

HOW TO WRITE LIKE TINA AND MINDY: CONSTRUCTING PERSONA IN FEMALE
CELEBRITY MEMOIR

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CONSTRUCTING PERSONA IN FEMALE CELEBRITY MEMOIR

presented by Sarah Neuroth,, a candidate for the degree of master of arts, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Sam Cohen

Professor Rachel Harper

Professor James van Dyke

.....For my husband, Trever. I promise I'll stop talking about Tina and Mindy now.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
HELLO	
Introduction, Or What You Need to Know About Me, Tina, Mindy & Chelsea.....	vi
PART I: THEORETICAL STUFF	
1. Putting the “Creative” in Creative Nonfiction: Memoir as Construction of Persona.....	1
2. On Female Memoirs and Where Tina & Mindy Fit In.....	12
INTERMISSION	
3. Structural Analyses of <i>Bossypants</i> , <i>Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?</i> and <i>My Horizontal Life</i>	20
PART II: THEMES FROM TINA & MINDY	
4. How to Give Advice in Your Memoir (With a Flash of Truth and a Quick Laugh).....	33
5. Locating the Everyday Woman in Celebrity Memoir.....	41
6. Memoirs: A Fun Picture Book for Celebrities.....	52
GOODBYE	
Conclusion, Or Why This Matters to Me.....	70
APPENDICES	
1. ANNOTATED TABLES OF CONTENTS.....	84
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	91

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Graphic of Creative Nonfiction.....	viii
2. “Daily Stress Level of Various Jobs” Fey, 186.....	9
3. Structural Analysis of <i>My Horizontal Life</i>	20
4. Structural Analysis of <i>Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?</i>	21
5. Structural Analysis of <i>Bossypants</i>	22
6. Structural Analysis of <i>I Feel Bad About My Neck</i>	24
7. Cover of <i>My Horizontal Life</i>	52
8. Cover of <i>Bossypants</i>	54
9. Cover of <i>Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?</i>	56
10. “I Forget Nothing: A Sensitive Kid Looks Back” Kaling, 9	58
11. Childhood photo of Fey Fey, 5	59
12. Professional photo of Fey Fey, 6	60
13. June 2004 <i>BUST</i> magazine cover Fey, 159	61
14. Childhood photo of Kaling Kaling, 191	63
15. <i>30 Rock</i> script excerpt Fey, 178	64

16. <i>Saturday Night Live</i> script excerpt Fey, 212	65
17. Photo of Kaling directing <i>The Office</i> Fey, 121	67
18. Excerpt from “The Day I Stopped Eating Cupcakes” Kaling, 145	78

HELLO

Introduction, Or What You Need to Know About Me, Tina, Mindy & Chelsea

For my brother's law school graduation, he and a friend, Caitlin, set up a dinner at an organic and locally sourced restaurant in the heart of Kansas City. Because of the nature of the restaurant, they requested a guest list and head count, and so Jared and Caitlin combined their family lists and even came up with a seating chart for the dinner. I ended up sitting across from Caitlin's stepmother, a woman who looked more like Caitlin's older sister than stepmom, but whom Jared thought I would enjoy talking to. Before dinner he told me how Caitlin's father, mother and stepmother were all freelance writers, whose work had appeared in *Food & Wine* and various airline magazines. Jared prodded me to bring up my aspirations of writing for a living, knowing whom I was to sit by. And so I waited patiently to receive input on my career path from the number of writers whose company I shared. After a few glasses of wine, the stepmother asked me what I wanted to do after I graduated from college.

"I'd like to write," I told her, adding how I had made plans to apply to graduate school for creative writing. "I have dreams of eating Ramen for the rest of my life," had become my go-to line, often to beat anyone else to the punch. I was tired of hearing how writers couldn't make a living. If I wanted to, I knew I could, somehow.

"Oh honey, we're all ghostwriters here. We know," she replied through her wine-stained teeth.

Really? I thought. *You don't make money from writing?* I wasn't sure what she meant. My limited experience in writing led me to believe that the only writers who made

money were the ones who were already famous, who could afford a book flop. The woman in front of me did little to dispel the rumor that any Plain Jane could write for a living, and suddenly my joke turned to actual truth.

My first experience with creative nonfiction as a field of study was somewhat accidental, since I never actually intended to study creative writing when in college or graduate school. Although I often wrote creatively on my own, I only registered for a creative nonfiction class when I needed to fulfill an elective credit for graduation. My thought process was this: I wanted to take a creative writing course, but I disliked writing poetry and fiction, and so I was left with creative nonfiction. What I realized in the Introduction to Creative Nonfiction course was that I had been writing creative nonfiction, and that there was a world of writers who wrote memoir and personal while relaying the events of their lives to the world. Prior to the course, the memoirs that came to my mind were the ones of older actors and musicians or other celebrities who wrote about their experiences in the peak of their careers, as they were always on the stands in bookstores, proudly on display for former or current fans to purchase. In the class, we read Joan Didion's *Salvador*, a journalistic treatment of her experiences of being an American in El Salvador, while also writing on her personal feelings of being scared, or curious about the country and its people. We read excerpts of David Foster Wallace's oft-read essay "Consider the Lobster," part of James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son"—works by writers famous in their field, yet unknown to me. I learned later, as a graduate student, that each of these texts remain fundamental essays to give students new to creative nonfiction a foundation of the types of writing that appear in the genre.

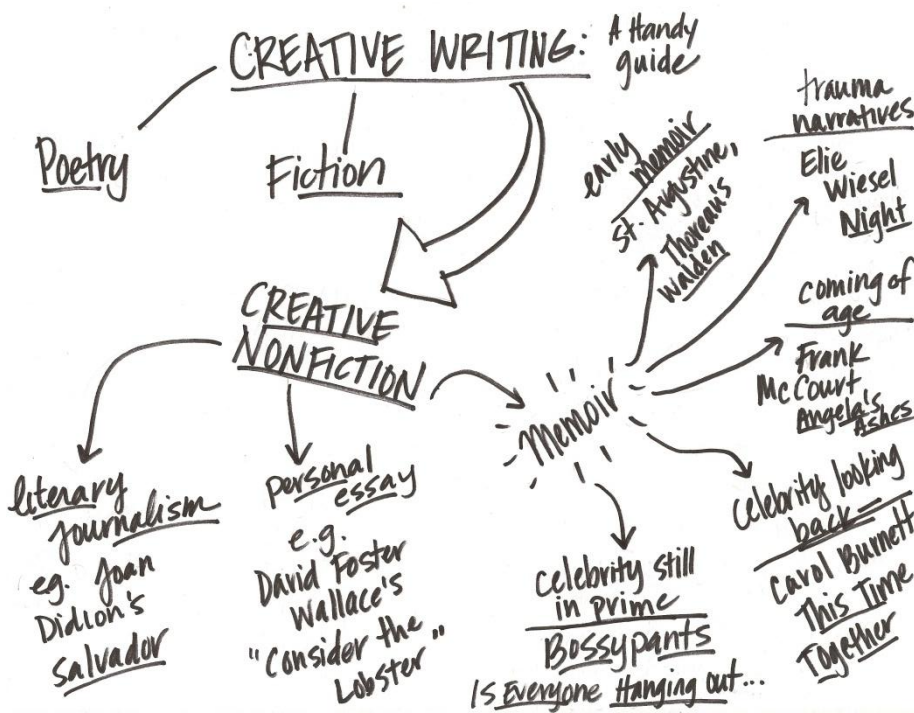


Figure 1

Creative nonfiction has since become the focus of my education for the past few years. Through workshops and conferences and departmental readings, I have

narrowed down a definition of what I believe to be creative nonfiction. In order to best present what I think to be specific types of creative nonfiction, I came up with a diagram that best explained the various types of literature associated with the genre as a whole. In creating this diagram, I found that in the workshops I have taken, though we studied little—if any—theory on creative nonfiction, the same names and types of creative nonfiction were assigned as readings and exemplary pieces of writing for us to emulate. For example, I felt I include David Foster Wallace's "Consider the Lobster" essay as an example of personal essay, as I have read the essay numerous times for numerous workshops. Yet, in order to define memoir, I felt the need to include the types of memoir I have encountered in my workshops, as each memoir I have read inside or outside the classroom, have fallen into one of these categories. Much of creative nonfiction can fall into numerous categories, however, especially in the sub-genres I have identified in the

diagram. For example, “Consider the Lobster” has been presented to me as both literary journalism and personal essay, for its journalistic treatment of the Maine lobster festival and for its inclusion of Foster Wallace’s personal feelings on the festival, as well as its unique structure that is predominately influenced by the lengthy footnotes. If blending of sub-genres can occur, then so can the blending of the various types of memoir as well. In my years of workshops, I have found that many memoirs can be classified in a number of ways. Yet for this project, my aim was to focus on the types of memoirs I was most attracted to, and the ones that failed to appear on any syllabus I encountered, with the hope that they might blend the categories of memoirs I have identified in the diagram. Couldn’t a celebrity memoir be considered a “coming of age” memoir, or a “trauma narrative,” and be studied in a similar manner as *Angela’s Ashes* or *Night*?

Before entering the scholarly conversation about memoir, personal essay, lyric essay, and literary journalism—all sub-genres within the larger context of creative nonfiction—the texts I was attracted to were the ones with a strong female voice, usually that of a famous actress or comedian. I enjoyed reading memoirs that made me feel as if I could relate to the writer through their use of humor and honest; Tina Fey’s memoir *Bossypants* is perhaps my most favorite. I had been a fan of hers from the time I heard she was the first female head writer on *Saturday Night Live*. I felt similarly about Mindy Kaling, known primarily for her character Kelly Kapoor on the American version of the television show *The Office*. Though she played a shallow twenty-something on the show, in reality she was a writer responsible for the scripts of entire episodes of the show, while also occasionally directing and producing episodes as well. What attracts me as both a reader and writer to Fey and Kaling’s books is that the level of comedy written for their

respective shows is present in their memoirs. Both write honestly about the times when being a woman is hard, through personal anecdotes about motherhood, childhood and relationships.

For example, one of my favorite passages in Fey's book is in the chapter entitled "Growing Up and Liking It," when she writes about her first experience with "car creepery" at thirteen years old. She writes,

I was walking home from middle school past a place called the World's Largest Aquarium—which, legally, I don't know how they could call it that, because it was obviously an average-sized aquarium. Maybe I should start referring to myself as the World's Tallest Man and see how that goes? Anyway, I was walking home alone from school and I was wearing a dress. A dude drove by and yelled, 'Nice tits.' Embarrassed and enraged, I screamed after him, 'Suck my dick.' Sure, it didn't make any sense, but at least I didn't hold in my anger. (Fey 15)

This single passage is symptomatic of the rest of Fey's memoir. I flipped to this page of *Bossypants* in a bookstore, and after reading this short paragraph, I wanted to read the rest, and got the book as a gift for my birthday shortly after reading this excerpt. Not long after that, I got Mindy Kaling's *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*, and found it to be remarkably similar to Fey's work in tone, subject matter and most importantly, humor. Their memoirs gave me glimpses into the lives of the actresses I adored on screen. I was, and continue to be, part of the reading public that ached for stories of backstage encounters and of writing a phenomenal script right before a live show. But, in studying creative nonfiction, these memoirs are rarely, if ever, discussed in workshops and seminars. These works do not carry the same level of prestige as Didion or Baldwin, and I became self-conscious in my love for these celebrity memoirs. I read them at home, and never discussed it with any of my creative nonfiction colleagues.

That is, until now. My favorite memoirs are the subject of this project. Tina Fey and Mindy Kaling represent a new era of girl-power that twentysomething college women can most easily relate to: women who are intellectual, educated, and successful in their careers. The female characters, whom they portray on the NBC shows *The Office* and *30 Rock*, are less concerned with the status of fame, fortune and the assets that accompany the lifestyle, and more concerned with their next meal, their Spanx that ride up their asses, and other less-glamorous aspects of being a career minded woman.

