in her ethnography of two expressivist classes at Boston College. Paley views the social and personal as not separate entities. She writes that "Personal narrative takes the writer's own life as its focus. It involves the use of a narratorial 'I' which seems to be the actual voice of the person who writes" (181). She then expands the narratorial "I," noting that in Boston College's FYC courses she saw what she calls "hybrid papers," "where elements of personal narrative mix with

exposition or argument in the same paper" (181). She asserts that those who argue against the personal narrative:

fail to see how the family can function as one of many capillaries through which power and powerlessness circulate...Those who sever such stories from the political beliefs of their students miss out on their pathos and intellectual energy and fail to help students make important connections between their personal lives and the society at large. (20)

What Paley, Grumet, Herrington, and others in composition suggest is that the personal narrative still plays a limited role in academic writing and its value in academic writing needs to be reassessed so it has an expanded role in academic writing. These composition theorists contend that the personal narrative needs to be more than simply a self-reflective essay, typically assigned as a pivotal moment narrative. These compositionists suggest that through personal narratives a student can explore the meaning of an experience in their life in terms of how society as a whole functions. Achieving this social level, however, requires the expansion of the personal beyond

self-reflection of a single pivotal moment and into the public.

Compositionists have wrestled with these intersections of the personal and the public for the last decade. Susan Jarrett argued in 1991 that the problem that has plagued feminist writings in the past is that they failed to make this transition from or to connect the personal to the public (121). Jarrett contends that instructors need to "help their students to locate personal experience in historical and social context—courses that lead students to see how differences emerging from their text and discussions have more to do with those contexts than they do with an essential and unarguable individuality" (121). Perhaps this is why some FYC instructors embraced in the mid-1990s the literacy narrative, an essay assignment that asks students to examine how they came to read and write; they saw it as an alternative to the invasive pivotal moment essay. Literacy narratives also served two other purposes: one, they provided text-based writing, something many in composition and linguistics find necessary to make the transition from personal writing to academic writing for English Second Language students (Leki and Carson), and two, literacy narratives often required students move

beyond self-reflection by requiring them to situate their experiences in social contexts. While some may argue that literacy narratives can be as invasive as pivotal moment essays because of their potential for revealing highly personal history, some compositionists also argue that the literacy narrative allows for the discussion of the politics of language and that this discussion of a social construct is valuable to FYC students, many of whom have never thought about the political nature of language.

Exploring the community through the individual and using personal essays as the discourse has become increasingly important as teachers deal with an ever-growing cultural diversity in their college classrooms. Terry Dean argues that because of the increase in cultural diversity at colleges, teachers need to structure more complex learning experiences to help students learn academic writing (23). Dean argues, "When we teach composition, we are teaching culture" (24). He has found using personal narratives that compare cultural rituals are effective because they allow students to explore parts of their cultural heritage that they are not fully aware of (28). He also notes, "Anecdotes about oneself and former class experiences are another way to generate discussion

and raise issues of cultural transition and identity" (34). Composition instructor Mary Soliday calls this writing "literacy stories" rather than personal narratives, but the purpose is the same. In literacy stories, students use personal narratives to help them cross between worlds. "In focusing upon those moments when the self is on the threshold of possible intellectual, social, and emotional development, literacy narratives become sites of self-translation where writers can articulate the meaning and the consequences of their passages between language worlds" (511). Soliday argues, "Reading and writing literacy stories can enable students to ponder the conflicts attendant upon crossing language worlds and to reflect upon the choices that speakers of minority dialects and languages must make" (512). This moves their personal stories into public writing as students use their personal experiences to help them understand language, a social construct.

Unyoking the Personal from the Narrative

One reason to stay with the personal in academic writing is that cognitive studies show students write better when they write from experience, what Britton

explains as a "natural starting point for beginning writers" (147). Because the personal narrative has been largely situated in the self-reflective, it traditionally has been located in expressivist rhetoric. James Berlin counters the theories of expressivist pedagogy and says that knowledge is constructed through the community, hence the social-epistemic rhetoric. Given that the individual's knowledge is always situated within the discourse community, then it follows that personal experiences also become situated within social-epistemic rhetoric. If all knowledge is collaborative, then individual knowledge is constructed through community discourse. Therefore, the personal within the narrative is no longer limited to self-reflection, and it no longer needs to be restricted to beginning FYC students whose first essay is a pivotal moment personal narrative, but who are then told to leave their personal experiences behind to write traditional academic papers such as argument and research. The personal within the narrative becomes what Cushman, Miller, Jarrett, Paley and others argue for: less about the personal and more about the personal in relation to society.

This movement of the personal into public writing achieves another purpose as well. It divorces the personal

from its long marriage with the narrative, thus establishing a second way to situate the "I" in academic writing. For some one hundred and fifty years, the personal has been entwined with the narrative. The implication thus has been that the personal could only exist in narrative. This has been especially so in FYC, where students have been told they can use the personal in their narratives, but then they must leave the personal behind and maintain an objective viewpoint when writing analysis, argument and research assignments. In recent years, some compositionists (Lu, Kirsch, Ritchie, Paley) argue that personal experience is valid evidence for writing academic analysis and research papers. Writing in the September, 2001 issue of *College English*, Candace Spigelman contends that personal stories also can be used in argument writing as well. She explains that personal narratives should be ways in which "writers make sense of their lives by organizing their experiences into first-person stories" (64). She further argues that these first-person narratives can "actually serve the same purposes as academic writing and that narratives of personal experience can accomplish serious scholarly work" (64). And she further notes of personal narratives: "They are intended to serve ends beyond pure

expression of opinion or cathartic confession" (64). She sees the personal narrative as evidence in argument (64).

While these scholars advocate the use of personal experience as evidence in academic writing involving argument, research and analysis, this move is less visible in FYC. Just as the personal narrative in FYC has remained limited to often a single, confessional pivotal moment essay, traditional FYC pedagogy also has failed to recognize the validity of personal experiences in academic writing other than narrative. Personal narratives often can be very persuasive, but personal anecdotes have not traditionally been accepted as valid evidence in academic writing. Positing student writers who can not only use self-reflection to examine the relationships in their lives in context with history and society but allows these writers to use personal experiences when applicable for writing analysis, argument and research essays creates writers who use analysis and argument (and even research) in examining and understanding their community, as well as the social and historical relationships that comprise each person's life and moves students into the field of public writing.

It is Always Personal

Beyond expanding the personal's role in academic writing to encompass argument, research and analysis, some language and literature scholars say it is time for academia to finally recognize the presence of the personal in scholarly writing, regardless of whether it is written in objective voice or a personal narrative. This recognition that the personal is always present is a third way of evoking "I" in academic scholarship. In their 2001 book *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing*, co-editors Deborah H. Holdstein and David Bleich argue that compositionists need to recognize that the personal is always present when the pair write that "[t]his volume collects essays that, taken, together, try to show how fundamental it is in humanistic scholarship to take account, in a variety of ways and as part of the subject matter, of the personal and collective experiences of scholars, researchers, critics, and teachers" (1). The pair credit Michael Bérubé's October 1996 *PMLA* essay "Against Subjectivity" with bringing this issue of personal always present to light in academia. Bérubé asserts that using personal narratives in academic writing has been thought to be "some kind of generic violation of scholarship in the

human sciences" (1065). He asserts, though, that "as long as the scholarship in question concerns humans and is written by humans, readers should at least entertain the possibility that nothing human should be alien to it" (1065). Bérubé appears to have brought to light the academic dialogue that recognizes the personal as always present, regardless of whether it is written in the objective or subjective voice, as Holdstein and Bleich note when referencing Bérubé's quotation in their book's introduction: "This conclusion, so self-evident, is only now becoming acceptable in the humanities—that is, to admit the full range of human experience into formal scholarly writing" (1). In that same 1996 *PMLA* issue, Cathy N. Davidson's asserts that, "Whether we put ourselves in or think we are leaving ourselves out, we are always in what we write" (1072). Davidson comes to this conclusion after examining how the same conventions used in personal writing exist in other writing, noting that "the conventions of genre for personal writing are every bit as scripted as the conventions of scholarship" (1072). This counters the traditional view of scholarly writing, a genre that defines itself as objective and requires writers become personally detached from their scholarship and their

reading audience. Many scholars in composition, the humanities, and the sciences have long recognized that nothing is objective (Elbow discusses this in his 1991 of the subjective and objective voice). Yet, as Christoph writes in the July 2002 issue of *College English*,

Discussions of the personal in our field have frequently treated it as if it were something to be imported (or not) into one's academic writing—even as these discussions have reminded us that writing is always to some degree a subjective enterprise, grounded as it is in individual writer's perspectives on the world. (660)

She goes on to say that "theorizing the personal is a relatively recent concern in academy, it is connected to the much older question of how a writer's or speaker's character is related to his or her ability to communicate" (661).

Recognizing the personal's presence whether it is written or oratory or public or private or objective or subjective also is the subject of Jane E. Hindman's essay in the September 2001 issue of *College English*. Hindman reinforces Christoph, Bleich, and Holdstein's argument

about the recognition of the personal in academic writing.

Hindman says:

Our discursive practice is enabled and justified by the personal whether or not we recognize it as such and whether or not we are willing to be held accountable for our situated motives, choices, ethics.[...]A composing process which requires me to evoke my beliefs at their most invisible embodied place, to scrutinize relentlessly the stakes in maintaining those individual beliefs and to confront the privileges they afford me, and to stage self-consciously my methods for persuading you of the authority of those beliefs—that kind of composing produces writing that matters. (107)

Producing writing that matters is, after all, a vital key to writing for FYC students, as Elbow and other composition theorists continue to assert. Because of this failure in academia to recognize this presence of the personal in all scholarly writing, Holdstein and Bleich contend that “humanistic inquiry can not develop successfully at this time without reference to the varieties of subjective, intersubjective, and collective experiences of teachers and

researchers" (1). And, they say, there seems to be a contradiction in when personal is permitted into scholarship; they contend that often instructors separate their teaching and their scholarship. At the same time these instructors use personal experiences and narratives in validating their own points of view, they do not extend this possibility to their students. "Including personal experiences and narratives in the presentation of scholarship lends scholarship its pedagogical authority: it is not just plain 'knowledge.' It is knowledge that *this* person found in *this* community or society and is sharing with *this* other group of people" (3). They conclude that "The persons, the scholarship, and the teaching are combined" (3). This argument holds true for FYC. There still exists in FYC writing this pretense of detachment of the person from the scholarship, when student writers are told to leave the personal behind to write argument and research essays.

