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Becoming Me: A Journey to Womanhood

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Becoming Me: A Journey to Womanhood



From left to right: Haley age 5, 14, & 22

Haley M. Mathis
Senior Capstone
Journalism & Media Studies
Creative Project
Professor Qun Wang
Division of Humanities and Communication
Fall 2016

Becoming Me: A Journey to Womanhood

Haley M. Mathis

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Senior Capstone Creative Project Proposal

1: *Name and Area of Concentration:*

Haley Mathis

Journalism & Media Studies

2: *Capstone Title:*

“Becoming Me: A Journey to Womanhood “

3: *Project Description:*

A collection of autobiographical creative writing pieces, specifically, poems. The pieces will be arranged in chronological order from childhood to the present. Project will aim to establish my own acceptance of my flaws in a country that’s culture values appearance as a priority.

4: *Alignment with Common Theme:*

My project aligns with our common theme of ‘Self Identity’ because through my writing pieces I will be exposing how I viewed myself in the past and how I identify myself today.

5: *Expectations:*

Through this project I expect to display what I have learned as an HCOM major including my ability to express myself in a way that is not only beneficial for myself but for others as well. Being able to do so will also help me become more compassionate to others who share their own stories.

6: Specific Skills Required:

Specific skills required to successfully complete this project include exceptional creative writing skills, ability to honestly self reflect and identify, and ability to effectively express my own feelings and beliefs in a way that readers can connect to.

7: Next Steps:

I will begin sorting through my past work to find pieces that may be effective for my project as well as begin writing new pieces. I will then compile and arrange all of the pieces so that they tell the overarching story of my journey to positive self identity.

8: Timeline:

I plan to give myself a week to compile and edit previous pieces that I have written, then allow myself 3 weeks to write new ones that will help provide a more concurrent time line of my journey to positive self identity. The fifth week I will focus on formatting and editing my project as a whole and finishing the other project requirements.

Early Childhood:

Cute

Don't call me cute
I'd say to myself
As strangers
pointed and stared

"Goldilocks, Curly Sue"
they'd call me

I hated it—
being called cute
The attention
often too much to bear

Grabbing the dull kitchen scissors
I knew what I was about to do was wrong
Snip Snip
The curls fell
piled on the floor

Now hair to my ears
& both front teeth gone
No one stops
Or looks in my direction

I walk by those same people
Only this time
I'm met with silence

Longing—
to be called cute

Earthquake

I will never forget
the first time
I was called 'fat'

2nd grade
Recess

Walking towards the basketball court

"Oh no, here she comes!"
I look to my right
A young boy I have never met

"Duck and cover, she's causing an earthquake!"

Shook.

I will never forget
the second time
I was called 'fat'

3rd grade
Recess

Walking back to class

"Whoa, are you pregnant?"
A different boy
Unfamiliar face

Shook.

Crush(ed)

I remember my first crush
I remember his blonde shaggy hair
 covering half his face
I remember the way his braces
 Made him talk with a lisp
I remember thinking he'd never like me
I remember him asking me to be his girlfriend

Is this real life?

It was
 & it was perfect
Or as perfect as it could have been
 Seeing we were only 11
Holding hands on our walks home from school
 Playing together at recess
 Talking on the phone before bed

Then...

I remember my first heartbreak
I remember his sorry blue eyes
 peeking through his shaggy blonde hair
I remember the way his braces tucked into his lips
 as he told me
 "I'm sorry, but I like someone else"
I remember watching them
Hold hands on their walks home from school
 Playing together at recess

I remember feeling
 crushed

Adolescence:

Friends with Boyfriends

Why do girls my age
measure their worth
by the number of boys
they've kissed?

Why do they spend all their time
straightening their hair and
picking out the perfect outfit
hoping to impress the opposite sex?

I often wonder
Is something wrong with me?

While my friends go on dates
with their boyfriends that have
consumed their young minds
I am alone

Should I get new clothes?
Should I start wearing makeup?
Maybe then boys will like me

I want to be liked for who I am
The chubby, goofy tom boy
I don't want to be liked
for someone I'm
pretending to be

That's just not me

Contradictions

We're told to
"Love the skin were in"
While we spend time and money
covering ourselves with
products that hide our
flaws

Those same flaws we're expected to embrace
are the ones they use against us

"She'd be pretty if..."

Her eyebrows were perfectly shaped
Her acne went away
Her lips weren't so thin

Then

When we acknowledge those things
and correct them
to try and fit in to
society's standards
We are met with

"She'd be pretty if..."

Her eyebrows weren't so bold
She didn't wear so much makeup
She never messed with her lips

Why bother
when either way
we can't win?

Role Models

In this digital age
I'm surrounded by
pictures of girls with their
flat stomachs and long silky hair

Their makeup perfectly applied and
lashes long enough to touch their
precisely shaped eyebrows

These are the types girls that most of my generation
aspires to be like

Not because of their humanitarianism
or their inspirational accomplishments
But simply for their
physical appearance

I catch myself often
trying to be just like those girls
The ones with thousands of Instagram followers
telling them
“You are perfect!!!”