This project is dear to me, not just because of my once-held-close aspirations of being a stand-up comedian, but also because of the state of creative nonfiction as I see it. Too often writers, or aspiring writers, think of David Foster Wallace, Philip Lopate, and Joan Didion as a few major writers who dictate the definition of what qualifies as creative nonfiction. My own personal belief is that there is a place in academia for all types of literature, even perhaps the literature that dominates the bestseller lists. My goal is to extend this type of thinking into teaching craft in creative nonfiction workshops. The personas that are created by female celebrity memoirists in creative nonfiction allow for other writers to experiment with their own invented personas—which, inevitably leads to the ethics of inventing a persona in a nonfiction genre. But, because I view these as merely *versions* of the writers, I am interested in how writers use not just style, structure and organization to create a persona, but also photos, captions, diagrams, and hand-drawn charts. Writers create versions of themselves not only with the words on a page, but also in their visual representations, and begin working to construct their own personas in their work through the integration of these techniques.

Both Fey and Kaling come from an improvisational comedic background, which presents itself in their screenwriting, since both write for popular NBC comedy television shows. But in their books the writing changes, as they are no longer writing for the same audience. The audience for their memoirs, as they both acknowledge, are women. And because they are writing personal accounts of their failures, successes, life lessons and personal encounters with comedy, all from a woman's perspective, they are free to relate the anecdotes of personal female struggle both in and outside of the workplace. Stories of how these women interact in personal and work-related relationships are only the focal point of some chapters for both Fey and Kaling, however. Instead, the aim of their memoirs is to give their female audience a glimpse into their lives as professional writers, who also happen to be well known. This was a primary motivation for me to do work with their texts. I wanted know how Fey and Kaling achieved their childhood dreams of writing for television. Few chapters in Kaling and Fey's works are solely focused on the relationship aspect of being a female, and so I was able to closely follow their career paths through their anecdotes. Their detailed experiences present in the memoirs allow for readers to interpret their lives on the writer's terms—that is, the writers dictate how the information is presented to the readers through the construction of persona.

Each woman begins her memoir with childhood anecdotes. Fey writes about being a young girl in the awkward stages of puberty, then continues along chronologically to document her young adulthood and adulthood working as an actor, writer and comedian. I believe her goal was to write about her life in such a way that other women might relate to it, and think about how they too have had similar experiences when juggling their work and personal lives. Memoirists have various

motivations for writing, but I believe Fey's was to continue her love for writing in a different genre, outside of broadcast, while attempting to relate to the readership of women who would buy her book. Part of the reason to read memoir is to get an insight into that person's life, which is especially true if the writer is a famous person whom the average reader wouldn't have access to otherwise. I was gifted this book by my husband, and read it straight through in one day. It's not that it was an easy read, but it was so enjoyable to read the work and life of someone I've admired for a long time. I wanted to see what Fey was contributing to the genre of creative nonfiction, and if it was something worth paying attention to in an age where celebrity memoirs seem to be inundating the bestseller lists.

Fey is the older of the writers I have chosen, and Mindy Kaling the younger, contributing to the female comedian memoir category of creative nonfiction by publishing her book after Fey's. Kaling's collection of essays has an air of memoir to it, yet it is a collection of essays in the genre of creative nonfiction. Each essay has the ability to stand on its own—chapters do not necessarily dictate a chronology of information needed to understand the work as a whole. I was given this book by my parents, who thought that I would appreciate the essays on relationships, femininity, and the act of writing. Kaling is most well-known for her time spent as a writer for the show *The Office* and so much of the experience permeates her writing. Because she writes about aspiration to be like Tina Fey, and the reviews on the cover call Kaling “Fey's cool little sister,” I began to feel as if there was a new sub-sub-genre of creative nonfiction on the rise. The similarities between the two books—one being the fact that I was drawn to read both, and another being that one writer seemed to have an awareness of the other—

made me push further to see if there was something to be gained from reading and studying these texts as a writer of creative nonfiction.

For the sake of this project, I will identify and analyze the specific personas present in the memoirs. These writers exhibit various personas in order to combat the imposed persona of celebrity by their audience. The constructed personas are linked versions of the writers, as they demonstrate to the reader through various themes that they are relatable women, or what I call an “Everyday Woman,” while also portraying themselves as writers. Both Fey and Kaling—and Handler, to a lesser extent—mark their experiences with their celebrity status by including anecdotes on their celebrity status, or through chapter titles, photos, photo captions and occasional one-liners dedicated to acknowledging their celebrity status. Each writer is well aware of their audience and the reasons for reading the memoir, and so to perpetuate the reader’s interest, they choose to include mentions of their public personas. After acknowledging the public’s view of the writer, they then work to dispel it with their constructed personas, although not always successfully. With each of these women, there is a distinct persona that informs the reader’s understanding of the memoir, as well the events and characters chosen to be included in the memoir itself.

I feel this project is necessary for those studying creative nonfiction or working on their own autobiographical projects as it demonstrates the manner in which persona can be constructed in memoir. Thinking about the greater context of women in creative nonfiction leads me to find that women’s autobiography has not gone unnoticed in scholarship, yet criticism of the female celebrity memoirist seems absent. My suspicion is

that this is so because of the stigma that surrounds the memoirs written by celebrities, as many of the works are seen as “tell all” works with little substantive material for scholarship. Yet I hope to prove that not all celebrity memoirs are created equal, and that there is something to be learned from Fey, Kaling and Handler, all of whom were writers before becoming famous. Studies in female autobiography are used in this project in order to evaluate the effectiveness and thematic concerns of the female autobiographer. Scholarship from Margo Culley on female autobiography—which will be equated with female memoir in this project—has concluded that women’s writing of themselves “displays unique narrative discontinuity, writes the self through the Other, tests boundaries between the public and private spheres, and exhibits a collective consciousness” (Culley 4). While the same conclusions may also be true of Fey, Handler and Kaling, the use of the public and private sphere as used by the celebrity dictate how a reader thinks of the writer distanced from her work. The constructed personas in their work force the reader to consider these memoirs as substantive piece of memoir that should be considered among other memoirs studied within the genre of creative nonfiction. The same issues of narrative distance, structure and craft apply to Fey, Kaling and Handler, but ultimately in different ways due to their celebrity persona.

Ultimately, these memoirs and essays are examined simultaneously because of the writers’ personalities and careers, as all have established careers as writers prior to writing their memoirs. My main motivation for the project, and what I hope to show, is that celebrity memoirs have their place in creative nonfiction and should not be discounted because of their authors’ career path or social status. From my perspective as a writer in the creative nonfiction community, these memoirs have much to offer writers

of creative nonfiction, as well as speak to the general themes that arise in the study of female autobiography. In this way, this project is useful to a variety of audiences, and will evaluate the usefulness of celebrity memoir while attempting to emulate the various techniques employed by the writers throughout the project. I aim to use photos and subtitles in the same manner as Kaling and Fey in their memoirs. In doing so, I hope to prove that though these memoirs are written with humor in mind, they are still constructing their nonfiction in the same manner as other memoirists.

PART I: THEORETICAL STUFF

Chapter 1

Putting the “Creative” in Creative Nonfiction: Memoir as Construction of Persona

Creative nonfiction is a large, sweeping genre, as it includes everything from memoir and personal essay to literary journalism and lyric essays. Each of the strands of creative nonfiction have their own sets of standards a manuscript must reach in order to be called a piece of literary journalism, or memoir, and so on. Yet all of these strands, or sub-genres of creative nonfiction, as I will call them, all have one thing in common, for the most part—they are all, in fact, nonfiction. The word “nonfiction” itself is descriptive enough, as everything written must be true, yet the word “creative” attached to it makes the definition a bit more vague. What writers call “creative” varies from sub-genre to sub-genre, or even from writer to writer, but the root of my own personal definition of creative nonfiction is that whatever has been written must boil down to an idea, event or action that the reader perceives as inherently true. The creativity is where the writers get their leeway, most often in memoir, due to the nature of writing one’s own story. The writer doesn’t cover every life event when writing, marking one of the first uses of creativity when crafting a memoir. Creativity allows writers to not only pick their life’s events to include, but also to structure and organize the events to their liking, while also writing in their choice of tense and narrative style. As seen in the memoirs of Kaling and Fey, each chose to write in first person, often past tense, while using lists, subheadings and visuals to structure their writing. But the writing of the true and past events remains the core of the memoir, and the reason many readers buy the memoirs. But as memoir

gains in popularity, drastic choices must be made in order to stand out above the rest, aside from using celebrity status to sell books. In this way, Kaling and Fey rely heavily on their creativity—which includes the words on the pages and the visuals littered throughout the memoirs—to produce comic memoirs that still fulfill the duties of a memoir: to tell the story of the writer’s life, usually with respect to one or more major themes.

Memoir has become a massive sub-genre, as Ben Yagoda, author of *Memoir: A History*, writes that “according to Nielsen BookScan, which tracks about 70 percent of U.S. book sales, total sales in the categories of Personal Memoirs, Childhood Memoirs, and Parental Memoirs increased more than 400 percent between 2004 and 2008” (Yagoda, 7). Memoirists and critics alike are concerned with the the amount of memoirs in circulation. Laura Marcus, author of *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, notes her concern with “the perceived instability or hybridity of autobiography as a genre (Marcus, 14). She writes that the massive amount of autobiography, which is equated to memoir for this project, allows for the study of “subject/object, self and identity, private and public, fact and fiction” within the sub-genre itself (Marcus 14). Autobiography, or memoir, has become a resource for those critics seeking to identify what authors write about in their personal accounts of their own lives. But based upon the popularity of memoir, many readers have begun to define creative nonfiction as memoir, rather than a sub-set of the entire genre. Similarly, readers assume that the majority of memoirs, if not all, are written by celebrities, or those who become somewhat famous for their bending of the creative nonfiction genre—James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* being a prime example. But aside from these infamous writers, those memoirs that

remain of interest are the ones in which the writer is already famous—any bestseller list in the nonfiction genre will document the many memoirs penned by celebrities.

Yagoda also writes that memoir can be and has been divided into numerous types: “The American memoir is so capacious that it cannot be contained by just one category; this is the time of a million little subgenres. Even more than celebrity, misery, canine, methamphetamine, and eccentric-mother memoirs...” (Yagoda 11). He uses “subgenres” to identify the most popular types of memoirs that have become popular, while I use the term to describe the sub-genre of memoir itself, proving that there are many types of memoir, but both writers and critics are unable to effectively categorize the work. As a result of so many types of memoir, writers have taken to writing anything that might set them apart from their competitors and fellow writers. Yagoda writes that in this attempt, however, the various categories of memoir only become more and more specific:

As ubiquitous as memoirs seem in the United States, they are—if there are even degrees of ubiquity—even more so in Britain...almost all U.K. memoirs fall into two categories. The first is the “misery memoir”: an account, usually by a noncelebrity, of childhood abuse or otherwise painful or difficult circumstances...The second category is the life story of a mid-level radio disk jockey, television presenter, athlete, or comedian, or their WAGs, i.e., wives and girlfriends. (Yagoda 9)

In this description of the nature of memoirs abroad, where memoirs are even more prominent in bestseller lists than in the U.S., Yagoda creates a definitive type of popular memoir, one of which the memoirs examined in this project may fall in to. The difference, however, between the memoirs of the “mid-level” celebrity described in the second category and Kaling, Fey and Handler’s memoirs is that theirs may not necessarily be classified as “mid-level,” as each of the women are still acting or appearing in their own television shows or in feature films. What qualifies as a “mid-

level” celebrity memoir varies, and I am unwilling to classify Kaling, Fey and Handler as “mid-level” celebrities, as each of the women has their own cult following in addition to their current status as relevant celebrities—relevant in that a mention of their name would prompt recognition in a social situation. As such, the classification of the “mid-level” celebrity, or the celebrity memoir as a prominent type of memoir is notable as it calls for an evaluation of the quality of the memoirs and their relevance to other kinds of memoirs present in the genre.

In this expanding sub-genre, readers have come to expect specific stylistic elements when reading memoir. James Stull, in his work *Literary Selves: Autobiography and Contemporary American Nonfiction*, writes that “style is also an epistemological strategy that both reveals and defines reality...that is often a highly personal and metaphorical interpretation of material and social worlds” (Stull 3). By introducing style as a means of procuring a self, or locating a self in a memoir, Stull enforces the idea that the writer uses the “creative” aspect of creative nonfiction to further develop a persona for readers. This means that readers, because they are relatively familiar with the memoir sub-genre, are able to identify the types of selves associated with the various types of memoirs that dominate bestseller lists. One might come to expect the disconnected self in the case of the trauma memoir, or a naïve one in a coming-of-age childhood memoir, or something similar for a parenting memoir. In any case, readers have become familiar with what kinds of personas they will encounter when reading specific types of memoir, and this is true as well for the celebrity memoir.