Unveiling the Personal

Recognizing that the personal always exists is the first step towards accepting that the personal always exists even in the most objective of scholarly writing.

Another necessary step is learning to recognize the personal in the writing. Much has been written about finding a voice and identity in writing. On finding the personal voice in a text, Susan Handelman begins with the etymology of the word 'personal,' which she notes is "derived from 'persona,'" which in "turn designates the 'mask' used by actors in ancient Greek drama, the *dramatis personae* who spoke through it: *per* + *sonare*," (122). Handelman sees the mask, or as she terms it the "face", "acting as an interface between self and world" (122). She posits then that when we speak of personal we mean then to "give a face" and a voice to something (129). "One way a text is 'made personal' is by being embodied in the living voice, face, and being of the teacher in dialogue with the student, and the students with each other" (131). She seems to assert here that when students begin to recognize that they are not "mirroring" the teacher in their writing, but come to understand their own personal knowledge taking place through this interface of self with the world (the teacher, other students and their society) "true wisdom" is constructed and students give an identity and voice to their writing, what Handelman calls the "inner change" (133).

Though perhaps subtle, this inner change that Handelman refers to becomes evident, and instructors must be aware of its subtle signs in their students' writing as they examine their own teaching pedagogy. Christoph has studied some of the subtle ways writers invoke the personal, and she says instructors "have not given sufficient attention to other, more subtle ways in which the personal enters into composition processes and written text" (661). One reason Christoph cites for this lack of attention is that composition instructors have spent so much time looking at the "ethics and propriety of using 'the personal' in scholarly writing, and more recently, in defining what we mean by 'the personal'" (661). This is largely true in FYC, where much of the debate has focused on whether students should be permitted to use the personal (Bartholomae and Elbow).

As a result, little attention has been paid to how students actually invoke their ethos in their writing, regardless of whether they are actually using the personal pronoun I or are writing in the objective voice. In examining the writings of pioneer women, Christoph asserts that a writer reveals their ethos, even subtly, by what the writer chooses to include and exclude and how the student

frames a text. Christoph concludes that by recognizing these subtleties in their students' writing, "we as writing instructors can take care not to offend or alienate students unintentionally by labeling strategies of placement in their writing wrong or inappropriate" (677). Christoph says that identity statements can be easier to recognize than moral displays and "are also more likely to be labeled as inappropriate to academic discourse" (677-678). She goes on to note that:

These strategies of placement as rhetorical help to identify students as particular kinds of people. If we are aware of strategies of placement as rhetorical moves, then instead of merely marking these uses of material associations as inappropriate, we as writing teachers can use them as starting places for talking about how writers use rhetorical strategies to appeal to their audiences. (678)

While Christoph argues that instructors need to be aware of these rhetorical strategies and help students become aware of the rhetorical strategies that they employ in their writing, what also needs to take place is that students recognize the multiple ways the personal resonates in text.

Writing in the September 2002 *College Composition and Communication*, Kumamoto notes that instructors need to help students recognize and locate their multiply identities, what she terms students' "eloquent 'I'," a term she borrows from Joan Webber. Kumamoto defines this eloquent "I" as "the fusion of the universal and the concrete self in a person" (69). She uses Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of "outsidedness," Berlin's claims that "...the student's 'true' self is subtly constructed by the responses of others in the class," Donald Murray's theory that "all writing is autobiographical in the sense that all writing comes from within," and Jack Dodds's writing/rubrics in his *Roles for Writers and Readers: A Rhetorical Anthology*. Kumamoto says that as her students gradually move in their writing from personal narrative to the more traditional objective essays they come to recognize their eloquent "I" emerging in their academic writing. She writes:

 Their writing indicated their efforts to bridge the distance between a way of knowing through personal experience and the sharing of that experience, and a new way of knowing through analytical reasoning and dialectic argumentation. Indicative of the change occurring in their grasp

of self, their writing was accomplished in a mixture of personal reflection, informational reportage, cultural inquiry and analysis, and synthesis of various opinions and positions. This mixed style could be read as a shift taking place in their self-knowledge as well as in their self-understanding, traversing from their familiar, ordinary selves to newly constructed academic beings, which they could articulate in the persuasive language earned 'personal orders.' (80-81)

Kumamoto's observations about her students' writing demonstrate what Handelman notes occurs when students begin to develop their voice and identity. These students no longer simply mirror the readings or their teacher's opinions, but through writing come to discover their own voice and identity and thus their writing reflect their own persona.

In examining and reconfiguring the eloquent "I," Kumamoto seeks guidance from Jean-Paul Sautre's dialogue, saying that while he is "aware of the social purposes and functions of writing achieved in dialogues between writers and readers he speaks about writing primarily as an

existential and private urge for self-proof, a written significance of who or what one believes one is" (67).

Ultimately, this defines writing. Writing may be a social construct, as Berlin and others argue, but as Britton suggests the most natural way to begin to discover this construct is through the personal. It is this excavation of the self both as a private and a public individual that identity begins to take shape and through the personal the persona takes shape in a student's writing.

Therefore, when I speak of reshaping the personal narrative in FYC, what I am actually proposing is that we reshape our understanding of the personal and how it is situated in FYC, aligning it with scholars' discussions of their own uses of the personal as they write for academic journals. Their own uses reveal the multiple ways of using I in academic writing. At the same time, in postulating how to reshape the personal, this examination must take into consideration three factors: one, how the personal is now being used in FYC courses taught as CSUSB; two, how CSUSB instructors of FYC view the personal in academic writing, and specifically how they see the personal in their students' writing, and, three, how students see their ethos invoked in their academic writing.

CHAPTER TWO

PERSONAL NARRATIVES AT CALIFORNIA STATE
UNIVERSITY SAN BERNARDINO

First Year Composition Textbooks

One reason the personal narrative has been so engrained in FYC is that a majority of FYC textbooks typically call for it to be the first writing assignment of college freshman. Until recently, rhetoric composition textbooks such as *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing* and *The Bedford Guide for College Writers* have been most widely used in CSUSB's FYC courses. A review of these textbooks and several other rhetorics reveal that most textbooks still embody some version of "modes" instruction and that the personal narrative is the first assignment. Usually this personal narrative assignment centers around remembering events of some sort, a common prompt then for what is typically called the pivotal moment essay. For example, in *The St. Martin's Guide to Writing*, sixth edition, authors Axelrod and Cooper write that autobiographical writing is a popular genre. "Autobiography is so popular because reading as well as writing it leads people to reflect deeply on their own lives. When you

reflect on the meaning of experience, you examine the forces within yourself and within society that have shaped you into the person you have become" (25). The authors go on to explain to college writers that the purpose of autobiographical writing is to "present yourself to readers by telling a story that discloses something significant about your life" (25). The authors caution readers not to "pour out their memories and feelings" but to "shape those memories into a compelling story that conveys the meaning and importance of an experience" (25). Similar pedagogical practices are advocated in *The Bedford Guide for College Writers*, third edition. Authors X.J. Kennedy and Dorothy M. Kennedy open the first chapter introducing students to writing from recall, which they define as "writing from memory, the richest resource a writer has, and the handiest" (13). The textbook's first writing assignment is to write about a personal experience. The authors provide these directions:

Write about a personal experience that took place at one moment in your life and that changed how you acted, thought, or felt from the moment on. Your purpose is not merely to tell an

interesting story but to show your readers the importance that experience had for you. (20-21)

In *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing*, second edition, authors John D. Ramage and John C. Bean take a slightly different approach to the personal narrative. The editors devote the first six chapters to providing an overview of college writing, explaining the demands of this writing, thesis development, ways to discover purpose, audience and genre of writing assignments, and the observation and reading rhetorical skills required of university-level writing. The first writing project comes in the sixth chapter on reading rhetorically, and it requires students to write a summary of a reading. Beginning in the seventh chapter, the editors introduce students to discourse modes and they begin with personal narrative writing, which they title autobiographical narrative. Once again, as seen in the other two textbooks, the assignment for the autobiographical narrative requires students write about "something significant from your life" (142). The editors explain to students they will learn how to write basic techniques for "dialogue, specific language, and scene-by-scene construction" and these basic techniques are utilized "when sharing stories, telling jokes, or

recounting experiences to friends. These are the most natural and universal techniques, the ones that people of all cultures have traditionally used to pass on their collective wisdom in myths, legends, and religious narratives" (142). Ramage and Bean acknowledge in the teacher's guide that some instructors like to give autobiographical narrative assignment early in the course "on the grounds that personal writing should precede more academic forms. Others like to give it last—on the grounds that open-form writing is more complex and subtle than closed form (academic) prose. We found that either choice works well" (xxxvii).

Personal Narrative Assignments

While rhetorics such as the above mentioned are still used at CSUSB, a growing number of instructors and professors are using composition readers in their FYC courses. These composition readers also suggest a personal narrative as the first assignment. A few professors said they sometimes opt to assemble a collection of essays for students to read rather than using a reader or rhetoric. Regardless of the text, in interviews with the six CSUSB professors who have taught English 101, all said they have

students use some form of the personal and/or narrative in the first writing assignment to engage students in academic writing. However, how these are used differs from professor to professor. For example, Professor Maureen Newlin often requires students to write an autobiographical essay on a pivotal moment in their lives as the first English 101 assignment. She uses the *St. Martin's Guide to Writing* or an abridged version of this textbook (For example in spring, 2002, English 101 students worked from *The Concise Guide to Writing* by Axelrod and Cooper.) Newlin's assignment reflects one of the most popular forms of the personal narrative assigned in FYC across colleges, perhaps because it is so readily suggested in rhetoric textbooks.

A shift in the use of the personal and/or narrative comes with a kind of autobiographical essay that has gained increasing popularity in college writing and specifically here at CSUSB in recent years: some variation on the literacy autobiographical essay. Professors Mary Boland and Jacqueline Rhodes often ask students to write about how language shapes their identity. Each professor varies this assignment. For example, Boland says she asks students to write a literacy memoir and she prefaces the students' writing with readings from authors such as Barbara Mellix

and Mike Rose, both of whom have written similar literacy memoirs. In the assignment, she asks students to examine how language (oral or written) has functioned in shaping their life. The prompt also typically asks them to think about what their own experiences with language might teach others. Rhodes has students read essays on education and then asks students to write an autobiographical literacy narrative in which they must place their experiences in context with the readings. Specifically, the students are to compare and contrast their experiences and opinions with that of an author's point of view.