We post selfies in hopes to feel validated
by the number of likes we receive
from people we don't actually know

Strange, right?

I know this to be true yet I don't stop trying
Trying to be like those girls the internet loves
Loves to admire and look up to

Those undeniably beautiful girls have become our role models
Not Hillary Clinton or Malala Yousafzai
But instead were
Keeping up with the Kardashians

Adulthood:

Weight(ing) for Change

It was easy blaming my
lack of confidence
on my weight

20 plus years being the
'big girl'
was seemingly holding me back from
enjoying life

Once you lose 100 pounds everything will change
I thought
as the doctor explained the procedure

1 year, 5 scars and 120 pounds later
all that change I had longed for
had yet to come

Yes, my waist was slimmer and my
double chin no where in sight
but that same feeling of
inadequacy still
haunted me

180°

It's like a switch has been flipped
within me
I walk the campus feeling at ease
No longer inferior

The uniqueness that was condemned
by my high school peers
is now embraced

Imagine that!

College is different
We are here because we want to be
not because we *have* to

In turn
our focuses have shifted
No longer is it all about
how we come off to those we are attracted to
but instead
we strive to please
ourselves

I'm still figuring out who I am
and who I want to be,
though the pressure to fit in has dissipated

The journey continues on
internally

A Letter to Myself

Dear younger self,
You are perfect just the way you are
I know, cheesy isn't it?
But it's true

You don't need to change for anyone
Don't doubt yourself

Your worth depends on much more
than your ability to walk in 6 inch heels
or the brand of clothes you wear

Learn to love the flaws and quirks
that make you unique and
others will soon follow suit

Those nights alone will eventually be missed as
life can get chaotic
Take advantage of the peaceful moments

It may seem like you don't fit in
or you that you need to fix yourself
to be like everyone else

Trust me, you don't

So please:
Stay true to yourself

Reflective Essay:

While this semester was not the first time I have written poetry, I can attribute my creative writing class as a driving force in my awareness of many different craft elements. With my intermediate experience with creative writing, I applied several craft elements including imagery, dialogue, detail, scene/setting, rhythm, voice and character development. For example, in my poem titled *Cute*, I aimed to provide details to place the reader into my piece. Furthermore, the use of imagery made it easy for the reader to be able to picture me as a young child. In my piece *Crush(ed)*, the use of rhythm and repetition aimed to provide an emotional effect. In every piece, including the previous examples stated, character development was of utter importance. This is due to the fact that the purpose of this project was to show my own personal development from early childhood to present day. Without this necessary character development, the project's impact would be severely diminished. While there is dialogue throughout my project, it is mostly internal rather than between other people. This is due to the inner struggles that I faced

throughout the pivotal years and sharing them helped me develop as a character even further.

My project tackles the struggles with self identity in our modernized American Culture. As an audience member, anyone can relate to this topic while their experiences are not the same as my own, they can relate to the underlying message and theme regardless. I can't assume that everyone will connect to my pieces, though I aimed to write them in a way that at least they could conceptualize. The purpose of my creative project is to not only entertain the readers, but to hopefully inspire them and affirm their worth as a human being. Since these pieces cover such a variety of life stages, anyone from a young child to an adult could find some sort of commonality in my pieces to their own struggles.

Our section's common theme of self identity made the options for our individual projects vast. I knew I wanted to do a creative project as I find myself to be a creative individual. With my past experiences with poetry, I thought that it would be a perfect medium to tackle the struggle of finding ones' identity in a culture that promotes beauty and perfection as the social standard. The writing process entailed more than just writing the poems. Though *Cute* and *Friends with*

Boyfriends were previously written while I was still in high school, I went back and revised them by applying what I've learned during my years at CSUMB. For the other seven poems I created for this project, I found a quiet place that I felt free to express myself and to be most creative. From there, I made notes of the pivotal moments in my life that contributed to my struggles with identity. Over the course of two months I wrote several drafts until the final nine pieces were perfect to my standards. The pieces did not come to fruition with ease; it did take a lot of self reflection and honesty with myself in order to maintain authenticity. Through writing these poems about myself and my problems with self identity, it was eye opening and sometimes challenging to be honest with myself. It wasn't until completing this project that I realized the extent of my self doubts growing up and how much our culture's pressures had contributed to my lack of confidence. Initially I planned on writing a variety of creative writing pieces such as short stories and social action pieces, but during the creative process I found that poetry was the most expressive way to express my thoughts. I do believe that was an appropriate decision and helped add continuity to my project.

Living in the modern age where technology and social media are at the forefront, teens and young adults have been raised with these mediums. I myself can hardly remember a time before social media. Our culture has prioritized superficial qualities and put an unprecedented pressure for perfection. We try to form our identities into a version of our self that is accepted by our culture's high standards. Being exposed to these pressures has become the norm and in turn it's almost subliminal. This is not just through social media, but from other mediums such as television, music, and movies. For example, shows like *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* has become a phenomenon in our culture as it promotes a seemingly unobtainable concept of beauty and femininity. Many young teens as well as adults strive to alter their appearances, whether temporary or permanent, in order to conform to the media's idea of beauty. Our cultures pressure for perfection has created an inner struggle for many who already have self doubts and insecurities. Finding one's own identity in a culture like this can be daunting and seemingly impossible. Through my project I aimed to tackle these issues from a personal standpoint to provide hope for others who are struggling to find themselves.