In the case of Kaling and Fey’s memoirs, readers come to expect a style that is akin to the persona that they are previously aware of: Fey and Kaling are both female

actresses and writers that often portray characters with different personalities than their own, but because the readers are only aware of the personas they encounter on television, they expect the same characteristics of Kaling's Kelly Kapoor and Fey's Liz Lemon. As a result, Fey and Kaling rely heavily on their style choices to combat the reality that Stull notes. It is the job of the writer to create a reality in order to ensure the nonfiction is in fact nonfiction, and in Fey and Kaling's memoirs, they rely on their structural techniques, to include visuals, and comedic writing in order to create a reality in which the reader may believe that they are writers, and not the women they portray on television. Stull also writes that:

While contemporary nonfiction is indeed 'an experience of style,' it is also a testament of authorial selfhood and a means of verbal empowerment, a way of creating the self and arresting experience in the moment of language by symbolically possessing the world in the author's own distinct words. (Stull 3).

Style, then, is one of the all-important factors in writing a memoir, especially for a celebrity attempting to battle the pre-conceived notions readers impose on their readings.

The most malleable aspect in creative nonfiction is style, as the "creative" is what is negotiable when writing memoir or other forms of nonfiction. What is non-negotiable are the facts of a writer's life story. Elizabeth Winston, in her essay on the female autobiographer's relationship to her readers, notes that women had often apologized for their successes, but as of late, the facts of their lives were presented without any apology: "Women who published autobiographies after 1920, however, no longer apologized for their careers and successes, though a few still showed signs of uneasiness at having violated cultural expectations for women" (Winston 93). Though the "published after 1920" is a bit of a stretch for these twenty-first century memoirs, the idea remains relevant. Fey and Kaling write about the true events of their lives, though their stylistic

construction of the alternate, relatable persona is their apology to their female readers for achieving such great amounts of success in their careers. The celebrity status of the writers is what makes these women “[show] signs of uneasiness,” which leads to a constructed persona in order to demonstrate to their female readers that they are relatable women. Winston goes on to write that “women have traditionally experienced a conflict of values in deciding whether or not to write autobiographies,” perhaps providing more reason for Fey and Kaling to write using direct address and visual techniques (Winston 95). In order for these women to successfully combat their public personas, they must first “apologize” to their readers for their “violation of cultural expectations,” achieved by their success in television—which ultimately led to their fame—while remaining the confident, successful writers they construct in their memoirs.

When Fey creates the relatable persona in her chapters about her struggles in breastfeeding, the specific moments in which she crafts a personal, humorous anecdote are crucial to gaining the reader’s trust in her persona. For example, in her chapter “There’s a Drunk Midget in My House,” Fey writes, “For my little angel and me the magic number was about seventy-two hours” (Fey 239). In speaking about her relatable issue of her struggles in breastfeeding, word choice is a key component of style. When Fey writes of her experiences, she selects words and phrases that are ideal to constructing her Everyday Woman persona in a humorous way. Rather than stating, “I breastfed my baby for three days,” she calls her baby “my little angel,” and writes out “seventy-two hours” rather than “three days.” In order to maintain her own sense of style, Fey uses word choice in order to demonstrate her act of “possessing the world in [her] own distinct words,” as Stull notes (Stull 3). Though this isn’t necessarily always a conscious choice,

as Fey is writing in her own distinct words, it is still notable in the construction of the relatable persona that she and Kaling are both after in their memoirs.

The same concept applies to Kaling, as her excessive punctuation when delivering a joke is part of her constructed persona that she is a comedy writer, and not the character she plays on *The Office*: “And even though I’m a writer and producer (and sometimes a director, technically making me a quadruple threat, what of it?) of the series, people tend to forget this in the face of the fact that the character Kelly and I both love shopping” (Kaling 105). Punctuation is arguably an extension of the “verbal empowerment” Stull calls for in contemporary narrative, and so Kaling’s punctuation is as important as her word choice, specifically when drawing the line between the character Kelly and herself. The parentheses set off in the middle of a sentence is useful for comedic timing in this example, which is to be read with the pacing of a verbal joke, rather than a written one. The difference is that the parentheses force the reader to pause and think of the text inside the parentheses as a tangential thought, as it would occur in a conversation, which ultimately helps with the overall timing of the joke. This offset of the joke is useful for delivery purposes, but also gives the reader a better sense of Kaling’s “distinct own words,” or in this case, pacing. The reader becomes aware that her voice is in fact a distinct one from her character on television, and through the use of punctuation in unique places, she is able to dictate the speed and delivery of her comedy in the memoir. All this is to say that constructing a persona is an inherent choice made by the writer, through specific stylistic choices. Fey’s one-liners regarding her personal experiences in breastfeeding and Kaling’s humor through excessive punctuation are specific choices made by the writers in order to dispel the persona created by the public—that Fey and

Kaling are the same people as the characters they portray on *The Office* or *Saturday Night Live* or *30 Rock*.

By this standard, the visual elements inserted in the memoirs are equally as important, and can in fact be extended attempts at stylistic choices. Memoir/autobiography has been named one of the more, if not the most “democratic of genres,” and as such, “autobiography indeed might include precontact Indian cave drawings, photo albums, narrative quilts, and cookbooks...” in order to best relay the autobiographical storyline present in the memoir (Culley 5). Margo Culley, author of *American Women’s Autobiography*’ *Fea(s)ts of Memory*, explores the genre of memoir/autobiography as a democratic genre in order to encourage the use of non-verbal representations of the self, specifically in female memoir/autobiography. In this way, Kaling and Fey are apt to express concern not only in what words appear on the page, but in *how* they appear. By including personal photos, graphics and numerous subheadings, the visual aids break up the text so that the writing is the most prominent feature: all visual aids are created around the writing on the page, and made to complement the writing in the physical space. This stylistic technique of visual aids in memoir is not typically seen in any of the other forms of memoir, and so this technique is effective in separating these female comedian memoirs from others. Kaling relies heavily on photos to give her readers a visual representation of herself, so that her retrospective look on her childhood and young adulthood are written with the same humorous tone sustained in the rest of the memoir. The chapter “There are Narcissistic Photos in My Blackberry” is a prime example of the necessity of photographs for comic effect. The chapter is aptly described in the title—Kaling reprints the photos she has taken of herself with her cell

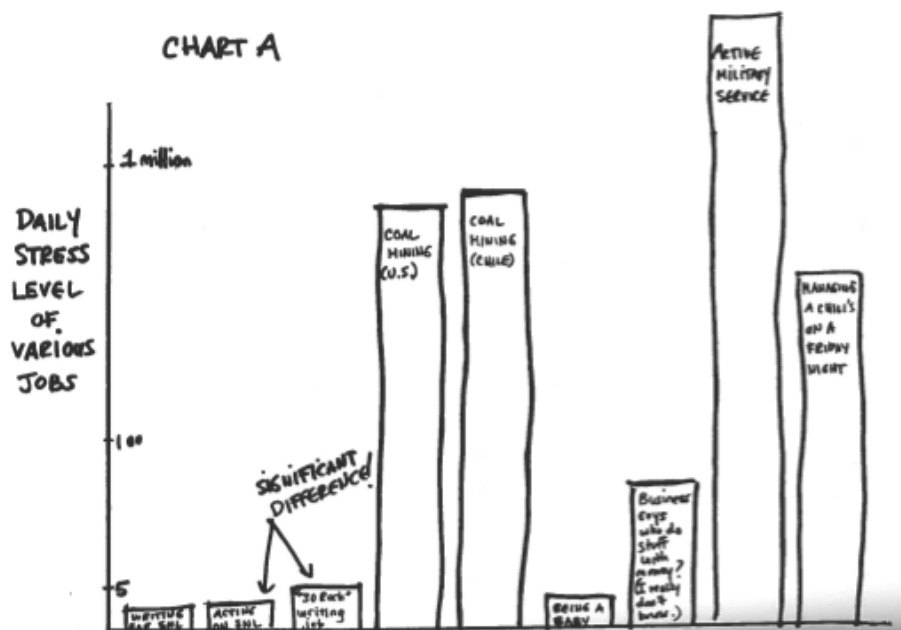


Figure 2

that style is “a way of creating the self...by symbolically possessing the world,” this is expressed not only with words, but also with Kaling’s other stylistic choices, to include photography and other visual elements (Stull 3)

The same can be said for Fey’s interpretation of style as it applies to memoir. While she too uses photos in a similar manner as Kaling, she includes graphics as a way of complementing the text from the chapters, as seen in the chapter “30 Rock: An Experiment to confuse your grandparents. This chapter features a hand-drawn chart of “daily stress levels of various jobs” in order to demonstrate Fey’s stress level, while maintaining a comedic tone. She rates stress from one to one million, with no specific measurement, and draws bars to represent various jobs, to include “Writing for *SNL*” to “30 Rock writing job, to “Coal mining (U.S)” and “Coal mining “Chile.” (Fey 186). The chart, along with the other visual aids, in Fey’s way of identifying her perceived persona to the reader, and then dispelling it with her own sense of persona, constructed through

phone along with a few sentences of explanation. This chapter relies entirely on the accompaniment of photos with text. And so when Stull states

the text and its visual aids throughout the memoir. The chart differs slightly from the photos however, as it is entirely original to Fey, and so her “means of verbal empowerment” is through the style in which she creates and empowers herself in the memoir. As such, she is given the means to control her persona through the various stylistic choices made in the visual aids alone. Accompanied with the entirety of the text of the memoir, Fey constructs a persona that forces the reader to view her through her own words, thereby giving her almost complete control over the way in which the reader perceives her. The emphasis on *how* the words appear on the page governs how the reader is to understand Fey: as a writer, and not as a public persona.

Style is significant and unique to each of the writers, proving that style is in fact part of the process of constructing a persona in a memoir, and essential for a celebrity memoir, in which the writer relies upon this construction so that their memoir will be read differently from the other memoirs in existence, or from the characters they portray on television, in Fey and Kaling’s case. In Stull’s words, “Style is indeed a self, if not the only self” (Stull 3). That is, style is integral in the celebrity’s attempt to create a persona that is true to her own identity. Rather than be seen as Kelly Kapoor or Liz Lemon, Kaling and Fey rely entirely on their stylistic methods of punctuation, quick jokes and visual aids in photographs and charts to convince the reader that they are writers first, and not celebrities or actresses. While style is necessary for other writers when crafting memoirs, the stylistic concerns of the female celebrity memoir are more significant, as each of the women makes a conscious effort to combat their celebrity status and persona in order to be seen as writers dedicated to their craft. In this way, style is indeed equated

to Fey and Kaling's selves, as their style is symptomatic of the kinds of writing they are famous for: well-timed humor.

Chapter 2

On Female Memoirs, and Where Tina and Mindy Fit In

After examining the ways in which style is integral for Fey and Kaling to create a persona of their own, on their own terms, I found it necessary to include a section on just female autobiography/memoir in order to give a thorough explanation of why the constructed persona is so important for the sub-genre of memoir, and for its female writers. Celebrity memoirs written by females are no different from the standards and traditions found in female memoirs that have been subjects of the literary and feminist theory that seeks to provide context and classification to the memoirs produced over the past century. These traditions or trends manifest themselves in the subject matter of the memoirs, as well as the language in which the subject matter is handled. In this way, female celebrity writers such as Fey and Kaling have as much to offer the theorists of female autobiography as the traditionally studied female memoirists that include Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein. Past feminist theorists and literary theorists have “shaped the criticism on women’s autobiography,” as Culley writes, with the understanding that the basis of the criticism is rooted in “the question of how women’s autobiography is different from men’s” (Culley 4). While I see no productive argument coming from evaluating Fey or Kaling’s memoirs in how they differ from their male counterparts, as this criticism would merely come down to a list of differences, I do wish to complicate the issue by establishing the way Fey and Kaling are shaping women’s memoir through their texts. Though they write with many personas in the memoir, their work is distinct to the celebrity, while also successfully fulfilling the standards of “display[ing] unique

narrative discontinuity, writ[ing] the self through the Other, test[ing] boundaries between public and private spheres, [and] exhibit[ing] a collective consciousness” which Culley lists as the arguments made in the past with respect to women’s autobiography (Culley 4). Fey and Kaling’s memoirs achieve many of these trends in their own work, albeit in a more contemporary and stylistic—to include visuals—manner.

