Cristina Romero

Prof. Gary Vaughn

Honors English 2089

18 April 2014

From Objectivity to Personality: My Development This Semester

In high school, I was almost always told to leave my thoughts out of my papers. I had theories about the subjects I was writing on, but I was to objectively share those theories and prove them with more qualified sources than my own ideas. The only time I truly was able to use my personal voice, rather than my cold and objective one, was when I had to write papers that were specifically about myself and nothing else. Basically, I either wrote completely objectively (with quotes from sources and scholars) or completely personally (citing nothing but my own words). I was deliriously happy with this arrangement, as I found I loved analyzing writings, films, and other subjects more than I liked writing about anything personal. I struggled to write ‘About Me’ papers and hated writing reflection journals. I was rarely honest in my personal papers or reflections because I had the pressure to censor myself (as I was at a Catholic high school, after all).

But then I entered college, where almost any class, outside of a science or math class, asked students to reflect on themselves and to be more personal in their presentations and interactions. Even English classes, classes I thought would be places for highly objective writing based on my experiences with AP writing, required some form of personal connection on papers from time to time. I never really felt comfortable with that, though. Most of those papers were my inserting my opinion into a paper about multiple sides to an issue or my connecting the reading to a personal memory. The papers still felt like they were supposed to be objective with nothing more a sprinkling of personal thought within them. Again, I was happy to write objectively and keep my thoughts and stories out of my papers. If I absolutely had to include something personal, then I would write some bullshit that matched with the paper. I never truly wanted my writing to have personal honestly. Then I took Honors English 2089. The first assignment was about my personal literacy narrative.

I hated my professor for assigning something so personal and was prepared to give him an essay filled with lies about learning the basics of grammar through Mad Libs and how I had such positive literacy sponsors. In fact, I had already written about 4 pages of bullshit when we had peer reviews of our rough drafts. I added more bullshit for the second review and felt okay with my “personal” literacy narrative. I still needed to add 2 more pages for my paper to meet the length requirement, but I felt so drained from writing happy little lies that I truly felt I could not add more to the paper. I became angry and frustrated and decided to say ‘fuck it’ and write the blistering truth about having negative literacy sponsors in high school who preferred students to write the teachers’ opinions and viewpoints in their papers rather than share their own. I was slightly ranting in my writing; I even called honors students my “brethren in bullshit” (“Mad Libs” 5). I thought I was being incredibly snarky and cruel in my writing and that I would offend my professor for bringing the paper to him. He loved it.

I had never had such a positive reaction to my writing. My professor laughed, liked my honesty, and was happy with my creativity. I was shocked. I did not know how to react. I remember thinking, “Did I really get an A in college English on a paper about hating my high school English teachers?”. My mind seemed unable to compute that my honesty received more recognition and appreciation than the polite bullshit I usually gave teachers. Suddenly, a whole new world in writing was opening up for me. I did not have to limit myself to academic and objective writing. I did not have to censor myself to get a good grade. I did not have to write for the teacher, but rather could write for myself. I was excited for the next essay, which was…writing objectively about a topic that one cares about.

The shift from excitement in realizing I could write personal papers honestly to grumpiness in having to essentially write about something personal in an objective way was sudden. But I discovered something when I began to write my second essay. I did not have a hard time writing it, as objective writing has always been my forte, but I actually wished I could again write something with more personal thought. For the first time, I *wanted* to write and share my thoughts and personal stories. I wanted to used ‘I’ in my papers and use quotes sparingly. The opportunity came to me again in the form of our last essay for the class, an ethnography of a discourse community in which we were involved. I was able to write about something personal to me, but also include medium of objectivity in describing that something personal. I was not limited to only quoting scholars; I was now free to interview friends (and Internet friends). The paper felt like a perfect balance of being personal but also being objective. Unlike many of my previous English essays in high school, I did not dread writing the paper and was happy to discuss something personal. I found critically thinking about something personal was challenging in a good way. Doing primary and secondary research was actually interesting. Writing the paper was exhilarating because it was unlike any other writing I had done before. I found my balance in writing.

I do not hate my professor anymore. And I do not hate personal writing anymore after writing that personal narrative essay. I grew from hating personal writing to being happy to incorporate it into my writings. I came in a grumpy honors student who just wanted to write about others’ writings and left a slightly giddy honors student who wanted to write about her own writing.