In a similar move, Professor Kim Costino asks students to examine the way language shapes identity or the way the language and power are related, but she does not ask students to write an autobiographical essay. Rather, she frames the writing assignment around readings that explore the use of and power of language, and she asks students to write about how language operates in their own life or in others' life.

Professors Carol Haviland and Ellen Gil-Gomez say they encourage students to use personal narrative in their writing, but do not assign an autobiographical narrative in the traditional sense. In the first assignment for one

English 101 class, Gil-Gomez says she had students examine the myths that surround the idea of the California dream and asked students how they identify themselves with this idea of the California dream and myth. Haviland says rather than have students write a story about themselves, she usually asks students to write essays that are arguments or persuasive in some way and she discusses how story telling is one aspect of that argument or persuasion. The story then serves the purpose of defining and defending an argument (Haviland).

Curriculum Constraints

One of the questions that must be asked when examining the personal narrative in English 101 is how it meets course guidelines established by the English Department. These guidelines state that:

The primary aims of English 101 should be to teach students to write effectively, to read critically, and to understand the connections between reading and writing. Writing assignments should be geared toward developing students' abilities to write the kinds of thoughtful and carefully edited papers and essays that are

expected in other undergraduate courses...The course should focus on writing assignments that require students to draw upon their critical readings of other texts in order to position their ideas and arguments in relations to those of other authors and to choose rhetorical strategies and structures that allow them to respond to different contexts. The course should teach students to use writing not only to communicate but also to generate thinking and to examine assumptions. (*English Guidelines*)

The department's guidelines do not stipulate specific assignments that students should write; in fact, the guidelines stipulate students' papers "may include a wide range of topics, objectives, and rhetorical situations, but the majority of them should require students to respond to other texts" (*English Guidelines*). The guidelines specifically stipulate that at least one assignment must incorporate research strategies, though it does not define those strategies. Therefore, if the personal narrative is not required for students, then why ask students to write this assignment, especially when it students are required

to write about a pivotal moment in their life and this pivotal moment could evoke stories of rape, incest, or abuse, as some instructors have reported in scholarly journals (Miller, Morgan, Valentino)?

One reason to stay with the personal aspect of writing is that cognitive studies show students write better when they write from experience (Emig, Britton, Elbow). CSUSB professors also said they find enactment of the personal engages students more in their writing. For example, Boland said she starts with the literacy memoir because it creates a forum for students to have a vested knowledge of something in order to write intelligently or knowledgeably without having to extensively read other material (Boland). She has students read at least two texts in relation to this first assignment. Newlin concurs, saying of students, "They feel they have more to say; they're more of an authority over that topic than maybe in something else" (Newlin). While not assigning a personal narrative in the traditional sense, Costino says she encourages students to use personal experience in their academic essays as support for evidence or ways to analyze something because it helps connect the student with their writing and their identity. Costino says of the students, "They're more connected to

writing if they're interested in what they are writing about. And often that is a personal experience. So I don't want to cut that option off. But a writing class isn't therapy; that's not its function" (Costino).

This issue over whether an assignment should be therapeutic has been a long-time issue in FYC, particularly with regards to pivotal moment personal narratives (MacCurdy, Deletiner). When asking students to write their personal story, Boland and Newlin say they stress to students that autobiographic narratives do not simply tell a story about the student's life. Rather, they tell students they must use the personal narrative to examine some deeper meaning or understanding of the event in their lives. Newlin says that she points out "that it's different from just simply telling a story because it has to have a point. In other words it has to have a thesis, something that they're trying to prove by using the story, about themselves or about somebody else or about a situation" (Newlin). Newlin warns students in advance that they will share their essays with their classmates, and she suggests students not write about something unless they feel comfortable doing so. "Some are surprisingly very comfortable with a lot of very revealing things, which is

fine with me. I have no problems with that, as long as they fulfill the assignment" (Newlin). Newlin's assertion is consistent with FYC instructors who report that many students enjoy writing about personal experiences and find the writing cathartic (MacCurdy, Deletiner, Morgan, Valentino).

In assigning the literacy memoir, Boland says asks students to explore how language shapes their community membership, forms their language, and makes them who they are. She assigns specific readings designed to help students understand how other authors see language shaping who they are, and she hopes students come to understand how language functions and shapes life. In many cases, she said, students have never thought of language in this way. She says some students write about very interesting ways language has been important to them in a positive way. "Some will talk about painful experiences, where people have been critical of their language or they felt pushed aside because of it" (Boland). While Boland asserts that literacy memoirs help students examine issues of language that they may not have thought about before, she is, however, critical of personal assignments where students are asked to simply write a narrative based on a personal

experience because it demands students reveal themselves whether they want to or not, for purposes that may or may not be their own. "And I think when done, there's a part of me that says this is none of our business, and we're asking students to put themselves on the line in ways that may make them feel uncomfortable and if we don't have good reasons and clear headed reasons about it we're very unethical". (Boland).

This idea that students are forced to reveal personal aspects of their lives in a course that is required by the college to graduate has garnered in recent years criticisms among composition theorists, including some at CSUSB, Haviland for one. Haviland says many in composition argue that the personal narrative is the easiest essay for students to write, but she thinks that for students for whom self-disclosure isn't appropriate this essay is actually extremely difficult. As a result, students choose not to share this information. This creates a problem, Haviland says. "Often the best stories are the stories that are the most real and the most vivid, but they may then have details that people don't want to share, so they cut those out and so then the story is barren" (Haviland). Haviland, who once assigned personal narratives, says she

no longer assigns the personal narrative as an essay because she doesn't see any connection "between the just telling of a story and anything they do in other kinds of writing" (Haviland).

Rhodes also objects to using the personal narrative when its sole purpose is to tell a story and not provide a transition to other types of academic writing. Assignments that set up this narrative arc requiring students to write about what they have learned from something in their lives reflect the "political problems" of FYC, Rhodes says. Citing Crowley's and Foucault's arguments of masked power, Rhodes says these political problems in part stem from the idea that some hold that FYC classes are thought to be service courses, a belief that has been held since the inception into academia in the late nineteenth century. While she says she doesn't view FYC as a service course, Rhodes said the ideology behind such thinking is that FYC is supposed to serve all those other disciplines by teaching useful sorts of writing. Therefore, she says that, "The personal essay by itself is not useful because that essay they write at the first two weeks of their freshman composition class will be the only personal essay they'll write for the next four years." (Rhodes). If FYC is a

service course, then that is not providing a service, she concludes. "So there's no point. So it's a waste of time from a service perspective" (Rhodes). Often, too, FYC is seen at a content level, she said, and there is not a justification for this type of assignment on this level either because what is being asked is for them to tell a story. Rhodes says an essay lacks content if its purpose is to tell a story. "Are you problematizing issues of language, of how people use writing, of literacy? No, you're just asking them to tell you a story" (Rhodes). Therefore, Rhodes says, that sort of writing belongs more in the realm of the creative writing.

Assigning a personal narrative for the sole reason to tell a story also does not fall within English 101 guidelines. While the guidelines do not forbid personal narratives, they do stipulate that writing assignments in English 101 should allow students to "draw upon their critical readings of other texts in order to position their ideas and arguments in relations to those of other authors and to choose rhetorical strategies and structures that allow them to respond to different contexts" (English *Guidelines*). This is a key point in the guidelines and a measure that can be used to examine all writing assignments

assigned in English 101. Rhodes says she thinks the literacy assignment is different from a personal narrative essay on a pivotal moment because it does not ask students to reveal themselves to the instructor and it asks them to do a specific rhetorical task, which is to wrestle with a text. Rhodes says she would argue that it is probably more value to students to give them more information in which to contextualize themselves. "You know read, find things, talk to people, have discussions. Write about these things. Feel like you have a stake in writing about these things. And that the 'I' that I'll value is the one that is thinking about things. That's a real writer" (Rhodes). For this reason, Rhodes and several other CSUSB composition professors prefer to ask students to write about literacy and to contextualize their experiences within the assigned class readings. When asked to contextualize their experiences with another author's point of view, students then must be able to execute several rhetorical strategies. They must be able to summarize, compare and contrast, analyze and argue. In this sense then, students use personal experiences as support for their opinions. The result is, Rhodes said, a critical point: that students'

own interpretation of the readings leads to a thesis and the genre does not lead to the thesis.

Interviews with other professors in the English Department found that most professors of English 101 prefer to have students use their personal narratives or personal experience anecdotes as evidentiary support for a larger issue, whether it is for social or historical purposes. For example, Costino says she encourages her students to use personal experience in their academic essays as support for evidence or ways to analyze something. "But I don't just want a narrative of any kind, personal or otherwise. I think it's great to incorporate pieces of narratives to make a larger point, to make an argument, but I want an argument" (Costino).

This recognition of the personal experience as evidence coincides with the emerging scholarship featured in *College English's* September, 2001, in which Cushman, Miller, Spigelman, and Herrington argue the personal narrative should be less about the individual self-reflection and more about the individual and more about the relations that make the person. Their argument for the personal to be situated in historical and social contexts in writing for academic journals coincides with this

movement at CSUSB to use the personal as evidence that students can use for discussing larger issues in essays. This scholarship suggests the need to expand the personal beyond narrative, a move that seems more aligned with the English departmental guidelines at CSUSB.

At the same time, this theory that moves the personal away from self-referential to evidentiary coincides with a 1997 study that found English Second Language students are better served if the personal writing they do in writing courses is text-based. The study by Ilona Leki and Joan Carson found that writing courses tended to ask ESL students to draw on their personal knowledge and experience while courses in other disciplines most often required students to respond to texts they read. The authors concluded in their study that "source texts provided more than just ideas for writing. The text used in disciplinary courses also provided vocabulary ideas, sentence structure (e.g. passives in science writing), and rhetorical forms that could be utilized in the writing assignment" (Leki). Because of the large student body of ESL students at CSUSB, these findings are important when designing any writing assignment for FYC courses. Professor Sunny Hyon notes that some cultures are not used to or find it inappropriate to

use personal experience in their writing. However, in teaching English 86A and B, she finds ESL students engaged in their writing when they use personal experience in a narrow scope. For example, she asks students to write about their experiences with languages and ties the assignment to Amy Tan's essay "Mother Tongue." Hyon says she always tries to pick a topic where students in the ESL writing courses are able to draw on something from their own experiences or observations. "I think that it gives them an 'in' to writing so that they're going to be able to have something on paper easily because they're going to be able to draw from their own experiences" (Hyon). She says she applies Leki and Carson's findings to her own pedagogy. She also finds that requiring students to always frame their personal experiences with text-based writings "give students an 'in' to the writing" (Hyon).