Part of “writing the self through the other,” as Culley has identified as a theme in women’s autobiography is closely examining and documenting the relationships in a woman’s life, to include her closest relations. Jo Malin writes that “Every woman autobiographer is a daughter who writes and establishes her identity through her autobiographical narrative,” outwardly discussing the manner in which persona is developed in a memoir (Malin 1). As women, writers seek to define themselves through their family members, as they call themselves daughters, sisters and wives when establishing an identity in the text. This is echoed in Jil Ker Conway’s research as she states the main question for the woman autobiographer “becomes how to see one’s life whole when one has been taught to see it as expressed through family and bonds with others” (Conway 4). The woman is faced with combating an identity that is rooted in her relationships to those around her, thereby creating a conflict of interest when writing her own autobiography. While Malin’s research is focused on the blurred line between “the autobiography of the daughter and the biography of the mother,” as she is focused especially on the maternal identity in female memoir, she sets a precedent for other identities to be located and then blurred in a single text (Malin 1). Through examination of various texts, Malin writes that the “‘distinctions’ between autobiography and biography, or text and intertext, blur, even disintegrate,” again establishing that blurring

of identities can even cause them to “disintegrate,” effectively allowing for parallels to be drawn with regard other identities unrelated to the maternal (Malin 3). My point here is to show that the parallel to be made is in regard to the public and constructed personas present in Fey and Kaling’s work, which distinguish them from the majority of the female memoir/autobiography that have been subject of criticism until now. The constructed persona is the one that governs the majority of the memoirs, while the public persona is the celebrity one in which the reader imposes onto their reading. The constructed persona is the contemporary woman autobiographer’s way of breaking from her familial-rooted identity in order to write her own story. As the lines between the constructed and imposed personas become blurred, though not necessarily disintegrated, Fey and Kaling’s readers can determine when the attempt at the constructed persona is successful. This blurring of personas aligns with Malin’s ultimate conclusion regarding “the embedded narrative of the mother” in female autobiography (Malin 11). She writes that “each text contains a ‘self’ that is more plural than singular, yet neither” (Malin 11). The same can be said for the constructed and publicly informed persona that the female celebrity addresses in her memoir: each is a version of “self” that speaks to only one part of the complete persona of the writer. That is, each of the personas is distinct, and although they become entangled in the various chapters of the memoirs, the reader is still likely to pinpoint what persona is speaking when.

Similarly, these personas help speak to Culley’s identification of the trend that women in autobiography “test [the] boundaries between public and private spheres,” as they are constructing the private persona in order to battle their public one (Culley 4). The testing in when the memoirist has to determine which private version of the self she

wished to display to the reader. Because of this, the reader is always shielded from the private sphere in the memoirist's life. The reader only knows of what is in the text, and so the memoirist could choose to blur the line between constructed and public persona, as Fey and Kaling have done. For example, in Kaling's chapter "All About *The Office*," one subheading in the chapter is entitled "Things Kelly Would Do That I Would Not," accompanied by another subheading, "Things Kelly and I Would Both Do" (Kaling 105). Simply by using the name of the character she plays on the television show, Kaling has already blurred the line between her public and private persona, in list form. This blurring specifically occurs in Kaling's list entitled "Things Kelly and I Would Both Do," as many of the bulleted points on the list are similar, effectively showing the reader the blurred personas of constructed self and publicly inflicted versions of self. As a result, the reader understands that the persona in the television may potentially align with the persona of the writer, yet Kaling also is sure to create a distinction between the character Kelly and herself. In doing so, she satisfies the reader's curiosity while creating her own persona of a distinct person from the television character.

Yet W. Ross Winterowd views this use of public and private spheres in autobiographical texts as an ethical concern in the genre. He writes, "any kind of language transaction operates according to a set of tacit rules or rules-of-thumb, of which the cooperative principle is the handiest example. However, the reader's and writer's shared knowledge of genre also creates a contract whereby the nonfiction novel and other 'literature of fact' narrative are made possible" (Winterowd 51). This "writer-reader contract," as he describes it, is present in all "nonfiction novels" and can thusly be applied to the memoirs at hand. So when Kaling chooses to create a list of differences

between herself and the character she portrays, is she violating this contract made with her reader? How is the reader to know that these *are*, in fact, distinct differences from the writer and character? Winterowd also writes that “readers take a work to be either fact or fiction even though the fiction may contain many elements of fact and the factual account may have fictional elements,” perhaps giving our memoirists a way out of the ethical issues. Kaling uses a variety of writing in her memoir to include essays as well as the personal anecdotes that comprise the majority of her own memoir. So when the reader encounters the list of differences between Kaling and the character Kelly Kapoor, it is understood that perhaps the list is not as hard and fast as it could be. For example, Kelly Kapoor is likely to “Cry about a celebrity breakup” while Kaling is likely to “Hold a royal wedding viewing party.” (Kaling 105-06). If the reader has the understanding that nonfiction texts have fictional elements, then this list is useful in blurring the line between personas, so that Kaling is able to control her persona of Kelly and instead inject her own constructed persona of the writer in the reader’s experience of the memoir. Winterowd’s “writer-reader contract” allows for readers to assume the memoir contains fictional elements, while the writer assume the reader has this understanding as well. In this interaction, the memoir’s personas allow for the female writers to “test the boundaries of public and private spheres” as Culley states.

Another distinct trend in women’s autobiography is what Patricia Meyer Spacks calls the “claim of significance” in formal autobiography (Spacks 112). This claim is a side effect of writing about one’s self in autobiography, and yet women, as Spacks is quick to point out, have “traditionally had more difficulty than men about making public claims of their own importance” (Spacks 112). Again, I resist the urge to detail the exact

differences between men and women writing autobiography, yet I do concede the importance of recognizing the trend of making a public claim about one's self in autobiography. This ultimately is the goal in writing autobiography, is to create a persona that readers can recognize in the writing, and so the importance on making a claim, or finding a story to tell, is the primary element of the text. In describing this aesthetic of autobiography, Spacks details the qualities not on display in early autobiographies of Dorothy Day, founder of the radical *Catholic Worker*, Emmeline Pankhurst, an English suffragist, and Eleanor Roosevelt, noting that none of these women chose to write about their "distinct sense of individual destiny" or "the theme of accomplishment," though many had impressive resumes (Spacks 113). Women, it seemed, were less likely to stress the importance of their own lives in their autobiography, that is, until recently. In Fey and Kaling's work, the theme of accomplishments takes up a large part of the memoirs themselves, in that roughly half of each of the memoirs is dedicated to anecdotes on or related to their careers in writing. The other half is dedicated to describing the "distinct sense of individual destiny" that previous female autobiographers did not include. This self-proclaimed importance is necessary for the celebrity memoir to be successful, as the theme of advice and the creation of the relatable narrator are products of this importance.

While women in memoir seek to create a distinct persona for themselves, so too must the celebrity, in order to dictate what parts of their lives are available to the public. Many memoirists have written on maintenance of a private persona distinct from what is written about publicly: Sanford Pinsker in his essay "The Landscape of Contemporary American Memoir" quotes Molly Peacock as saying, "to bring a secret to light is not the same as destroying your privacy" (Pinsker 313). He writes, "Our best memoirists

understand that they are bearing witness to a version of their lives, that they are in effect turning themselves (and often others) into characters, and that their most important writing decisions have to do with how much they conceal versus how much they reveal” (Pinsker 313). In this way, the memoirist, male or female, creates a persona in order to create a believable character, while also paying careful attention to the ethical concerns of Winterrowd’s writing. Kaling and Fey create versions of themselves in order to combat the public’s view of themselves, and in their construction of the relatable persona, the reader becomes inherently aware of the differences between the persona and the person in the memoir. The contemporary celebrity’s privacy is already nearly destroyed, as the life of the celebrity is what fuels public curiosity and fills newsstands and television shows.

It has been shown that female autobiographers create personas on their own in order to create an identity for themselves that is separate from their familial bonds, and in order to separate, or at least complicate, the public and private spheres in their own lives when writing. These same principles apply to the celebrity female memoirist/autobiographer as well, though with some addendums. The writer in the celebrity novel is forced to create a relatable persona in order to combat the public view of her, that is, she wishes for her writing to inform the reader’s view of her. And in order to combat the preconceived notions from the reader, she seeks to create a persona that is readily applied in the same manner as the constructed personas woman autobiographers have created in the past. Kaling and Fey, as female memoirists, must also be aware of the her persona and identity as a daughter and mother, while also breaking from the trend of writing autobiography without the “distinct sense of individual destiny” and “the theme of accomplishment” Spacks writes of. In addition, women autobiographers such as

Kaling and Fey are forced to not only create a persona that distinguishes them from their public persona, but also to write themselves as characters in a way that is within Winterowd's "writer-reader contract" restraints—all characters, though they may be influenced by some elements of fiction, should be constructed in a way that readers might still identify with them, as Fey and Kaling have done in their numerous chapters on advice and relatable personal anecdotes.

The female celebrity ultimately has more standards to follow in order to write a successful memoir. As demonstrated previously, the persona constructed through the various themes that both Kaling and Fey share in their memoir was necessary for both writers to overcome the persona created by the public, and their work as actresses on television shows. While other women autobiographers or memoirists might not have similar hurdles, the celebrity in this case, one who is grounded in writing, must work with the publicly defined persona in order to demonstrate their skills as writers, and not their personas as mothers or daughters. In this way, the celebrity memoirists break the previously defined trend of avoiding writing or exploiting the theme of personal accomplishment. If Fey and Kaling do not work with their accomplishments in their careers in writing, then their constructed persona of the relatable writer fails. The success of the female memoir depends upon the creation of a persona that speaks to the reader and allows for relatable themes to come to the surface of the reading.

INTERMISSION

Chapter 3

Structural Analyses of *Bossypants*, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* and *My Horizontal Life*

For this project, I've selected three female comedian's memoirs in order to examine the themes and writerly choices made by these women when crafting their memoirs to prove that these memoirs work to construct various personas in order to combat the persona created and assumed by the memoirists' audience. A structural analysis of their work reveals that each of the women rely upon numerous themes and personas as the organizing principle of the entire work. The overall structuring principle in these memoirs is one that uses multiple personas and themes in order to better combat the public's view of these writers.

I have included visual illustrations of how each of the memoirs is constructed in order to give a more thorough and straightforward representation of the works as a whole.¹ These visuals provide context for comparing and contrasting each of the works against one another, so that a better understanding of the structure and organization of the female

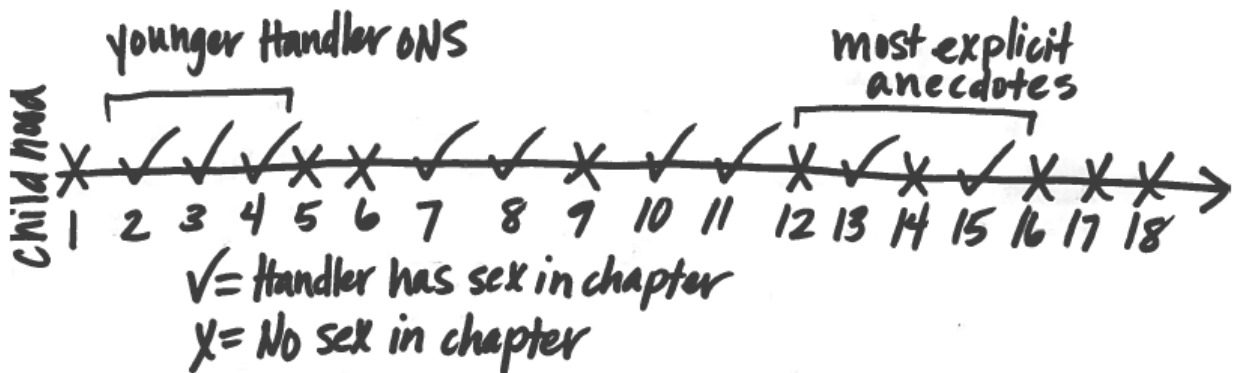


Figure 3

¹ For a more detailed table of contents, refer to Appendices 1-4.