For this project I was inspired by the poet Rupi Kaur's ability to write about herself while still making her work relatable to the audience. This motivated me to do the same when writing my pieces. While I have a different writing style than Rupi Kaur, I was still inspired by her work and authenticity, and I aimed to do the same. Another writer that inspired my creative writing pieces was Marjane Satrapi, the writer of the graphic autobiography *Persepolis*. In this book, the main character is a young woman who desires to be what the social standard says she can't be. Although this standard is set for her, she pushes and strives to break from it and be an individual as she makes it through adolescence. I personally related to her conflicting battle of self identity in my own way, growing up in a world where we have so much pressure on us to be what we don't want to or have to be.

After years of trying to conform to what society deemed as the 'new norm,' once beginning CSUMB, the pressures diminished. I think that can be attributed to the school's sense of community rather than competition. We are here to learn and that is our main focus, not trying to impress others or be popular. We are here to help each other and Also, the older I have become, the easier it is to recognize the fallacies of beauty and femininity that our culture has pressured us to succumb to.

This is not to say that I don't participate in some of my culture's rituals. For example, while I do wear makeup, I do it because I enjoy the process of applying an array of products and the creativity behind it. I don't do this to impress others or to try and fit in. It wasn't until adulthood that I had the realization that I can like things that our culture promotes without caving in to the expectations that often come with it. If I like a shirt that is considered 'trendy,' I'm not going to resist purchasing it in a quest to be different. I have come to the realization that being authentic to myself is most important; not conforming to our cultures standards but also not resisting them.

Overall, my project proved be more of a learning experience for myself than I initially thought. Self identity is ever changing and I may struggle with the matter later on in life; but through this project I truly believe that I am finally at a place of authenticity. Our culture's demand of perfection and beauty will probably not be going away any time soon. For this reason, I think it is important to identify the fallacy in society's prioritization of conforming rather than authenticity. I hope that those who view my project can at least take away that message and ideally they will feel a sense of hope and relief that they are not alone. I also hope that the readers

will be inspired to explore themselves to figure out what they are passionate about instead of accepting what our modernized American culture promotes. In turn, they will be their true authentic selves and that is essential in one's journey of self identity.

Synthesis Essay:

Applying what I learned from HCOM 475-02 into my project began with the explanation of our section's theme. "Border Crossing, Cultural Negotiations, and the Search for Identity," seemed like a broad and daunting topic when initially registering for the section. Throughout the semester, professor Qun Wang helped clarify the theme without limiting what we could do for our projects.

Our class emphasized self-identity as a significant aspect of our given theme. The importance of finding our own identity within any culture is key to self-actualization. Through the seminar portion of the class, I was able to collaborate with my peers to help break down our section's theme and come up with ideas for our individual projects. Since the format of the class was a seminar rather than a lecture, we had the opportunity to share our thoughts and ideas with each other freely for our own personal benefit. Instead of keeping our ideas to ourselves, the act of sharing ideas with others made our section more like a team rather than just a class.

For my project, I chose to write a collection of poems that explore my journey of self-identity. Living within a culture that values social media popularity and

physical appearance in high regard can often provide conflict for adolescents and young adults. We are led to believe that we must conform to these expectations in order to fit in. I can relate to the struggle to find my true self while living in the digital age. Choosing a creative project that tackles our section's theme on a personal level was a conscious decision so that in turn I would learn as much about myself as I did about our theme. Ironically, while writing poems that detail my process of self-actualization throughout my life, I was learning more about myself than ever before. I didn't realize the extent of my internal battle to fit in until this project was executed and my self-identity was culturally contextualized.

The assessment criteria for creative projects provided as an important guide throughout developing and executing my project. I believe I was successful in meeting the stated criteria in all aspects. For one, my project is clearly and substantially informed by our section's shared topic. It directly tackles the correlation of culture and self-identity. Second, as previously stated, the project undoubtedly enhanced my deeper understanding of the shared topic. Also, I applied skills learned from the HCOM disciplines such as creative writing, critical communication skills, media, narrative, and ethnographic skills, and critical cultural

analysis. Critical cultural analysis was used when developing and executing my project as modern American culture is conveyed through my poems. Media, narrative, and ethnographic skills were applied when gathering, interpreting, narrating, and disseminated the voices of people (my own) through cultural analysis when preparing my project. Critical communication skills were used to to effectively communicate to a diverse audience and lastly, of course, creative writing was the medium for my project.

We each have our own unique voice and I believe that my project is an excellent example of this. Through my poems, I hope the readers can recognize my unique style and voice. Though many of my classmates tackled their own struggle with self-actualization, I do believe that my project offers a unique contribution to our sections topical focus. My experiences as a female growing up in the height of social media and my struggles with femininity and confidence are prime examples of this. Finally, I believe that my project proved my ability to communicate effectively to a diverse audience. You don't need to be educated on our section's theme to understand my poems and their messages. Applying the given criteria to my project confirms its success.