Recognizing Ethos

Just as personal experiences as evidence gives students an in to their writing, Haviland also suggests it is vital for instructors to recognize and help students become more aware of their own ethos in their writing regardless of whether it is written in the objective third

person voice or in the subjective first person voice the personal always exists. She says the personal and student's writing are not mutually exclusive. She says students need to begin to "recognize that any paper you write, whether it has I'm in it or not, is in fact you if your name is on it. Just as if you read a novel and the writer doesn't say this is autobiographical, but that person is there. This is invented by this person" (Haviland). She points out that the fact that twenty-four students write a paper on the same topic and that they are all different reminds students that they are all present in their choices they make and in the construction of the paper (Haviland).

Haviland's views echo some of the latest scholarship, and specifically that of Hindman, who argues that the personal is always present in writing whether it is written or oratory or public or private or objective or subjective. One way to help students produce writing that matters, says Haviland, is to show them how they execute control in their writing, regardless of whether they use the personal pronoun "I" or not. Says Haviland:

If they're writing arguments, for example, I'm going to ask 'Why is this important?' Usually the first list of things is all the stuff they've

heard from somebody else. 'Why is education important? Well, it helps you get a good job' You get to be a richer person.' And I say, 'That's what everybody says about education. Why does it matter to you?' Because until you can find that piece of education that's important for X reasons that matter to you, you've written that same paper that hundreds of people have read and been bored by. (Haviland)

Haviland says students also need to recognize they usually have a choice of topics, and if not in the choice of topics, at least in how they approach the topic and in the choice of evidence they choose to support their findings. She says students need to use their view points, regardless of whether the pronoun "I" is used or understood, to convince the reader of their opinion. I'm always going to try these kinds of strategies that say you know you're the writer of this paper, you're there. This is uniquely you. But you uniquely you doesn't mean you don't listen to anything else" (Haviland).

These kinds of strategy-seeking devices to help students and teachers recognize the student writer's personal coincides with the theories echoed by Christoph in

her July 2002 essay for *College English*. In analyzing the writings of pioneer women, Christoph found that each writer has their own distinctive voice, based on the words they choose, their style of writing. Christoph argues that a writer's ethos is located in what she calls "strategies of placement," and these strategies can be applied to FYC courses (660). Christoph argues that "These strategies may offer a way of updating Aristotelian *ethos* rather than *logos* for their persuasive force" (668). Christoph cites three major strategies of placement that writers utilize in forming their personal. These are (1) identity statements, such as using the persona pronoun "I," (2) moral displays (what Christoph refers to as "moral standards that alert readers to the writer's membership in a particular community), and (3) material associations (what Christoph defines as conveyed *ethos* by identifying specific tastes or "cultural sensibilities"). (670-671). Christoph concludes that FYC instructors must "look for the more specific, more complex family, regional, moral, and microcultural placements that ultimately shape the range of options from which writers can draw to create identities in text that are rich, fluid and complex" (679).

Helping students recognize their own ethos in their FYC writing will transfer to helping students recognize their ethos in the writing they will do in other disciplines, which meets another stipulated primary goal of English 101 (*English Guidelines*). Specifically, the guidelines state that "Writing assignments should be geared toward developing students' abilities to write the kinds of thoughtful and carefully edited papers that are expected in other undergraduate courses" (*English Guidelines*). This particular goal in the guidelines is vital must be because while some disciplines permit personal narrative writing and the use of the personal pronoun "I," other disciplines do not. For example, the various uses of the personal differ within the English Department. This discrepancy is highlighted within several courses Professor Renée Pigeon teaches. In the English 306 she taught in winter quarter, Pigeon asked students to write either about a public figure or about a memorable person in the students' life as a jumping off point to examine a bigger issue, as she illustrated with numerous class readings. In the other English literature courses she teaches, however, she does not permit the personal narrative, though she does allow students to use the personal pronoun "I" when making a

point. Professors Bruce Golden and Gil-Gomez, also English literature professors, say they permit the use of the personal pronoun "I," but all three professors caution students to use the "I" in rhetorically effective ways. This means students should not litter their writing with "I believe" and "I think," but use it sparingly to make their point effective.

The use of the personal pronoun "I," however, is not as readily acceptable in other humanity courses. For example, in the social sciences, Professor Mary Texeira says that it is a personal choice of every professor to decide whether they want the student to insert him or herself into the paper or not. She encourages her students, however, to use the personal pronoun whenever they write. "We don't want them to remove themselves from the world of data, of the world of argument. We want them to insert themselves in there because they too are apart of that world" (Texeira). She says that's really the bottom line. "You put yourself in there because I want to know how you have experienced this yourself, even if it's just 'I interviewed the woman' rather than 'The woman was interviewed by'" (Texeira). As for using personal narrative or personal experiences as anecdotal, Texeira says that

occasionally this is permitted, but the personal must be supported with journal readings and studies.

While Texeira permits the use of the personal pronoun and personal experiences, Professor Pamela Schram, assistant professor of criminal justice, which falls within the social sciences, does not permit either. She said at one time she did allow undergraduates to use the personal pronoun, but changed her policy when she found students relied on the "I" as a crutch because students were using this personal pronoun in place of stating a valid argument. As a result, she tells students they are not to use the personal pronoun in their academic essays. She also says because of the type of writing demanded of the discipline, personal experiences or personal narratives are not appropriate in the type of academic essays she requires her students to write in the courses she teaches.

The use of the personal pronoun "I" and personal narratives and experiences also are inappropriate in academic writing for the history department. History Professors Joyce Hanson and Brett Flehinger say the very nature of the discipline prohibits the use of personal experience or the personal pronoun. In separate interviews, Flehinger and Hanson said that traditionally history is

written in the objective third person. Hanson says the historian has always been told to hide their subjectivity. "You are supposed to be the objective observer. And I think that comes a lot out of the tradition that arose in the 1970s and 80s of this quantifiable history, this history as a social science" (Hanson). While recognizing historians write in objective third person, both Hanson and Flehinger also acknowledge that history is never objective.

This is not to say there is not a place for the personal pronoun "I" and the use of personal experience, in a specific way. A few years ago, Hanson started asking students to write personal narrative essays where they assume the persona of a character; this character can be any person they want, except it cannot be anyone famous. The students are then asked to talk about how certain events during a specific historical period affected their lives. Hanson cites as an example students writing about how women living in the nineteenth century were impacted by the Seneca Falls convention. This requires that students know everything from the geographic area they lived in, to the culture and the cultural norms, to the economy and social environment. The one hitch in this assignment is that students must write it from the first person

perspective. While acknowledging it would be easier for the students to write in third person, Hanson says that writing in the first person forces students to "internalize it." She says she wants her students to put themselves in this place. "I think if you're having them do that they have to be there, they have to feel that they're there and you don't do that in the third person." Hanson says the reason she uses this assignment is:

Because I hated the papers they were doing. It was boring. It was boring for them and it was boring for me. And they went out and they picked a topic or they picked a book and they read that and they wrote about it. Well, you know you don't really learn anything that way. I think you learn by experience and I'm asking them to take on this other experience and to live that life. And I think that's really important in history.

(Hanson)

Hanson's example further demonstrates the point that personal writing engages students more than any other voice.

While the personal engages students, it is, however, not usually evoked and accepted in many other disciplines

academic writing, yet. This is why it is vital for students and instructors to be aware of ways students can evoke ethos in essays requiring the objective voice. Flehinger says he talks to his classes about ways they can utilize their opinion in academic essays written for this discipline, and that they discuss how to formulate and write about their opinion using third persons. Flehinger says writing in the third person places the focus on the evidence, while he finds that writing in the first person focuses the attention on the person, and in history the focus should be on the evidence not the person.

What these interviews and research suggests is that the use of the personal in academic writing varies from instructor to instructor, and discipline to discipline. In some situations students are permitted to use the personal pronoun "I" in their writing to demonstrate their ideas and arguments, while in other cases they are not. In some situations students are permitted to use their personal experiences as evidence in academic papers, while in other situations students are not permitted to use the personal experiences as evidence. Yet, what becomes clear in these interviews and the emerging scholarship is the recognition and acknowledgment that the personal always exists in a

writer's writing, regardless of whether it is written in the subjective or objective point of view. As Christoph notes, conversations about the personal in academia is "treated as if it were something imported (or not) into one's academic writing" (660). Christoph recognizes one way instructors of FYC can make students aware of ways they can evoke their ethos in their writing, regardless of the assignment or the discipline or if it is written from the subjective or objective the point of view.

CHAPTER THREE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN BERNARDINO

STUDENT SURVEY

Given CSUSB professors views and the current discussions among compositionists about the personal narrative and the personal in academic writing, the next important question is ask what do students say about the matter? It does not appear that a study or survey has been conducted among first year college students to discover their opinions on writing personal narratives or using personal experiences in their academic writing.

Data Elicitation

The purpose of the present study was to understand students' views on this subject. With the university's Institutional Review Board approval and consent of students' instructors, I distributed questionnaires to eight of the eleven English 101 classes offered during the spring 2003 quarter. Prior to filling out the five-question survey, I told students that the questionnaire and study had been approved by the university's Institutional Review Board, and that their responses were anonymous, strictly voluntary, and had no bearing on their grade. Because

answers were anonymous and did not have any bearing on grades, students were asked to be as candid with their answers as possible. I assigned each questionnaire a code number, but the students were never asked to provide their names, nor did they. I told the students to place a check mark in an assigned spot if they consented to participate in the study, and I asked them to list the college writing courses taken prior to English 101. A total of 133 questionnaires were handed out, with 132 students choosing to complete the survey.

Analysis of Survey Data

I examined the questionnaires first to see if the student's responses elicited an affirmative or negative response to each question. If there was not a clear affirmation or negation of the question, but rather the student placed a condition on the response, these were separated out. I tabulated all of these responses to each of the questions then to see if a consensus among the student population could be extrapolated. For example, take the question: "When asked to write about personal experiences, do you enjoy sharing your private stories or do you think this is prying into personal business?"