comedian memoir is presented. For instance, Handler's work appears as a straight line, as she presents the reader with her single persona: the sexual deviant. In the visual representation of her memoir, the straight line indicates the loose chronology of the work, and a means of plotting each chapter along the time line. Each chapter is marked with either an 'X' or a check mark to indicate when Handler writes about having sex. In this representation, the occurrences of sex are essential for a reader's understanding of how the structure of Handler's memoir works with her persona. Because she presents the persona of a sexual deviant, and there are no themes presented in the memoir otherwise, the organizing principle must be the one that is a direct result of Handler's persona. This

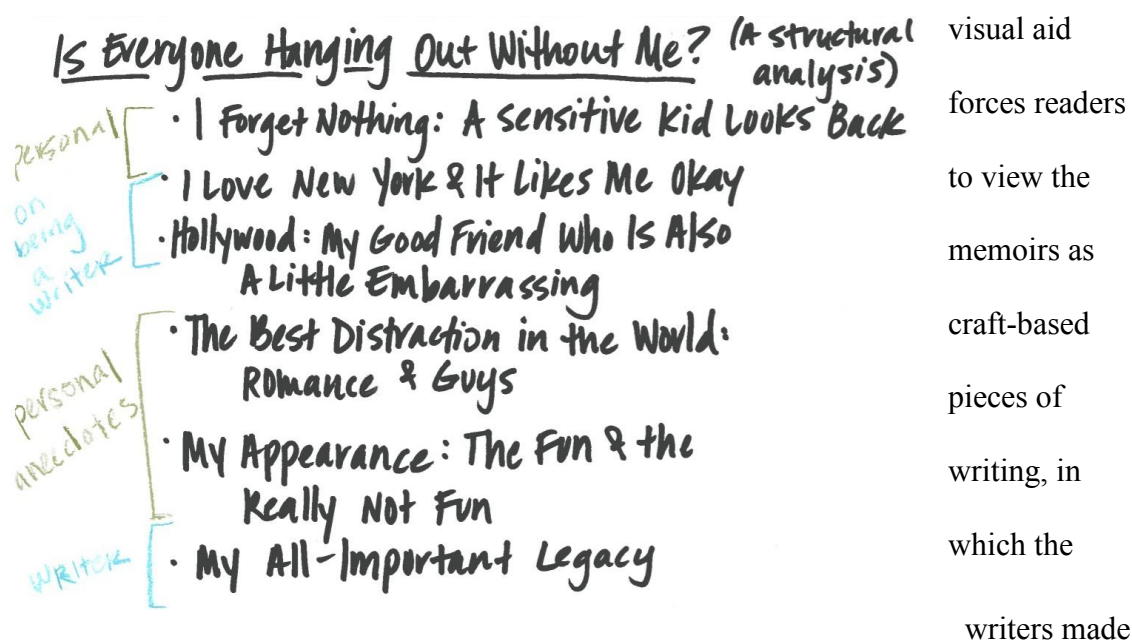


Figure 4

specific choices for which personas and themes to present to their readers. The use of visual representations in this chapter is integral to the identification of persona in these female comedian memoirs. Without the larger context of the work, the personas are left imbedded in the text, and the reader is unable to recognize the larger context of the works.

A few themes and connections are shared between Fey and Kaling's memoirs, the most apparent one being the use of chronology as a structuring tool. Both begin their work with their childhood, following the arc of their lives until the present as a structuring technique. Kaling, whose memoir is divided into six sections, opens the book with a section entitled "I Forget Nothing: A Sensitive Kid Looks Back." The title suggests the chapters are a collective reflection on her childhood, after which Kaling writes about her college and post-college years in "I Love New York and It Likes Me Okay." These sections follow the chronology of Kaling's life, yet the main difference is

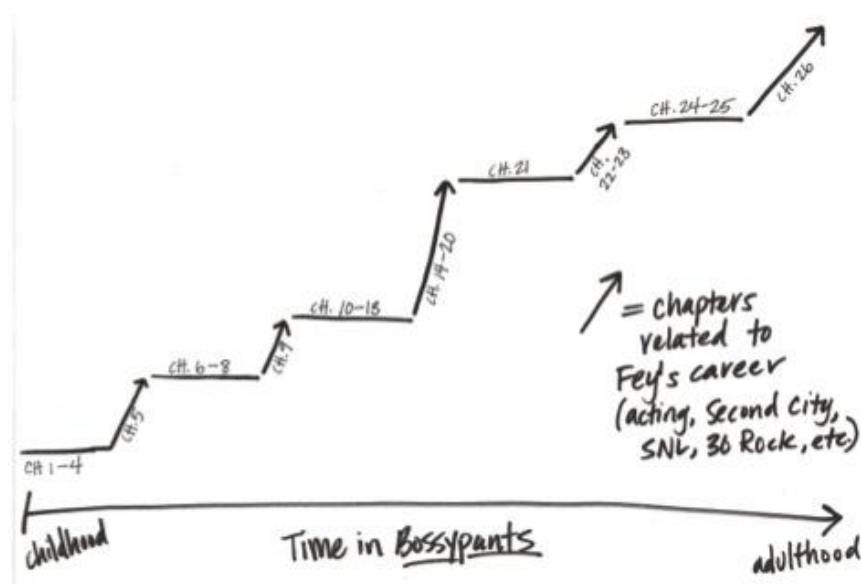


Figure 5

that the subject of the sections can be further subdivided into the themes of personal and private information and career-specific information. Kaling splits up the six sections of her memoir fairly evenly, as not every chapter is intended to be about her career path. The chronology is still in place. Fey's memoir works in a similar manner. When mapping out the structure of the memoir, used upward pointing arrows to indicate any chapters that related to Fey's career. The rest of the arrows show that Fey spends about as much time writing about her family, personal relationships, and general anecdotes of womanhood as she does writing about her career in writing for television.

As such, the visual representation of her memoir moves in an upward direction, however slowly. While Fey writes almost equally about her personal life and her career, the chronology of events is still intact, demonstrating that the trend of using chronology and themes is a useful way of structuring memoir.

In order to give a thorough background of how these memoirs function in relation to other female comedy writers, I feel it necessary to include a previous memoir in order to demonstrate the work that Fey and Kaling are doing as writers. Nora Ephron is an ideal candidate for discussion, as she penned multiple screenplays, novels, and essay collections in addition to her journalistic work in her lifetime. For this comparison, I have selected Ephron's *I Feel Bad About My Neck* to map out in a visual structural analysis. Though this book was published in 2006—only a few years before Fey and Kaling's memoirs—the collection is an ideal model for a female writer, as it was the first essay collection Ephron had published since 1978, when she published *Scribble, Scribble: Notes on the Media*. Unlike *Scribble Scribble*, *I Feel Bad About My Neck* was written without a particular theme in mind. Its subtitle is “And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman,” which directly addresses a particular audience, primarily women, as Fey and Kaling's works do. Because of the nature of Ephron's writing and her prominence as a female screenwriter, it can be safely assumed that Fey and Kaling would have some knowledge of Ephron's work and her status as a female writer, and could have possibly read some of her earlier work.

In examining the structural analysis for Ephron's *I Feel Bad About My Neck*, many of the chapters align with one another so that the “middle” chapters, “Me & JFK”

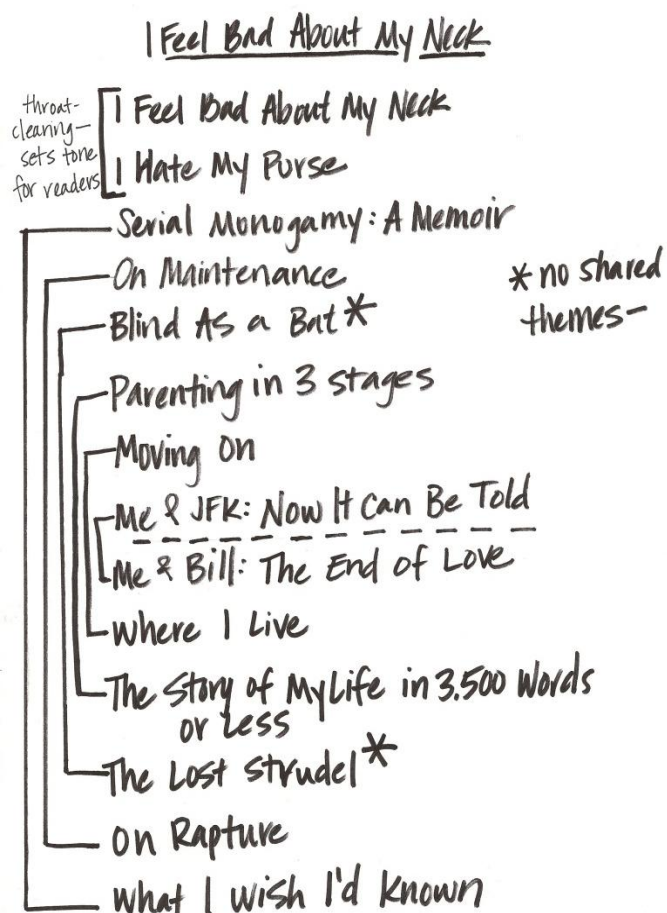


Figure 6

however can be closely paired up with regard to their thematic concerns in each chapter. As stated before, the “middle” chapters include much about Ephron’s experience with political figures, so much so that Ephron characterizes herself in each chapter. In reading about Ephron’s experience as an intern in the Kennedy White House, we learn of her awkward conversations with the president, and in the following chapter, we learn of her attitudes toward a president who disrespected the position of president in a similar manner as Kennedy. Yet in her older age, she is much more attuned to Clinton’s scandal, and the reader is well aware of how Ephron’s morals and values have matured in the years since her internship. The pairings of the chapters surrounding this middle pairing

and “Me & Bill” become the focal point for the essays. In my analysis, I noted Ephron’s first two chapters shared the similar theme of re-introducing the reader to Ephron’s writing style, as she hadn’t produced a nonfiction text in nearly thirty years. The first chapters, “I Feel Bad About My Neck” and “I Hate My Purse” speak clearly to a defined audience of females on specific topics that only affect women, and so these chapters must be considered together. The rest,

align similarly, each demonstrating a unique development in Ephron's attitudes toward various aspects of her life. Because she is much older than Fey, Handler or Kaling, this structure shows her life's lessons in a manner that does not follow chronology, but aptly demonstrates her skill as a writer. The reader is aware of the theme of maturation in Ephron's collection after understanding that each chapter is meant to be read with an accompanying one, which may not appear in sequence.

As such, Ephron is an ideal model for female comedian writers. Though she does not have the same celebrity status as Fey or Kaling, in that she was never an actress, she writes on many of the same themes that appear in Fey and Kaling's memoirs. Ephron writes about her early career and how she became a journalist, as well as parenting, her relationship with New York City, and her many relationships and marriages. However, the essay collection isn't entirely dedicated to recalling the events of her life. She also writes essays on various topics that are somewhat related to her personal life, such as the experience of being caught up in a book, examined in chapter thirteen, "On Rapture." The chapter details Ephron's experience in getting wrapped up in the plot of a good book, and wishing to only read instead of performing daily tasks. While reading isn't necessarily a theme found in Fey or Kaling's work, using a personal experience to begin writing about another topic is a technique used in Kaling's work, primarily. The similarities between these two writers is so apparent that one reviewer calls Kaling "The next Nora Ephron" on the cover of *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*. This essayistic writing style is common for female writers, and is present in Ephron's work and potentially served as a model memoir for Fey and Kaling to emulate when crafting their own memoirs.

Lastly, Ephron's use of anecdotes relating to physical appearance serves the same purpose as it does in Kaling and Fey's works, though in a slightly different way. The chapter entitled, "On Maintenance" in Ephron's work demonstrates that she is a relatable woman, as she details her every beauty routine, from how often she gets her hair colored and nails done to her exercise routine. These chapters are not necessary for her memoir, however, as she is not battling the celebrity persona that Fey and Kaling are, because she is a writer, and not an actress like Fey or Kaling. Because she never achieved the same status of celebrity by acting or engaging in photoshoots, Ephron's purpose in including a chapter on beauty maintenance is merely included to support the subtitle "And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman." But her inclusion of these chapters allow for Fey and Kaling to use the idea of writing about physical appearance in order to better relate to the audience. Again, Ephron's work serves as a model for the female writer seeking to write her memoir.

