

Unraveling the Complexities of Self by Writing

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I am a person who loves discomfort in her academic world. I love to understand, to learn from another's perspective, and to find meaning in places I wouldn't have looked at twice. However, I despise discomfort in my personal life. I grew up walking a tightrope. As a child, my body language and tone were studied and scrutinized constantly. To my mother, they were reasons to use me as a scapegoat for her anger. Subconsciously, I became accustomed to tuning myself to my mother's liking. The sounds of the door, footsteps, and a purse slamming onto the counter signaled the emergence of a quiet, obedient, would-never-dare-to-open-her-mouth-in-protest, daughter. And there I was. Every movement was listened to, observed, and approached in the manner that had experimentally been proven to result in the least amount of aggression.

To this day I struggle with perfectionism and this "awareness" for life and others due to our relationship. I've often been told I am "emotionally mature." As I grew up, this translated into a constant search for philosophy and deep discussion. However, it became clear to me it wasn't quite normal for an eight-year-old to be in distress over things like foreign affairs, domestic injustice, or that tree that was cut down last week. So, instead of continuing my ravenous search for somebody to indulge in said deep conversations, I turned to reading and writing. I indulged in every question that surfaced: How did this happen? Why? How did perspectives differ? What can I do about it? My questions were never-ending and I loved it.

Passion holds value like nothing else in my life. I have found writing to be the best way for me to express my endless questions and the intense emotions that correspond to each one. In "What Color is My Voice," the author states, "I am a woman who feels with ferocity, and I love to express those feelings and be loud and pissed off and powerful" (Bailey 73). This beautiful expression of female rage and the pain of silence stuck with me. I have held myself to such a high standard for so long that to find a form of expression where I can be vulnerable and expose my chaotic thoughts is revolutionary.

It wasn't until junior year of high school that I began writing for myself. At this point I could recognize all the messy aspects of my family. I could see the way it morphs my approach to life, isolates me from others, and gives me a variety of mental health issues - and it still makes me angry. I had been quiet and obedient and "perfect" for others for *sixteen years*. For sixteen years I feared judgment, imperfection, and emotion. The first time I journaled every sentence on the page started with, "I can't." I grew up with a mother who saw me as the problem when her day was derailed, and I internalized that. By journaling, I began to unravel the awareness and perfection I thought I had. I held the misconception that I was an indestructible and

independent student, daughter, and athlete, but I am not. I can still spend hours investigating the lives of others simply to avoid my own. Yet, this act of self-care, this place to dump every emotion without fear of burdening others, changed everything.

This process humbled me too. It made me come to terms with the fact that no matter how much I changed myself to somebody else's liking, I wasn't me and I wasn't perfect. In "Keystrokes to Perfection," Rachel Geisel similarly claims, "disappointing people made my stomach churn" and, "I craved the approval of peers and teachers, but more than anything, I wanted the approval of my parents" (Geisel). To me, writing has always carried an overwhelming sense of purpose. It is this unique yet universal form of communication that has grown with me. During childhood, I realized it also presented a consistent opportunity for praise. This led to an incessant need for my academic writing to be perfect because if it wasn't, then I was missing a chance to make my family happy and proud. The emergence of journaling appeared as a chance to express myself through an uncontrolled spew of thoughts. It was my words, my moment, and all for me. For once, something was only for me.

After a few months of journaling, I started therapy. Journaling helped me develop the skills needed to not only advocate for myself and ask for help, but to learn how to confront and express my emotions as well. I've learned that being highly aware of my emotions and actions does not equate to knowing how to communicate and truly deal with them. By repeatedly pouring my inner monologue onto paper and reflecting on my entries, I began to develop this skill. I still struggle to express myself, but I now have writing as a tool to help me do so.

As much as I can preach about how this practice changed my life, it would be inaccurate to say it fixed everything. I am still an avoidant (a person who avoids their emotions) who has a lot of mental unpacking to do. As a matter of fact, I am a hypocrite. After about a month at college, I've only added four entries to my journal, and they were grueling. The last thing an avoidant wants to do is sit down and think about their feelings, and my behavior reflects this. Nonetheless, after noticing how much journaling has helped me, I force myself to do it anyways and I notice a difference in my headspace every time. What keeps me from journaling is no longer perfectionism or fear of judgment; it is a fear of my awareness.

I've found that the most painful thing in my life is to be hyper aware. Whether that is of my emotions, others, current events, and so on. It's a blessing and a curse that enables me to collect deep insight on myself and create meaningful connections with others, but it makes me stagnant. It's easy for me to get wrapped up in anything and let my mind turn into a whirlwind of anxious thoughts. To contradict myself further, journaling is a perfect remedy for this sticky situation, yet I avoid it because most of the time I don't even want to be aware of the things I notice and feel.

I originally thought this would be an easy writing piece, that my critical thinking skills would permit me an endless flow of words. In reality, I've been fighting procrastination because I don't want to deal with the emotional weight and memories this topic can cause to resurface. I say this to be transparent; I still struggle, but I still try too. This practice of low-stakes, personal writing has helped me greatly, but that is definitely not to be interpreted as me being this hyper aware, all-knowing being. My identity as a writer and an individual have been tightly intertwined for most of my life. No matter how long of a break I take, journaling is always therapeutic. If my personal experiences with literacy have taught me anything, it is that taking the time to show yourself kindness and recenter your headspace is always beneficial. Regardless of how uncomfortable or scary it feels to express oneself, this practice can guide you, as it did me, to entirely new levels of understanding of your mind, morals, behaviors, and others' too.

Works Cited

Bailey, Kristen DeMint, et al. "What Color Is My Voice? Academic Writing and the Myth of Standard English." *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing*, Vol. 5, <https://parlormultimedia.com/writingspaces/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/5DeMint-Bailey-Ha-Outlar.pdf>. Accessed 5 September 2025.

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