Students most often responded either "yes" they liked to use personal experience or "no" they said they did not like to use personal experience. Typically, students then would elaborate on that answer. Therefore, the responses were tabulated in the affirmative or negative. If students' immediate response was "it depends," these were placed in a third category. In this example, 88 students said they enjoyed sharing their personal experience in their writing, 37 students said they did not like to share their personal experiences, and 7 students stated at the onset it depended on the topic or the degree of personal required by the instructor. Additionally, many of these students would further elaborate on their initial response, but this was not accounted for in the immediate tabulation. For example, many of the students who either said they enjoyed sharing their personal experiences or did not enjoy sharing their personal stories went on to say in a follow-up sentence that this would depend on how personal the instructor requested. While these clarifications are important, they were not computed in the tabulation of the results because most students tended to clarify their answers and this would not produce a clear, defined line. These clarifications, though, were noted in the discussion of the

question in this chapter. Each of the four questions that sought to extract a point of view on some aspect of the personal in academic writing was analyzed in this manner. The fifth question, and the first on the questionnaire, asked students what their expectations were when they registered for this English 101 class. This information was sought to attain an idea of what students thought the purpose of English 101 in terms of their goals for this class.

Survey Results

This section describes and gives examples of the various responses to the questions in the present study. Given that of the 133 questionnaires handed out in the various classes all but one student chose to respond, this represents an extremely high return response and provides, therefore, a good indication of students' opinions on the personal in academic writing. The questionnaire was limited in length to five questions to encourage a high rate of participation, but this did restrict the number of follow-up or clarification questions. Students typically completed the survey in less than 10 minutes, another advantage to securing the high participation rate.

Of the four questions focused specifically on the personal in academic writing, students were asked if they were permitted to use the personal pronoun "I" in this English 101 course. If so, students were to briefly describe the assignment(s) when they were able to use "I." If they were not permitted, students were asked to describe the writing assignments they had completed to date in this course. Of the 132 respondents, 124 said they were able to use "I," 6 said no (4 from the same class), 1 indicated they did not really know, and 1 other student did not discuss the question directly, so there was no way to determine if the student thought they were permitted to use "I" or not. The overwhelming affirmative responses demonstrate the acceptance of the use of the "I" in this English department. This is particularly clear since out of the eight classes surveyed only one is taught by one of the six professors interviewed. The remaining seven classes are taught by adjunct instructors. The 6 no's pose an interesting point from which to start the analysis of this question, in part because there are so few of them and that 4 of the 6 came from the same class. It must be noted that in a brief conversation prior to the class to secure permission to distribute the questionnaire, the instructor

where 4 students indicated no said that she does not have students write a personal narrative until the end of the quarter. In her class, 10 of the 14 answered in the affirmative, so most in the class believe they have permission to use the "I" whether it is stated or unstated.

Specifically with this one class, those students who said they could use "I" explained that they were permitted to use "I" in their journal writing and several noted it was a personal choice to use "I" in their essays. One student noted that "I" was permitted "as long as it was used properly." Another student wrote "We are allowed to use 'I' as long as it helps tell a story or gets the point across. We cannot use 'I' if it's to describe an emotion or feeling." Several students, including this student, noted they had not written a personal narrative yet. One student said that the first essay for the class, a commercial analysis, was easily completed without personal reference and noted that whenever it was possible to make a personal reference they had been urged to not use "I." The student concluded that, "We've been slightly encouraged to avoid 'I,' if possible." Several students concurred. These statements initially indicate that students, at the very least, have been schooled that there are times in writing

to use the personal pronoun "I" and that there are times when "I" is not necessary or appropriate in academic writing. This may be the reason why 4 students said they had not been permitted to use the "I" in their writing up to this point in class. Several students, including two of those who noted they had not been permitted to use "I," noted that they had not written a personal narrative yet, which would be the place most obvious to use the "I" in their writing. The phrasing of the question "In this writing course, have you been permitted to use the first person-pronoun "I"?" could also account for part of the reason why 4 students in this class said no. Since the first essay assignment did not directly ask students for their opinion or personal experiences, based on their responses, the students indicated that they could write this essay without personal experience.

As to the 3 other students who noted they had not been permitted to use "I" in their English 101 course, each of these students came from three different classes, and the other students in the class all said they were permitted to use "I" in their writing. One student said that they had never been permitted to use the "I" in their writing if the sentence could be better understood without the first-

person pronoun. This student noted that they had been strongly encouraged to take it out. This student's response indicates no direct connection to the current class, but rather the student seems to infer that in other writing courses they had been told not to use "I." The other student indicated they did not feel they could use "I" in the essay assignment, which required that students compare the Taj Mahal to a place significant to the student's life. Given that the rest of the students in each of these classes said they thought they could use "I," these no's may indicate that students understand there exists a distinction when "I" is permitted and not permitted, and that in some cases the resulting use of "I" depends on how the student interprets the assignment or if the instructor specifically calls for the use of personal opinion or does not directly stipulate the use of the personal pronoun "I." While this is one plausible answer, it is more likely that these three students misinterpreted the assignment, given the large number of students who said they could use the personal "I" in the first essay they had done for this class.

Reviewing the remarks of the students in all eight classes who said their instructor had permitted the use of

"I" found that students said the assignment asked for their opinion, so they used "I." While in each case the prompt for the assignment differed from class to class, in each class students noted the first essay required they provide their opinion and therefore they felt permitted to use the personal pronoun.

Students then were asked if they found writing essays that used personal experience or voicing their opinion easier or harder to write than writing academic writing that does not permit the use of "I," such as papers requiring research, argument or analysis. A majority of students said they found it easier to write essays that called for personal experience or voicing their opinion; 110 of the 132 students said they found essays using personal experience easier to write, 15 students stated they found these essays more difficult, 6 noted it depended on the essay, and 1 said that they did not care. The reasons students cited for why they found these essays easier varied and raise some concerns. Of these 110, approximately 20% (21 students) said they preferred to use personal experience because they didn't like to do research. Others said they felt they could relate better to the essay topic when they could tie in their own

experiences. For example, one student noted "I feel it is easier, stronger, and more meaningful." Another student said that when using personal experiences they were able to go into more detail about the topic they were writing about because they could relate to it. A third student said they "like to write papers on personal experiences because it's from you, not a book, it's something you care about and is easy to write on." Finally, one student said they found these essays easier to organize. "With personal essays my main challenge is to organize my thoughts. Research, argument or analysis writing is more involved; I need to organize and analyze someone else's thoughts or focus."

Some students said they found essays using personal experiences more difficult to write. Most of these students cited as their reason that they found writing about themselves difficult. This student sums up the feelings of several students: "I find writing personal experience papers more difficult because I have a hard time writing about myself. I feel that writing opinion essays are somewhat easier. In general, I would rather write a research paper or a position paper." One student went as far as to say that they thought the use of "I" and personal experience was unprofessional in academic writing. "It

reminds me of grade school. It seems as though papers can be more descriptive when you are not allowed to use 'I'." Another student said that they found personal essays more difficult because they tended to write the way they spoke "which is not very good English to begin with."

Those students who said that the topic determined the difficulty of writing the essay typically expressed views similar to this student who wrote that "...typically if it's an issue I can relate to through a personal experience, I find it a lot easier to write about." The student who said he did not care, noted, too, that he thought he did well writing traditional academic essays and personal essay stories.

The fourth question asked students if, when they write their academic papers, they feel their voice present even when they don't write in the first person-personal pronoun "I"? Here the division narrows; 64 of the 132 respondents said yes, they felt they had a voice in their academic writing, while 49 said no, they didn't feel their voice in their writing, and another 18 stated that it depended on the topic of the essay. And even within the yes and no's, students often noted that it depended on the essay topic. Interestingly, this was the one question where many

students simply answered either "yes" or "no" and did not elaborate or they restated the question as a statement. For example, a number of students wrote that "yes, I feel my voice is present in my writing even when I do not use 'I'."

Of the 64, 24 students who said they felt their voice present in academic writing exhibited an astute understanding of voice in writing. For example, one student wrote, "There are ways to convey a personal feeling without using 'I' and it can be very effective." Several students in this student's class had noted on their questionnaire that the instructor had explained various ways to state personal emotions without using the personal pronoun. Another student in the same class wrote "In this class and others I was taught that no matter what I write, it is my point of view because I am writing it." Interestingly, most of these 24 students (14) were taught by this instructor. The remaining 10 students were from the other six classes, but none of these students indicated that the instructor had talked about the student's voice in their class. That's not to say the instructor did not address the issue; students simply did not state whether the instructor did or did not discuss this matter.

Many of the 49 students who said they did not feel their voice present in their academic essays said they did not feel a connection in this writing. Several students echoed this student's response: "Not really because it is not my personal experience; it is just a paper with facts and nothing else." Another student wrote that "in research papers my opinion doesn't really matter." This same student said that they find personal experience essays easier to write than academic essays, noting "I like using 'I' in my essay because it gives me more ideas to talk about." A third student wrote that "I feel like I'm writing for someone else. I feel like if what I wrote doesn't come from my point of view." And several students expressed opinions similar to one student, who wrote that "I don't really know. It's hard to get into academic papers. They are sometimes so really boring." Several students noted that the topic often determined if they felt their voice present in their writing. For example, one student wrote that "only when I write on a subject of personal significance to me, such as an issue like child abuse or violence or abortion—when I can state facts and opinions to prove a viewpoint, without using the pronoun 'I' ever." Still others said that academic essays made them feel like they had to conform to

someone else's standards. One of several students who said that it depended on the topic wrote, "I feel my 'voice' is somewhat present. I mostly feel as if I'm obligated to conform to 'rules' in order to receive a grade."

Finally, students were asked if they enjoyed sharing their private stories in their academic essays; 88 said they did enjoyed sharing their stories, 37 said no, and 7 said that it would depend on how personal. Even within the yes and no's, some qualified their answer by stating it would depend on how personal the teacher required them to be in their essay. These findings were spread about equally across the classes; not one class stood out as having a higher number of students who either liked to share or did not like to share their private stories.

A large number of students (26) wrote simply "of course" or "yes, I enjoy using personal stories." Six students said they are more effective writers when they use their personal experiences. Thirteen students cited as a reason that they thought sharing their private stories helped them to be understood by their classmates or teacher. One student wrote, "I enjoy sharing. My classmates see me on a more personal level that makes me feel human." Wrote another student: "I see it as a way for the professor

and other students to get to know a little about you."