Shared themes arise from examining the visual representations of the memoirs, in addition to the use of chronology as a structuring tool. Each writer uses various themes in her memoir to explore her career path and her need to relate to the reader. As a result, these themes are manifested in various personal anecdotes that relate to the writer's personal life, but then become commentary on the issue or theme raised in the anecdote. For example, in Fey's fourth chapter, "All Girls Must Be Everything," she begins with a personal experience on when she first learned that physical beauty was important to girls. She writes:

When I was thirteen I spent a weekend at the beach in Wildwood, New Jersey, with my teenage cousins Janet and Lori. In the space of thirty-six hours, they taught me everything I needed to know about womanhood. They knew how to "lay out" in the sun wearing tanning oil instead of sunscreen. They taught me that

you could make a reverse tattoo in your tan if you cut a shape out of a Band-Aid and stuck it on your leg. (Fey 19)

She then subtly changes topics to write on the idea of how older women view beauty overall. In this chapter, Fey speaks about her physical appearance, and what improvements women try to make to their appearance. This movement occurs two paragraphs from the opening paragraph of the chapter, when Fey writes:

One afternoon a girl walked by in a bikini and my cousin Janet scoffed, “Look at the hips on her.” I panicked. What about my hips? Were they too big? Too small? What were *my* hips? I didn’t know hips could be a problem. I thought there was just fat or skinny. (Fey 20)

By the end of the chapter, the anecdote from Fey’s childhood about spending time with her cousins has been abandoned, as it was used only as a means of introducing Fey’s overall point in the chapter of listing her own physical traits in list form.

Kaling also uses childhood experiences to move into speaking about issues in various chapters, as seen in chapter three, “Don’t Peak in High School,” in which she relays that she wasn’t the popular kid in school, but “it has helped [her] so much as a writer” (Kaling 34). In using their childhoods as structuring techniques, the reader is better able to anticipate the themes that may arise when reading. Readers come to expect tidbits of personal history accompanied with an essay-like treatment of the larger issues at hand in the anecdote.

After speaking about their respective childhoods, Fey and Kaling both write about their careers in writing and acting. These sections take up a substantial portion of the memoirs, as their careers in acting and writing for television are what they are known for. Twelve of the total twenty-six chapters (46%) in Fey’s memoir are related to her career, while eleven of Kaling’s thirty-six chapters (29%) are related to her writing career. While

Kaling's 26% might seem less notable compared to Fey's 46%, it should be noted that Kaling is younger than Fey, and therefore has not had the career Fey has, and that Kaling's chapters are often shorter and less anecdote driven than Fey's. Nonetheless, the occurrences of chapters on the writers' careers are notable as they are directly related to the act of writing, and useful for the examination of the writers' structural techniques in their memoirs.

In the chapters on Fey and Kaling's career paths, their celebrity status is acknowledged, as they both include chapters on being photographed professionally. In Fey's chapter "Amazing, Gorgeous, Not Like That," and Kaling's chapter, "When You're Not Skinny, This is What People Want You to Wear," both women recall their experiences in photo shoots, as well as their favorite shoots and photos. In these chapters, Fey and Kaling both level with their readers by acknowledging their celebrity status, as they have both personally been asked to be on covers or spreads of magazines. But, by including these chapters, they are able to speak about their physical appearance to better relate to their audience, made up of mostly women.

In writing about their careers, the women are not only given license to speak about their celebrity status, but also to write about being writers. In these chapters, the reader is exposed to the writer persona present in each of the women's memoirs. Fey writes about being a writer for *Saturday Night Live* in "A Childhood Dream, Realized," and Kaling writes of being a playwright first in "Matt & Ben & Mindy & Brenda," and a writer for *The Office* in "All About *The Office*," while also including a chapter on her writing process in "How I Write." These chapters not only allow for readers to exercise their voyeuristic curiosities regarding the celebrity's life, but also demonstrate the writers

as writers first, meaning that both Fey and Kaling were writers before they achieved their current celebrity status. In these chapters, Fey and Kaling reveal themselves as writers dedicated to the craft of comedy writing. Fey writes of learning about comedy writing for a live show in “A Childhood Dream, Realized”:

What I learned about “bombing” as an improviser at Second City was that bombing is painful, but it doesn’t kill you. No matter how badly an improv set goes, you will still be physically alive when it’s over. What I learned about bombing as a writer at *Saturday Night* is that you can’t be too worried about your “permanent record” ...And unfortunately, sometimes the shit nuggets will make it onto the air. You can’t worry about it. (Fey 123)

Fey writes of her lessons learned here about writing for a television show, which she hadn’t done until she moved to New York City to write for *Saturday Night Live*. By including it here, she gives her readers insight into her writing style and her craft of writing comedy, while also demonstrating that she wasn’t always good at what she does. Instead, it was a learned process, which forces the reader to look beyond her celebrity persona and understand that at times, Fey wrote “shit nuggets” that she wasn’t proud of.

Similarly, Kaling writes of learning to write for television in her job as one of five full time writers for the first season of *The Office*. At twenty-four, she was the youngest writer on the show, as well as the only female writer. Kaling notes that though she had written original material before, in her stint as an off-Broadway performer for *Matt & Ben*, she knew little about writing comedy in this way:

Being a staff writer was very stressful. I knew I was a funny person, but I was so inexperienced in this atmosphere...Most of the stress came, honestly, because the other writers were so experienced and funny and I was worried I couldn’t keep up. (Kaling 111)

Later, Kaling admits that year taught her how to be a writer, stating that “[she] did not know at the time that this year with Greg, Paul, B.J., and Mike would be where [she]

essentially learned how to write comedy” (Kaling 112). By being forthcoming about her nerves and stress-induced first year as a writer, Kaling creates a persona for herself as a writer first, and not a celebrity. This persona is an honest representation of her fears and triumphs as a writer for a well-known television show. She, like Fey, writes of the learning curve of becoming a writer. This theme is necessary, as both Fey and Kaling seek to combat the celebrity persona that has been constructed for them, outside their memoirs. In order to craft a persona in which they are relatable people, whose jobs are stressful and learned, they include these chapters on being writers in hopes of making their memoirs more akin to memoirs previously written by other female writers.

Referring to the visual representation of Kaling and Fey’s memoirs, each writer alternates between writing about their careers and writing about their personal lives. Kaling groups the “I Love New York and It Likes Me Okay” section with the “Hollywood: My Good Friend Who Is Also A Little Embarrassing” section in order to give her readers a sense of who she is as a writer, only to then follow these sections with more personal chapters in “The Best Distraction in the World: Romance and Guys” and “My Appearance: The Fun and The Really Not Fun.” Similarly, Fey alternates between chapters on her career and chapters on her personal life along a timeline, sometimes including only one chapter on her career, other times including up to seven in a row. Each writer includes some chapters on her personal life to balance out the career driven chapters, in order to demonstrate to the reader that she is a relatable character, while also presenting the alternative persona of the writer to the public’s idea of the writers as celebrities.

Chelsea Handler: The Foil

Chelsea Handler's memoir *My Horizontal Life* appears very briefly in the chapters that follow for many reasons, but the main reason is because her memoir is crafted much differently than Tina Fey or Mindy Kaling's. *My Horizontal Life* is eighteen chapters total, which are all loosely based around the memoir's theme of Handler's sexual relationships. The subtitle of the book, "A Collection of One-Night Stands" invokes the colloquial term "one-night stand," which gives any reader the idea that her memoir will solely focus on her sexual endeavors and little else. Handler's text is built as a collection of anecdotes, with little thematic through line, other than the sexual nature of the stories. While the memoir may follow the arc of Handler's life, the anecdotes' focus on the sexually explicit material make her memoir distinctly different from Fey or Kaling's, which have many themes intertwined, one of which are the writers' relationships, but not the sole focus. In addition to the singular theme, the memoir is also poorly written, as little attention was given to stylistic choices when writing, as was done with Kaling and Fey's works. Handler's memoir mimics the techniques of her stand up routine, in that she often uses the same lines in the memoir as she has in her routine, and that she is primarily concerned with a cheap laugh. As a result, Handler's work acts as the foil for the Fey and Kaling's memoirs. Her subject matter, combined with the overall structure, prevents readers from understanding her as a figure similar to Fey or Kaling.

And so although she is also a female comedian, Handler achieved success as a talk-show host two years after *My Horizontal Life* had been published. This also sets Handler apart from Fey and Kaling, who had achieved success as writers and actresses prior to penning their memoirs. Fey and Kaling engage with their careers as writers and

actresses in their first published works, yet Handler, who had been performing stand-up comedy, refrains from including this information in her memoir and sticks only to the information that is relevant to her “Collection of One-night Stands” theme. Here again, she is the foil. After reading her memoir, the reader only understands her as a character engaged in sexual activity, rather than as a celebrity with various personas. While Kaling and Fey create active personas that are capable of doling out advice or relating to readers, while engaging with their celebrity persona, Handler’s persona is not necessarily a persona, but an identity that Handler accepts. Her readers expect a singular identity when reading—one of a sexual deviant whose only concern is a funny story—and Handler accepts this identity and does nothing to combat it in her writing.

With all this in mind, Handler’s memoir will not be appearing much in my analysis of these memoirs. Her work has been chosen as an archetype of other memoirs by female comedians, such as Lisa Lampanelli and Kathy Griffin, whose memoirs work in a similar manner as Handler’s. While her work is one that is necessary for this specific project for its role as the foil, *My Horizontal Life* adds little to the scholarship of female comedian memoir. It is, in essence, written for pure shock value and for those voyeuristic readers who care for nothing else but anecdotes that are better suited as stand-up material. In short, Handler’s inclusion in this project is to demonstrate the meticulous writing and structure present in Kaling and Fey’s memoirs. Sorry, Chels.

PART II: THEMES FROM TINA AND MINDY

Chapter 4

How to Give Advice in Your Memoir (With a Flash of Truth and a Quick Laugh)

When reading, it became increasingly clear that one of the main elements of a female comedian memoir is advice giving. In both Tina Fey's and Mindy Kaling's memoirs, advice to the core audience of females makes up a large part of the subject matter in the memoir. Though much of the text remains personally related to both Fey and Kaling's lives, they use their personal anecdotes to both inject humor and guidance to any female reading their work. Both writers use direct address, unique to their memoirs—Ephron rarely, if ever, used direct address in *I Feel Bad About My Neck*—to show the readers that they are indeed being talked *to*, demonstrating that Fey and Kaling are both well aware of their audience. Through their awareness, they are able to identify the readers reasons for reading, and give generic advice to their readers. Similarly, Fey and Kaling both anticipate their readers by including bits of advice seemingly driven by personal experience in their careers as writers. Fey and Kaling both have similar audiences, though Fey's might be older than Kaling's. Because Fey is more established in her career as a writer, she is able to write to a more specific audience of older females, to whom she can relate to when she writes about her experiences being a wife and mother. Kaling, however, identifies strongly with younger females, who may be just starting their careers as she is. But because their audience is collectively female, each writer can give advice to their readers by using their personal experiences as twenty-something and forty-something writers.

By including these pieces of advice from the start of their memoirs, the audience is able to observe the construction of a new persona occur in the introduction to better understand how the memoir will function. Fey and Kaling understand the makeup of their audience, and therefore use their celebrity status to elevate their personas into ones that craft pieces of advice for their audience, as expected. The persona is an experienced, female comedian who uses her personal anecdotes to give advice to the readers on when to cry, how to survive in a male-dominated workplace, when to fulfill revenge, and so on. This is expected from the writer, and the writer uses the celebrity persona to give the readers what they expect: advice from a well-versed, successful writer in the entertainment industry.

Tina Fey's *Bossypants* continues to dominate bestseller lists, which gives me reason to pause: are those reading her work looking to get a glimpse into her life as a famous female comedian, or are her readers more interested in her career as a writer and her attitude toward the craft of writing? Fey is arguably one of the most popular female comedians of the still-young twenty-first century, and so it would make sense to infer that her popularity and celebrity status as a female writer and comedian propels her book sales. Yet, in order to more fully understand this popularity, the audience must be examined in order to understand their reasons for reading. While reading, it can be noted that her intended audience is indeed women, as she invokes direct address to a female audience often in her writing. Direct address is less common in creative nonfiction, as the narrator is most often speaking of past events related to him or herself, but in the case of Fey's introduction, where the first examples of direct address can be found, she speaks to

her audience on what they can find in the book. Throughout the introduction, she acknowledges her gendered reading audience:

If you are a woman and you bought this book for practical tips on how to make it in a male-dominated workplace, here they are. No pigtails, no tube tops. Cry sparingly. (Some people say “Never let them see you cry.” I say, if you’re so mad you could just cry, then cry. It terrifies everyone.) When choosing sexual partners, remember: Talent is not sexually transmittable. Also, don’t eat diet foods in meetings. (Fey, 3)

Through direct address (“If *you* are a woman...), Fey capitalizes on this audience by speaking to them in their own terms. She excludes men in the introduction by making references to tube tops, pigtails and “a male-dominated workplace,” and in doing so, signals to the reader what the subject matter of the memoir will be geared toward a female audience. This second paragraph of the introduction tells the reader that the rest of the book may include pieces of advice or anecdotes directly applicable to females.

From the introduction, Fey writes about her childhood experience, though the next major piece of advice, again using direct address, appears well into the memoir. Imbedded in chapter nine, “The Windy City, Full of Meat,” Fey dives into more pieces of advice directly related to the workplace. At this point in the memoir, Fey has moved beyond her “Origin Story” (chapter two) and young adulthood into her career, which begins in Chicago. Fey notes that she was a cast member of one of the touring companies of the Second City, and so much of her time was spent travelling the country performing with a handful of other comedians. They were responsible for writing and performing the well-known material from the comedy club in Chicago. Yet Fey writes, “For example, they once sent us on a tour of Texas and the Midwest, and the moment the can pulled away from the theater, we all agreed to throw out the ‘best of’ sketches we had been directed to perform and replace them with our own original material” (Fey 83). This

segues into a subtitle of the chapter, in which the title of the memoir is invoked for the first time: “Bossypants Lesson #183: You Can’t Boss People Around If They Don’t Really Care” (Fey 86). This piece of advice, implied by the word “lesson,” begins a streak of advice for women in the workplace, while also injecting a bit of humor into the advice-giving. By numbering the lesson “#183,” Fey is simultaneously poking fun at all the pieces of advice women receive about their careers, while also adding to the list in her own way. Similar to the advice given in the introduction, the paragraphs following Fey’s subtitle are geared toward women who seek Fey out for advice in their own careers. Fey’s position as a woman who has “made it” in a business dominated by men allows for her to dispense pieces of wisdom to her audience. She says:

This is what I tell young women who ask me for career advice. People are going to try to trick you. To make you feel that you are in competition with one another. ‘You’re up for a promotion. If they go with a woman, it’ll be between you and Barbara.’ Don’t be fooled. You’re not in competition with other women.

Also, I encourage them to always wear a bra. Even if you don’t think you need it, just...you know what? You’re never going to *regret* it. (Fey, 88)

Fey acknowledges her position as a person with a wealth of knowledge in the entertainment industry by saying “This is what I tell young women...” She understands and accepts this position of authority throughout the book, and by aiming these pieces of advice at young women, or women in general, she also accepts that her audience is primarily women. After acknowledging this, she continues to maintain her status as a successful female comedian by making a joke aimed at women, by telling them to “...always wear a bra.” In her humor, she is again acknowledging her audience by singling out a problem encountered only by females. Yet she is not alienating men, because Fey understands that at this point in the memoir, it has been long established that

men are not the primary audience. In this piece of advice regarding a bra, she is speaking only to women, solidifying her status as an authority figure on how to make it as a *female* comedian, and not a comedian in general.

Similarly, Mindy Kaling echoes many of the advice sentiments found in Fey's memoir. Published in 2011, a year after Fey's memoir, Kaling invokes many of the same devices as far as ensuring the audience is one of women who may be aspiring comedians or others looking to break in to the industry. She begins the memoir with an introduction in which she answers questions, using the direct address found in Fey's memoir as well:

Thank you for buying this book. Or, if my publisher's research analytics are correct, thank you, Aunts of America, for buying this book for your niece you don't know that well but really want to connect with more. There are many teenage vampire books you could have purchased instead. I'm grateful you made this choice. (Kaling 3)

Kaling addresses the audience directly ("I'm grateful *you* made this choice.") to demonstrate to the reader that she has identified her core audience. In identifying her audience, she has also included an integration of other forms of literature into her memoir, showing that she is more aware than the average writer. By noting that "There are many teenage vampire books you could have purchased...", Kaling is aware that not only are the "Aunts of America" reading her work, but also the "Nieces of America," who may also be included other genres' audiences. In addition, by naming "teenage vampire books" as a genre that "Nieces of America" are interested in, Kaling notes that her book is in competition with this genre among those in her reading audience as well.

In addition to using direct address to identify her audience, Kaling inserts humor to set the tone for the rest of the essays in the memoir. In her "Q & A" themed

introduction, the second question reads: “Is this one of those guide books celebrities write for girls?” The questions have been invented by Kaling, presumably anticipating any issues the audience would have prior to reading the memoir, and by including this question, Kaling acknowledges the trend of advice-giving in memoirs. However, she wishes to remain separate from this trend, as evidenced by her answer:

Oh, hell no. I’m only marginally qualified to be giving advice at all. My body mass index is certainly not ideal, I frequently use my debit card to buy things that cost less than three dollars, because I never have cash on me, and my bedroom is so untidy it looks like vandals ransacked the Anthropologie Sale section. I’m kind of a mess. I did, however, fulfill a childhood dream of writing and acting in television and movies. Armed with that confidence, alongside a lifelong love of the sound of my own voice, yes, I’ve put some advice in this book. (Kaling 4)

Kaling outright denies the goal of the memoir to be one of a guide, because she is “kind of a mess.” The humor is directed toward a female audience because of the particular types of issues she brings up in her own life. She speaks about her body mass index—and her physical appearance overall throughout the memoir—in order to hint at the issues that other women might come across in their own lives. Though she attempts to restrain herself from doling out advice, Kaling notes that “[she] did, however, fulfill a childhood dream...” in acting and writing for a living, and that she has included pieces of advice in the various essays in the book. This demonstrates Kaling’s assimilation with the trends of advice-giving in the memoirs of female comedians: like Fey before her, she includes small pieces of advice in order to connect more with her mostly-female audience having already become aware of the demographic she is writing for.

Kaling’s pieces of advice continue in the next paragraph, as she begins to give glimpses of what is to come in the rest of the memoir. For instance, her first piece of

advice follows the above paragraph, in which she comments on proverbs relatable to most any situation:

However, you should know I disagree with a lot of traditional advice. For instance, they say the best revenge is living well. I say it's acid in the face—who will love them now? Another old saying is that revenge is a dish best served cold. But it *feels* best served piping hot, straight out of the oven of outrage. My opinion? Take care of revenge right away. Push, shove, scratch that person while they're still within arm's reach. Don't let them get away! Who knows when you'll get this opportunity again? (Kaling 4)

Kaling and Fey both use similar types of moves in order to begin writing about advice-giving in the first place. Both writers use adages familiar to audiences, and then begin to dissect them accordingly. Fey takes on “Never let them see you cry,” while Kaling uses the “Revenge is a dish best served cold” and “The best revenge is living well” in order to begin writing her opinion. Each woman uses adages that “they” said. Fey writes, “Some people say ‘Never let them see you cry,’” while Kaling writes, “For instance, they say the best revenge is living well.” Both attribute the old sayings to those who are not present in the memoir to provide context for their advice given to their audience. In this way, both writers seek to include a wider audience than originally intended.

Kaling's use of “traditional advice” in this introduction differs from Fey's use of practical advice to women seeking to get ahead in their careers. While Fey's advice was also humorous, in that she mentions one should not “eat diet foods in meetings” but should “always wear a bra,” Kaling's advice is less relatable to the female reader. Her thoughts on the old adage regarding revenge apply to all readers, male or female, who may encounter a situation in which revenge is invoked. She instructs readers to “take care of revenge right away,” but without offering more specific details as Fey did in her first piece of advice. In this way, her advice is not as anecdote driven as Fey's first pieces of

advice are, yet these paragraphs nestled into the introduction provide similar thematic concerns. Kaling's allows for readers to assume that though she only comments on the adages, she must have reason to feel so strongly about revenge, which is the reason for including such strong language ("Push, shove, scratch that person while they're still within arm's reach."). This idea of revenge does appear much later in the memoir, in chapter thirty-four, "Revenge Fantasies While Jogging," though the reader doesn't know this when reading the introduction. But Fey's advice is more specific, as "Never let them see you cry" turns to "...if you're so mad you could just cry, then cry. It terrifies everyone.", which informs the audience that Fey has reason to believe that crying terrifies everyone, which, like Kaling's, doesn't appear in her memoir until late, in chapter twenty-three, "Juggle This." Each writer allows for these pieces of generic advice to inform how readers interpret their work, as the reader rightfully assumes that the advice was given with some personal experience behind it.

Chapter 5

Locating the Everyday Woman in Celebrity Memoir

Throughout their memoirs, both Fey and Kaling attempt to disregard their celebrity status and convey to their audience that they are in fact normal women who deal with the issues that regular women face on a day-to-day basis. This is seen in their chapters on their childhoods and early adulthoods, as well as a few chapters on physical appearance and maintenance. The inclusion of this subject matter is relevant to the celebrity persona I have previously referred to, in that these writers attempt to break away from the television fame-based persona that informs their readers' interpretations of their works. The attempt is notable because the writers are relatively successful in making this constructed persona part of their memoirs. What I refer to as the The Everyday Woman becomes part of the constructed persona in both memoirs.

One example of the manifestation of the Everyday Woman previously discussed is from Kaling's introduction to her memoir. In it, she uses a "Q & A" format to identify and anticipate questions from her audience. Kaling states that she is "only marginally qualified to be giving advice at all," because her "body mass index is certainly not ideal," and her "bedroom is so untidy it looks like vandals ransacked the Anthropologie Sale section" (Kaling 4). Kaling uses these specific instances to let the audience know that she too struggles with issues of keeping her house clean, though she has some celebrity status. By noting her "body mass index" and not her overall weight, Kaling demonstrates a specific manner in which women are concerned with their physical appearance. Similarly, Kaling notes a specific store, Anthropologie, in her detail about her

cleanliness. In using this specific store, she is reaching out to other women who may shop, or at least be aware of, the specific store. She puts herself into the same category as all the other women who shop at Anthropologie. Yet, this is not the only place in the introduction where Kaling constructs the relatable persona. Later in the introduction, Kaling answers the question of “So, is this book like a women’s magazine?” by stating, “Not really, but if it reads like a really funny magazine, I’ll be psyched” (Kaling 4). This first line signals to the reader that Kaling hopes for her book to be as relatable as a women’s magazine. She goes on to say:

You can’t walk by a magazine and not read it. You try to throw away a magazine and if you don’t push it down in the trash enough, it somehow resurfaces on the floor of your TV room. I know this because I swear my house has been haunted by the same December 2004 issue of *Glamour* magazine for the past seven years. (Kaling, 4-5).

In order to make herself relatable and personable, Kaling includes a question about magazines to share a small detail about her personal life and habits. Here she acknowledges her audience by referring to a specific magazine, *Glamour*, while also commenting on more of her personal cleaning habits, as she has previously done in the introduction. She identifies herself as a reader of *Glamour*, and anyone who may also read the magazine will relate to Kaling, as they will be able to pinpoint more of her interests outside of her career as a writer and actress on a television show. The specificity in name of the magazine shows that Kaling is one who is also interested in fashion, as well as the articles and pieces of celebrity gossip that are included in the magazine—just as a typical reader might be. She uses the audience of an outside source in order to better construct her personality as an Everyday Woman.