Four students noted that they thought sharing personal stories a cathartic experience. One student wrote: "I enjoy sharing my private stories. Similar to journaling, writing about personal issues is therapeutic." Based on their statements, another few students did not appear to be concerned about revealing personal experiences. For example, one student wrote "I enjoy writing about personal experiences because I've been through a lot." Seventeen of the students noted that these stories were their favorite type to write, but did not elaborate on why. This statement was characteristic of most of these students: "I enjoy writing about personal experiences. They are my favorite assignments."

Some students said that while they liked to write about personal experience they also set their own boundaries on what personal material they would reveal. One student wrote, "There are boundaries, which I don't wish to cross, but I don't mind sharing some personal stories." The student did not elaborate on what those boundaries were. Another student said "I do like to write about personal experiences, but I do not get too personal." Some clarified that the personal experiences couldn't be too

personal. "I like sharing facts about my life. Not the too personal ones but those who can entertain and teach something too." This same student said in the previous question about whether they found the personal experience essays easier to write than academic essays. "It is easier since we can be more open and we can get our points across." Another student appears to feel the same way. "If I feel the story is too personal, then it won't be written." Yet, earlier the same student noted to the question of whether personal essays were harder or easier to write that they thought the personal was easier to write because they "are able to write about my own personal experiences." This same student also stated that they only felt their voice was present in academic papers when they were able to provide their opinion. And one student said it would depend on the teacher, though most of the time this student does not mind sharing private stories.

Of the 37 students who said they did not like to share their private stories, only 5 elaborated, typically stating they did not feel comfortable sharing their stories with classmates. This student's response typifies these students' views: "I don't want other people to find out. I rather keep it to myself." Another student stated: "I don't

like to write about personal experiences because I don't like the entire world to know my personal business." One student said they thought it was "unprofessional" to include personal stories in an academic essay. This was the same student who, cited above, stated that they thought including personal experience was something only grammar school-age students should be permitted to do.

Interestingly, none of the students who answered this question noted that they felt revealing personal stories invasive for cultural or religious reasons. This is noteworthy because some in composition argue writing about personal stories may be invasive to certain cultures, and Lopate notes in his book *The Art of the Personal Narrative* that some cultures do not have the genre of the personal narrative because of their cultural view of ego and community. Lopate also says that some religions view the ego as subordinate to a higher being, so these religions find writing about self invasive.

There are many factors why students may not like to share their personal experiences, but most students stated only that they did not want others to know their business. One key reason students did not elaborate is that the questionnaire did not ask them to state why. It simply

asked students if "you think this is prying into personal business?" Interestingly, too, only two of the students who said they did not like sharing their personal stories said they thought it prying. Both of these students simply stated "prying into personal business" and did not elaborate further.

Finally, two students noted that they lie when they use personal experiences. One of these students said: "I always make up other stories." The other said, "I like to write about my personal experiences, but I lie a lot of times to make a better point."

Summary of Findings

Although this sample of 132 students may not be generalized for all college students enrolled in English 101, some trends do emerge and merit further investigation.

First, a majority of students said they enjoy writing about their personal experiences in their academic essays and that they find essays that allow them to use personal experiences easier to write. Some students stated that using personal experiences makes them better writers because they have a greater stake in their writing. This validates what many compositionists argue is the benefit of

asking students to use their personal experiences in academic writing. On the other hand, 21 of the 110 students who said they thought personal experience essays easier to write noted that this was true because they did not have to do research. This finding is troublesome for several reasons, but primarily because students appear to link personal experiences with less difficult work. This conclusion may or may not be true, but additional follow-up questions need to be ascertained to determine the answer.

Second, although a majority of students (64 of 132 responses) seem to understand that their voices are present in their academic writing regardless of whether or not they use the first person-pronoun "I," a majority of these responses (40 students) simply answered "yes" to the question or restated the question into a statement, "yes, I feel my voice present in my writing even when I don't use the first person-pronoun 'I'." Only 24 of 132 students stated specifically why they recognized their voices are present in their writing. Some of these 24 students, in clarifying their answers, stated that because they select the evidence in the essay their voice is always present, regardless of whether they use "I" or not. The remaining students said that simply because they write the essay they

understand they are making choices, such as in word selection and organization, and that these choices validate the presence of their voice, whether they use "I" or do not. In one sense, their responses are surprising because many composition theorists have argued that one reason to allow students to use personal experiences is to help them find their voice in what is otherwise vacuous academic writing. What needs to be examined further is how a majority of students identify their voice in their writing and what types of writing the students have performed to date in their first year of college. If most of the essays have required personal experiences or allowed them to select the topic, then this would account for why so many students stated they felt their voice present in their writing.

Third, while a majority of students said they do not mind sharing their personal stories, many of these students qualified their answers and said it would depend on the essay topic or what personal information would be required. One reason so many students may be willing to share personal experiences is the types of personal narratives students have been asked to share in these eight English 101 courses. Based on the present study, students were not

asked to reveal highly personal information in the personal essays they wrote. None of the students was asked to write a personal narrative on a pivotal life moment. Instead, students were asked to write personal narratives about a family tradition, a favorite place, how their writing and reading shape who they are, to analyze a commercial advertisement, and to examine the issues of gender roles in society in response to a class reading. A sixth assignment asked students to examine the issues of resistance in the Civil Rights era in response to class readings. These assignments, while requiring the personal narrative and the first person-pronoun "I," did not prompt students to write about moments in their lives where they had to overcome a hardship or difficulty or face a wrongdoing. Thus, many students may have said they enjoyed sharing personal stories because the personal stories required of them were not too personal.

This is an important distinction. It appears that while a majority of students enjoy using their personal experiences in their academic writing, many do set limits to what they are willing to discuss in public. Because the questionnaire did not ask students to clarify what personal experiences were too personal or what experiences they

would or would not be willing to share, there is no way at this point of knowing what personal stories students think are too personal. Despite this lack of information, though, it appears that an overwhelming number of students like to use some sort of personal experiences in their essays.

Students said they thought incorporating personal experiences help them make a connection with their academic writing. At the same time, students express the belief that unless they feel some connection to the topic they are writing about, they do not feel their voice is present in their writing. Only a few students said they did feel their voice present to the point that they recognized it exists in every essay they write. Most of these students were taught by one teacher. This seems to indicate that (1) unless the students are taught to recognize how their voice is present in their academic writing they do not feel it is present, and (2) students feel more connected to their academic essays when they include personal experiences.

These issues are all important factors to keep in mind when re-examining the personal narrative in FYC and specifically at CSUSB.

CHAPTER FOUR
RE-EXAMINING THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE
IN FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION

The student survey findings, coupled with the CSUSB professors' interviews and the emerging scholarship, highlight the problems with the personal narrative as it is now situated in FYC and suggest key ways of reshaping the personal narrative so that it better supports the CSUSB's English 101 guidelines. Specifically, the data suggest that the pivotal moment personal essay fails to meet the assignment criteria stated in the English 101 guidelines and more general FYC pedagogical purposes. The data further suggest that the pivotal moment essay exemplifies the masked power inherent in FYC, and could potentially be invasive to students. The body of evidence also indicates that allowing students to situate personal experiences within social and historical issues and contextualizing their experiences with other authors' arguments would more likely meet English 101 guidelines. Finally, these data suggest that teaching students to use their personal experiences as one kind of evidence or support in other FYC writing assignments could also prove more useful in

developing their academic writing voice across the disciplines and facilitate the transition from single-voice essays to the multiple-voice conversations required in research and other academic essays. The findings of this thesis study, therefore, indicate that the function of the personal narrative as it is traditionally assigned in the form of a pivotal moment essay in no way reflects the types of essays students will write in the remainder of their university careers. Furthermore, the research indicates that when the personal narrative is limited to a single personal narrative, it does not function as a discourse mode to teach narrative and description. Rather, as now situated in FYC, the personal narrative functions more like an isolated and unrepeated genre in academic writing because students write this one essay and then leave it behind to write argument, analysis, and research essays.

Failed Pedagogy

As the professors' interviews make clear, the pivotal moment personal narrative fails to prepare students for the type of writing expected of them in other undergraduate courses, pointing to the failings of this assignment in meeting the pedagogical criteria stipulated by guidelines

for English 101 on several levels. First, the guidelines stipulate that English 101 writing assignments "should be geared toward developing students' abilities to write the kinds of thoughtful and carefully edited papers and essays that are expected in other undergraduate courses" (*English Guidelines*). The professors' interviews suggest that students rarely write pivotal moment personal narrative essays in their remaining academic careers. Rather several professors in upper division English, social science, and history courses note they assign essays that they may incorporate personal narratives, not as stand-alone essays but as support for particular rhetorical strategies (Haviland, Boland, Hanson, Texeira). Second, the guidelines stipulate that:

The course should focus on writing assignments that require students to draw upon their critical readings of other texts in order to position their ideas and argument in relations to those of other authors and to choose rhetorical strategies and structures that allow them to respond to different contexts. (*English Guidelines*)

The pivotal moment essay assignments suggested in most composition textbooks do not require students to respond to

text. Rather, these essays are designed to inspire students to write about similar situations or serve as models for students writing pivotal moment essays. Third, while not specifying assignments that students should write, the guidelines further stipulate that "the majority of them should require students to respond to other texts" (*English Guidelines*). Again, the traditional pivotal moment essay does not require students to "respond to other texts." Instead, it asks students to reveal and reflect on vital moments in their lives, uncontextualized with other authors' experiences or arguments.

The rhetorical purpose of the pivotal moment essay in FYC also must be considered on several levels, because it is the most common personal narrative assignment in composition textbooks. A key rhetorical purpose of the personal narrative is to teach students to write narration and description, two discourse modes. Since 1870, when Hart declared the personal narrative "well suited to develop invention," the personal narrative has been the primary vehicle for teaching narrative and descriptive writing. The pedagogical purpose for teaching narration and description is to help students learn how to tell a chronologically well-organized story with enough description that their

readers visually understand the author's meaning and purpose. Narration and description, therefore, are valuable rhetorical tools because students will use some aspects of narration and description as they learn to work with concrete and abstract ideas in their writing. With the pedagogical purpose of narration and description in mind, the most common way these two modes of discourse are assigned is as pivotal moment essay. Typically, a pivotal moment essay asks students to write a story about themselves, usually focused on a life-changing moment in their lives, and to describe the events in great detail and chronological order. A second rhetorical purpose of the personal narrative has been to move students from writing as a single voice to bringing in multiple voices into the conversation in their essays. The pivotal moment essay functions as this single-voiced, first step, introducing students into academic writing by allowing them to write about what they know best: themselves.

As it pertains to the pivotal moment essay, these pedagogical reasons inherently have several faults, as this research suggests. First, this essay often invites vacuous writing because many FYC students have not yet experienced life-altering moments similar to the authors they read, and

because those who have experienced life-altering or traumatic events may not wish to share these experiences for a variety of personal, cultural or religious reasons and so they leave out details (Boland, Haviland, Lopate, Rhodes). Therefore, the pivotal moment essay would seem more likely to hinder invention because it asks students to write highly personal narratives and encourages details that students may not wish to share with instructors and classmates. Second, given Peterson's and Beach's studies on gender-bias and age-appropriateness, respectively, this essay's grading structure is inherently biased against men and younger students. These studies' findings suggest that pivotal moment essays inherently favor women because women typically write about traumatic events, which teachers typically judge more "honest" writing, and these essays disadvantage younger students who likely will not examine the meanings of their experiences as complexly as older students or as deeply as their instructors expect. Third, the very argument that this assignment allows students to write about what they know best, themselves, demeans students' knowledge by implying that they know little about anything but themselves. Finally, the ethical issue of this assignment cannot be ignored: these essays compel students

to reveal their private lives in order to succeed in class and earn top grades.

The ethics of the pivotal moment essay exemplifies the masked power inherent in FYC, as Crowley, Faigley, and Rhodes argue. The pivotal moment essay perhaps more than any other personal narrative seems to illustrate Faigley's argument that the personal narrative essay sets the teacher up as the judge and jury in deciding which moments are truthful, and within these dual roles lies the masked power. Also, Faigley's contention that teachers judge autobiographical essays according to different criteria than they use for other essays would seem valid particularly in the pivotal moment essay because students do not contextualize and analyze an author's argument or an essay's messages. Consequently, pivotal moment essays are judged on two primary factors: one, how well the story is told and, two, whether the event qualifies as a pivotal moment. Therefore, teachers are more likely to continue grading personal narrative pivotal moment essays on the basis of "honesty" or "authentic voice" or "integrity." Faigley's assertion can be seen in Haviland's contention that pivotal moment personal narratives are hard to grade because even if the students' experiences are very powerful

but not skillfully written, instructors must still assign grades. If the grades are low, students see the grades as invalidating their experiences rather than measuring their writing (Haviland).

The fact that pivotal moment essays are assigned in the first two weeks further supports Crowley and Rhodes contention of the Foucaultian masked power inherent in FYC. These pivotal moment essays, in particular, justify Crowley's contentions that "composition teachers are the only teachers who are still asked to evaluate students' character rather than their mastery of a subject matter" (57). The very fact that students are asked to reveal themselves in ways they have never had to do and to instructors they have known for a week or two further constitutes, in Rhodes' view, a "Foucaultian strip search" because the instructor validates or invalidates the student's pivotal moment. Finally, Foucault's theories of masked power also are exemplified in the studies conducted by Peterson and Beach on gender-bias and age-appropriateness, respectively, for the reasons stated above.

Given that these essays prompt students to reveal personal experiences and the fact that the students

surveyed stated that they leave out what they find to be too personal, it is reasonable to conclude that the pivotal moment assignment may be invasive to some students. This finding seems to contradict published scholarship that most students enjoy writing about highly personal experiences and that some even find this writing cathartic (MacCurdy, Deletiner, Morgan, Valentino). While, as noted in Chapter Three, students surveyed were not asked to clarify what they considered too personal, students volunteered that they would limit what they were willing to discuss in public. Given these students' clarifications, this study's findings suggest that students recognize that there are limits to what they will reveal and suggests that students would leave out details in an essay if the experience is too personal. This confirms Haviland's contention that many students limit what they reveal in these essays, leaving the story barren. This point must strongly be considered given the growing cultural diversity of CSUSB students in conjunction with Lopate's assertion that some cultures and religions find writing about the self to be invasive for communal, ideological, or spiritual reasons. Consequently, this raises questions about grading, because the experiences students leave out may be essential to tell

the whole story, and when students choose to eliminate these stories, the resulting essay likely will result in a vacuous essay and a low grade.

The fact that students may be penalized because they are unwilling to reveal highly personal information about their past raises perhaps the most serious concerns about the pivotal moment essay and calls into question the quality of the assignment. Couple this potential invasiveness in a student's life with the other data noted above—that students may feel compelled to write about highly personal issues to get a good grade, that some students confess to crimes, the studies of Beach and Peterson, and the assignment fails to meet English 101 guidelines—and the value of pivotal moment essay must really be called into question. What makes an essay assignment good or bad? The very evidence that has been cited above forms a solid base to make the judgment about the validity of an assignment's worth. The pivotal moment essay does achieve three key FYC pedagogical purposes. The essay can be used to teach narration, description and writing in the single voice. Yet, as the data cited earlier suggest, the essay fails to meet the FYC pedagogical purpose of inviting invention. The essay also fails to meet

several goals stipulated in the English 101 guidelines. Finally, the overwhelming data concerning the pivotal moment essay's inherent biases coupled with the essay's inherent invitation to write vacuous writing can not be discounted when evaluating the quality and effectiveness of this essay assignment.

Advantages of the Personal Essay

These findings, however, do not discount the value of the personal narrative to FYC writing. The data in this thesis suggest that there are other personal narrative assignments that would better meet English 101 guidelines and FYC pedagogical purposes without inviting vacuous writing or invading students' personal spaces. The literacy essay popular in recent years is an example of an effective assignment to introduce students to academic writing and help them contextualize their lives in broader terms of social issues. It moves the students from writing of self-disclosure to writing that is self-reflective. As the data suggest, the literacy assignment meets English 101 goals that require students contextualizing readings and authors' points of views, it invites invention because all students must deal with language, and it teaches narration,

description and single voice writing. While, as noted earlier, some may argue that literacy narratives can be as invasive as pivotal moment essays because of their potential for eliciting highly personal history, the literacy narrative allows for the discussion of the politics of language and this discussion of a social construct is valuable to FYC students, many of whom have never thought about the political nature of language. Furthermore, the essay invites students to examine their lives in relationship to social and historical issues. This contextualization also invites students to self-reflect, which incorporates critical thinking skills, a goal of English 101. Fostering students' self-reflection offers them the opportunity to examine their life and their beliefs in context with their community, society and history. These experiences then allow them an opportunity—sometimes the only opportunity until now—to understand their world and why they have come to think and believe the way they do. Assignments that foster this type of critical thinking seem to be what FYC writing is seeking to achieve.

Assigning essays that ask students to reflect on their personal experiences with a social or cultural text are one way to reshape the personal narrative so that it better

meets the CSUSB English 101 guidelines and FYC pedagogical purposes. The data in this thesis suggest other alternative ways of looking at the personal, or this idea of the multiplicity of I, beyond simply this idea of the genre-like personal narrative. The emerging scholarship, the interviews with CSUSB professors, and the student surveys provide useful evidence of ways to expand the role of the personal in academic writing and to situate it in English 101 courses so that it complements rather than contradicts the course's pedagogical purposes.

Reshaping the Personal Narrative in First Year Composition

Interviews with the majority of CSUSB professors coupled with the emerging scholarship indicate a need to broaden the current use of the personal narrative beyond a self-disclosure pivotal moment essay in student writing. Specifically, CSUSB composition professors and the published scholarship suggest personal narratives should examine how the individual sees their experiences in context with historical and social issues and other authors' viewpoints. The research suggests that this is already being done to some extent at this campus and at other universities with the development in the last ten

years of the literacy narrative (Boland, Costino, Dean, Haviland, Rhodes, Soliday). While executed in a variety of ways, this literacy narrative assignment requires students to contextualize their experiences either directly or indirectly with the class readings because students must position their arguments alongside the issues discussed in the readings, whether or not students specifically refer to an author's argument or experience. The student survey also suggests a greater variety of personal narrative topics assigned, most examining some sort of social issue (such as work institution, family traditions, or a favorite or familiar place). The reason for this greater variety may be the move at this campus from composition textbooks to composition readers, which feature essays on a variety of social, historical, and institutional subjects. Interestingly, many students reported that the personal narrative assignment required them to contextualize their personal experiences or views with the class readings. These assignments would seem to better meet the English 101 guidelines. Given student survey findings that students enjoy using personal experiences if not too revealing, these assignments also seem to invite invention because the

assignment allows students to use personal experiences but do not require students to reveal highly personal moments.

Still, as the personal narrative is most typically used now, it remains limited to a genre-like status in FYC and is not generally viewed or used as a rhetorical strategy. Typically, the personal narrative is the first and only personal narrative a student writes in FYC. Many compositionists now call for using personal experiences to help define and examine the world (Cushman, Miller, Herrington). This movement to using the personal as one methodology for exploring world issues can only take place if composition instructors stop looking at the personal narrative as a genre and regard it as a rhetorical strategy. As this thesis suggests, the personal no longer needs to be yoked to the narrative as a one-time, genre-like essay. This unyoking is easily accomplished through personal anecdotes, and personal anecdotes have often been used as a rhetorical strategy of evidence for argument and analysis outside academic writing. Given that the narrative falls within Aristotle's four sections of argument, it seems natural to think of personal anecdotal stories as falling within the narrative category of argument, and therefore a viable option in argument.

Allowing personal experience as evidentiary support in FYC raises several interesting issues. First, several students in the survey stated that using personal experiences helped them make better arguments in their academic essays. A number of students also said that they felt their voices present in their writing when they were allowed to use personal experiences as evidence in argument and other academic essays. Several of the university's composition professors also said that they allow students to use personal narrative and personal experiences anecdotes as evidentiary support for a larger issue if the student's experience supports their argument (Boland, Costino, Haviland, Rhodes). But these professors also stressed that personal experiences would provide but one source of evidence; students must also use other evidence, usually obtained through research, to support their argument. Haviland says that writers can use personal stories to persuade readers of their arguments and this rhetorical strategy provides a reason for the story:

When I ask students to write persuasive papers, I think often we get such a big separation between the personal and the argued, but they're the same kind of thing because any time we tell a story

we're telling it for a reason. We're trying to explain something or illustrate something or emphasize something. (Haviland)

Seen this way, the personal story is part of a rhetorical strategy. Paley's ethnography of an expressivist classroom offers examples of ways to move personal narrative from self-reflective essays to essays that use personal stories as a rhetorical mode to explore social issues. Accepting students' personal experience as evidence also suggests that students will be able to contextualize their experiences, generate thinking and examine assumptions, all stipulations of English 101 guidelines. Coincidentally, permitting students to use their personal experiences may further enhance students' invention because students will be drawing on their personal experiences to help them initially explore social and world issues, and this use of students' experiences to explore social and world issues resonates with Miller and Cushman's call to allow personal narratives to move beyond self-reflection stories to a greater understanding of the social, historical and institutional issues that impact people's lives, including students.

While advocating a greater acceptance of personal stories as evidentiary support, I also must note that it is equally important to help students understand when and how it is appropriate to use personal experiences in their writing. As CSUSB professors noted in their interviews, many university disciplines, including English literature, do not recognize personal experiences as valid evidentiary support. Yet, if students are taught that their personal experiences have a rhetorical function in writing, then two purposes are achieved: it validates students' experiences while demonstrating that like any other rhetorical function, there is a time and a place to use personal experience. For example, a personal experience could function as evidentiary support and thus is being used as a rhetorical strategy in an essay where the rhetorical purpose is argument. If the rhetorical purpose of an essay is to analyze an issue, a student could draw on a personal narrative and this anecdote would serve as a rhetorical strategy. Therefore, this later move allows instructors to clarify ways students can know when to use personal experiences in academic writing, and this appears to meet FYC pedagogical purposes and English 101 guidelines.

Allowing FYC students to use personal experiences in arguing their positions and contextualizing their views with other authors affords several other benefits as well. First, it may enrich students' invention, given that students will be drawing on their personal experiences to help them initially explore social and world issues. Second, students may come to immediately recognize the presence of their voice in academic essays traditionally void of voice (Student survey). Combining the use of personal experience with the traditional rhetorical strategies of analysis and argument allows students to position themselves in their writing with that of other authors, a specific requirement of the guidelines. Given that personal stories help with the writing invention process, students' personal stories might, therefore, become the link that helps students move from their personal narrative essays to more traditional argument and analysis essays written in the objective, third-person voice. Situating their personal experiences with text-based essays also gives students "the in" to writing that Hyon speaks of while giving students the tools Leki and Carson found students needed to transfer FYC writing to the writing expected of students in their other academic

courses. The use of personal experiences as evidence and a rhetorical strategy allows for students to position themselves in relationship to other authors and move the personal narrative beyond simply an essay of self-reflection. Personal experiences then become the next tool students use to generate thinking and examine assumptions in context with conversations taking place with authors through the class readings and in students' outside research.

The Personal in the Objective

Using personal experience narratives to explore social, historical and world issues, and as evidence leads naturally to the third way of situating the personal in academic writing advocated recently in the emerging scholarship: the recognition that the personal always exists in writing regardless of mode of discourse or genre, and regardless of whether it is written in the subjective or objective point of view (Bérubé, Bleich, Hindman, Holdstein). One reason to allow students to use personal experiences as evidence in formulating their arguments for academic essays, particularly in FYC, is to help students make this connection between learning, understanding, and

internalizing information. Another reason may be to teach students (and others) how to tell the truth—to reveal the real reason why they believe what they do and why they advocate the position they do. Handelman's assertions of unmasking the persona in writing demonstrates this learning process; as students internalize the teacher's and other authors' viewpoints using their own personal knowledge gained through experiences and the interface of self with the world, students no longer "mirror" others but come to understand and voice their own opinions. Handelman calls this construction of knowledge "true wisdom," and she asserts that this is how students give identity and voice to their writing. Kumamoto's study of her two-year college students further demonstrates Handelman's assertions and the importance personal experiences play in students' writing as they discover their own voice through analytical reasoning and dialectic argumentation. As Kumamoto's research indicates, when students use a "mixture of personal reflection, information reportage, cultural inquiries and analysis, and synthesis of various opinions and positions," they discover their voices in their writing (80-81). Kumamoto's research seems to suggest that when students use personal experiences in support of a

rhetorical purpose and in conjunction with other rhetorical strategies students develop their ethos.

As Kumamoto, Christoph, and Haviland note, FYC instructors need to help students locate their ethos to find their voices in their writing. Christoph's work in the subtle ways writers locate their ethos offers instructors examples of what to look for in students' writing in helping students recognize and develop their ethos. Haviland's assertion that FYC instructors need to help students recognize that their ethos exists regardless of whether they write in the objective third person or in the subjective first person is another example of how students learn to locate their personal in their writing.

Teaching students how to locate their ethos leads them to recognize their voices in their writing. As noted earlier, nearly a majority of the students surveyed (64 of 132) said they recognized their voices as present in their writing, but only 9 students stated that they recognize their voices through the evidence and words they choose. Because 40 students simply answered "yes" without qualifying how they recognize their voices, the question must be asked whether students really understand how their voices are present or whether they are simply "mirroring"

their instructors' teachings that their voices are present. The fact that 68 students noted they did not think their voices present unless they used "I" reinforces the call by these compositionists that teachers must help students locate their voices in their writing. Interviews with CSUSB professors suggest that some professors discuss with students ways to locate their voices (Boland, Costino, Gomez, Flehinger, Haviland, Hyon, Rhodes, Texeira). Given that CSUSB professors outside composition stated that their discipline does not permit students to use personal narratives or the personal pronoun "I" in their academic writing, students will need to recognize ways to locate their personal voice (i.e. their opinions) in their writing. Kumamoto's and Christoph's research offers composition instructors ways to help students locate their ethos to find their voice in their writing.

The research in this thesis suggests that permitting students to use personal narratives and personal experiences as they examine social and historical issues and as evidentiary support helps students to locate their voices in their writing. The research also indicates that permitting students to include personal experiences as one way of supporting their assertions helps them make the move

from single-voice to multiple-voice essays and from the subjective, first-person voice to the objective, third-person voice. Through this process, students move from "mirroring" their instructors' opinions to thinking critically and examining others' assumption. Therefore, moving personal narratives beyond genre-like, self-disclosure essays to allow students to reflection about how they contextualize their lives and thinking in examining social and historical issues and as evidence in argument appears to meet the criteria outlined in the English 101 guidelines and perhaps better suits FYC pedagogical purposes.

Admittedly, advocating the various ways the personal is situated in academic writing sparks debates. Writing in the October 1992 issue of *College English*, Joel Haefner argued those teaching the personal had a "hidden agenda" to privilege the individual and American democracy and failed to see the value of the personal narrative "as a cultural product, as a special kind of collective discourse. Hence there is still a place for the 'personal' essay in a collaborative pedagogy" (511). Unfortunately, much of the debate over the personal has centered on whether it has a legitimate role in academic writing. This is important

because writing courses restricted the personal narrative to a single, self-reflective essay or, as Leki and Carson note, to essays that asked students to draw on their knowledge and experience but did not contextualize it with other texts. The traditional way of assigning the personal narrative and of looking at the personal in academic writing has failed to recognize that the personal is shaped by world experiences. As Handelman and Kumamoto demonstrate, knowledge comes about through the social construct as Berlin claims, collaboration with others as Kenneth Bruffee asserts, and self-reflection as Britton, Murray and other expressivists claim. How the personal narrative is used now in FYC fails to recognize this development of knowledge. Rather, the personal narrative has been used in FYC for the sole pedagogical purpose of introducing students into writing. FYC has failed to show students that personal narratives can be an effective rhetorical strategy in academic writing. As such, it can be as effective a writing strategy as other rhetorical functions such as narration and description. Therefore, when talking about rhetoric, we need to help students understand the rhetorical functions of the various rhetorical strategies, and this includes the personal and

its multiplicity of ways of evoking I in writing.

Therefore, finally situating the personal as a rhetorical function in FYC writing recognizes the processes through which writers create knowledge.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Study of the Personal Narrative in English 101
Informed Consent
To: Students in English 101, Freshman Composition
From: Kathy Hansler, Graduate Student at CSUSB
Re: Study of the Personal Narrative in Freshman Composition
Date: Sept. 26, 2002

The study you are being asked to participate in is designed to investigate the way the personal narrative is taught in Freshman Composition at CSUSB. Graduate student Kathy Hansler is conducting research under the supervision of Professor Carol P. Haviland, Department of English, California State University, San Bernardino. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of California State University, San Bernardino.

In the study you will be asked to complete a survey. This task should take about 5 to 10 minutes. You may also be invited to submit copies of your writing done in this English 101 course. In addition you may also be asked some questions pertaining to your essays and writing assignments.

All of your responses and writings will be held in the strictest of confidence by the researcher. Your name will not be reported with your responses or your essays. Your participation in this study is totally voluntary, and your grade will not be influenced by whether you participate or anything you say or write. You are free to withdraw at any time during this study without penalty.

If you have any questions about the study or would like your answers or papers back, please feel free to contact the researcher, Prof. Carol Haviland or Kathy Hansler, at (909) 880-5833 or you may contact the researcher through email at kmhansler@aol.com.

By placing a checkmark on the line below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of, and that I understand, the nature and purpose of this study, and I freely consent to participate. I also acknowledge that I am at least 18 years of age.

Please place a check mark here: _____

Today's date: _____

Assigned Code # _____

APPENDIX B
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENGLISH 101 STUDENTS

Questionnaire for English 101 Students

Assigned Code # _____

College writing courses prior to English 101: _____

Thank you for participating in this survey. If you need to elaborate on any question, please use the back of this questionnaire.

1. When you registered for this course, what were your expectations?
2. In this writing course, have you been permitted to use the first person-pronoun "I"? Please briefly describe the assignments when you were able to write using "I." If you were not permitted, please describe the writing assignments completed in this course.
3. Do you find writing using personal experiences or voicing your personal opinions easier or more difficult to write than academic writing that does not permit the use of "I," such as papers requiring research, argument or analysis? Please, briefly explain your opinion.
4. When you write your academic papers, do you feel your voice is present even when you don't write in the first person-pronoun "I"?
5. When asked to write about personal experiences, do you enjoy sharing your private stories or do you think this is prying into personal business?

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