The reference to *Glamour* is not the only reference Kaling uses to piggyback on an existing audience. On the next page of Kaling's introduction, she includes a question which reads: "This sounds okay, but not as good as Tina Fey's book. Why isn't this more like Tina Fey's book?" Simply by posing the question in the introduction, Kaling assumes that she and Fey have the same audience for their memoirs, and she is mostly correct in this assumption. *Bossypants*, having only been published a year prior to *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*, allows for Kaling to identify herself again as someone who has read Fey's work, while also using her memoir either as an example for what a memoir written by a female comedian should look like, or as a way to better identify with her own readers. The answer to the posed question makes the difference clear:

I know, man. Tina's awesome. I think she may have every major international trophy for excellence except a Heisman. (She might actually have an honorary Heisman, I should check.) Unfortunately, I can't be Tina, because it's very difficult to lure her into a *Freaky Friday*-type situation where we could switch bodies, even though in the movies they make it look so easy. Believe me, I've tried. (Kaling 5)

Kaling's answer to this posed question continues to construct the persona that she is an Everyday Woman, much like her readers, because she confesses that she too is a fan of Fey. In order to maintain a level of humor and tone that is consistent with Fey's work, she inserts humor in her thought about "lur[ing] her into a *Freaky-Friday* type situation," which allows Kaling to better assert herself as a woman who is much like the women to make up the majority of her audience—and Fey's as well. Though there are differences in the types of women in each of the memoirists' audience, in that Fey's audience is made up of older females, the overlap occurs in the fact that the audiences for both memoirs are

indeed female, and that the readers of Kaling's memoir are aware of Fey, so the reference here to Fey in Kaling's memoir is not lost on her audience.

Fey is aware of her female audience, as previously discussed, although her first attempts at constructing the Everyday Woman persona come much later than Kaling's in the memoir. It is hinted at in the introduction when Fey works through direct address to alert her readers to the fact that she is, in fact, just like them. To begin with, Fey addresses the reader, predicting their various motivations for purchasing and reading her book. She writes, "If you are a woman and you bought this book for practical tips on how to make it in a male-dominated workplace..." (4), "Perhaps you're a parent and you bought this book to learn how to raise an achievement-oriented, drug free adult virgin..." (4), "Maybe you bought this book because you love Sarah Palin and you want to find reasons to hate me..." (5), and finally, "Or perhaps you just bought this book to laugh and be entertained" (5). Fey works to identify plausible reasons for anyone looking to read her work. She acknowledges her celebrity status in that she mentions her work as a comedian and as a Sarah Palin impersonator, while also alluding to the fact that she is an Everyday Woman, or a "drug free adult virgin." This builds up to Fey writing about her motivations for titling the book *Bossypants*, in which she says she's learned a lot about how to be a boss, but ultimately the book has been "a simple task of retracing my steps to figure out what factors contributed to this person (photo of adolescent Fey)... developing into this person (recent professional photo of Fey)... who secretly prefers to be this person (photo of Fey in costume for *30 Rock*, pretending to be a child)" (Fey 5-6). Here, through visual aids, the audience is aware of the attempt by Fey to construct an Everyday Woman persona, as she includes a photo of herself from her own personal collection. This photo

is included in order to prove to the readers that Fey normal. Yet this is immediately disproved, as the next photo is a professional photo taken of Fey recently, in which she is made up, and touched up, most likely. Very few people have photos like these, and so the audience is immediately reminded of Fey's celebrity status.

Unlike Kaling, Fey does not attempt to construct a solid foundation in the introduction for her audience in order to prove that she is an Everyday Woman. Instead, these moves occur much later in the text over the course of many chapters. Fey devotes time to developing her persona through her chapters spent writing of her childhood and early adulthood, when she worked odd jobs as a teenager and young adult, as well as the chapters on motherhood and appearance. The first true sense the reader gets of Fey's attempt to build an Everyday Woman persona is a pair of chapters entitled "Remembrances of Being Very Very Skinny" (chapter twelve) and "Remembrance of Being a Little Bit Fat," (chapter thirteen) respectively. In these chapters, Fey writes a bulleted list of things she remembers about being both thin and overweight. Though the lists themselves may include information that readers—male or female—may relate to, it is what Fey writes at the end of these lists that allow for readers to understand that she is an Everyday Woman in these chapters. At the end of "Remembrances of Being Very Very Skinny," Fey writes:

We should leave people alone about their weight. Being skinny for a while (provided you actually eat food and don't take pills or smoke to get there) is a perfectly fine pastime. Everyone should try it once, like a super-short haircut or dating a white guy. (Fey, 116)

Similarly, after the bulleted list in "Remembrances of Being a Little Bit Fat," she writes:

We should leave people alone about their weight. Being chubby for a while (provided you don't give yourself diabetes) is a natural phase of life and nothing to be ashamed of. Like puberty or slowly turning into a Republican. (Fey, 118)

Fey acts as an authority figure in these paragraphs, not because of her celebrity status, but because she has documented her personal experiences with weight loss and gain through chapters that parallel each other in terms of structure. She relates to her readers, male or female, by stating that both weight loss and gain are “perfectly fine” and “a natural phase of life.” In doing so, she constructs, somewhat effectively, the persona that she too is an Everyday Woman who has struggled with her weight throughout her life.

Perhaps the most effective places in which Fey invokes the Everyday Woman persona is in the chapters in which she speaks about being a mother. In the chapter “There’s a Drunk Midget in my House,” Fey writes exclusively about the issues she encountered shortly after giving birth to her daughter. She opens the chapter by stating:

Ah, babies! They’re more than just adorable little creatures on whom you can blame your farts. Like most people who have had one baby, I am an expert on everything and will tell you, unsolicited, how to raise your kid! (Fey 237)

Because of the tone of the opening lines, the reader is aware that this will not be a traditional advice chapter, as Fey has done previously. The humor is used well here, as she makes reference to the trend that “most people who have had one baby” are prone to sharing everything they know about babies, and want to be seen as experts. Her acknowledgement that this “advice” will be given unsolicited sets the tone and framework for the rest of the chapter: Fey has also encountered people who wish to tell her the best way to raise her child, which is an experience her readers are likely to have had as well. Combined with the humor in these opening lines, Fey is laying the groundwork for perhaps her most relatable chapter in the memoir as a whole, as she is demonstrates a common experience for many new parents.

After this scene-setting, Fey again refers to her “expert” status, by stating “When I was pregnant (remember, I was pregnant once, *and* I’m on TV: Those two things combined make me an *expert*)...” (Fey 238). The emphasis is all hers, which only adds to the humor needed to understand that she is in fact, not an expert, but perhaps more of an expert in the experience of being pregnant and choosing to feed her baby formula over breast milk, which is what the chapter is actually about. Fey, throughout the chapter, details her experience with breastfeeding, which she says is “an *amazing* time in my life,” because it “really changed me as a woman” (Fey 239). The reader realizes, however, that these lines are sarcasm, because by the bottom of the following paragraph, Fey states that she understands that though there are differing opinions on how long to breastfeed (all between six months and a year), she suggests “you must find what works for you” (Fey 239). Here, she reveals that for her, “the magic number was seventy-two hours” (Fey 239). And so the lines on breastfeeding being an “amazing time” in Fey’s life become sarcasm, because the reader is now aware that breastfeeding was a challenge for Fey. Rather than breastfeeding being the remarkable experience that she touts it to be in these lines, the reader is able to relate to Fey’s very real experience of her issues with breastfeeding. As this is a common issue many new mothers face, Fey’s inclusion of this life event allow for her female readers to empathize with her troubles in breastfeeding. Fey’s construction of the Everyday Woman persona is strongest in this chapter as a result.

Later in the chapter, after having detailed her hardships with breastfeeding, Fey relates an actual piece of advice to her readers, whether they are mothers or not. She states:

Lesson learned? When people say, “You really, really *must*” do something, it means you don’t really have to. No one every says, “You really, really *must* deliver the baby during labor.” When it’s true, it doesn’t need to be said. (Fey 242)

This advice is given after Fey details her troubles in breastfeeding and the pushback she has received from other women, and so it alerts the audience that this line is something Fey can personally attest to as truth. This boosts her Everyday Woman status, because she has demonstrated that this lesson was in fact learned through experience, and that she is an expert at some level on the topic. Her expert status and Everyday Woman status become equal here, which becomes even truer later on the next page, due to the section entitled “Me Time.” The section of this chapter states “Any expert will tell you, the best thing a mom can do to be a better mom is to carve out a little time for herself,” again invoking the “expert” status that the reader understands is now equal to the Everyday Woman persona purposefully constructed by Fey (Fey 243). Along with this “expert” status, in the introduction of the “Me Time” section, Fey also includes suggestions for new mothers on how to get “me time.” She offers tips such as “Go to the bathroom a lot” and “Offer to empty the dishwasher,” while also including more specific tips that can easily be assumed are tips that Fey has personally tried:

Take ninety-minute showers. (If you only shower every three or four days, it will be easier to get away with this.

Say you’re going to look for the diaper crème, then go into your child’s room and just stand there until your spouse comes in and curtly says, “What are you doing?”

“Sleep when your baby sleeps.” Everyone knows this classic tip, but I say why stop there? Scream when your baby screams. Take Benadryl when your baby takes Benadryl. And walk around pantless when your baby walks around pantless. (Fey 243)

Fey's advice in these chapters is useful for readers as it aptly demonstrates Fey's ability to be a relatable narrator in her memoir. Through these specific details, particularly in which she uses second person by writing "your spouse" and "your baby," the reader is aware that Fey is referring to her own spouse and her own baby. Through these details and use of humor, the reader is able to determine that Fey is able to construct a relatable persona when referring to specific details in her life. She ends the graphic with a final word that "implementing four or five of these little techniques will prove restorative and give you the energy you need to not drink until nighttime" (Fey 243). By ending the chapter with humor, Fey allows for those readers who have also experienced the stress of parenting for the first time to relate to her experience, and in turn think of Fey as the Everyday Woman she strives to be throughout the memoir in order to battle her celebrity persona.

Handler's *My Horizontal Life* proves to be relatable, yet for far different ways. Her construction of the Everyday Woman persona is spread throughout the memoir, across anecdotes, and proves only to be speaking to a much smaller audience than either Fey or Kaling's memoirs. Because the subject of the memoir is Handler's sexual encounters, the text is already thematically different from Fey and Kaling's. Handler does not attempt to construct the Everyday Woman persona through specific writerly moves such as direct address, and instead allows for her anecdotes to speak for themselves. Handler's unintentional construction of the Everyday Woman persona comes strictly in her subject matter for each of the chapter, which a reader, male or female, may be able to relate to. This occurs on a far smaller scale than Fey or Kaling's memoirs, as she speaks of one subject only, rather than the arc of her life's events and her experiences as a

comedian and television host. As such, the reader finds the Everyday Woman in the details of Handler's experiences.

For example, late in the memoir, in a chapter entitled "Rerun," Handler writes about a Valentine's Day mishap in which she runs into her attractive landlord in an embarrassing situation. To open the chapter, she writes:

It was Valentine's Day, and I had spent the day in bed with my life partner, Ketel One. The two of us watched a romantic movie marathon on TBS Superstation that made me wonder how people who wrote romantic comedies can sleep at night. (Handler 181)

In these opening lines, a reader can find the Everyday Woman. By referencing specific details, such as the brand of vodka she had been drinking, or the specific television station, the reader is able to empathize with Handler as she wallows in singlehood on Valentine's Day. Yet Handler is exploiting a common feeling felt by many single people on Valentine's Day here, and not writing in these specific details in order to relate to her audience. Because Handler has not given her reader any sense of her celebrity persona earlier in the memoir, she is not forced to construct a relatable persona. This in turn means that she is not including these details for any other reason than to tell her story of the events on this Valentine's Day. As a result, she is far different from Fey and Kaling, who refer to their celebrity status in their memoirs. Handler is again a foil for these memoirs, proving how effective constructing a persona that readers can relate to is for the success of a female celebrity memoir.

The Everyday Woman persona is integral for Fey and Kaling's memoirs, as the women feel the need to combat their celebrity personas that have been thrust upon them by various outlets in the media and by their fans. Fey, Kaling and Handler are unable to manage their celebrity personas, because they are unable to control how audiences feel

about them until they create a persona for themselves. Kaling and Fey acknowledge their celebrity personas by writing about their experiences on their television shows, while Handler ignores her celebrity status in her memoir. The difference becomes important when examining the theme of the Everyday Woman, which becomes an integral part of both Fey and Kaling's memoirs, as they make specific writerly and comedic choices in order to construct their "normal" personas. While Handler remains the outlier, she proves that the construction of an Everyday Woman persona is important for some female comedians seeking to control their personas and how their work is received by their audiences.

Chapter 6

Memoirs: A Fun Picture Book for Celebrities

Traditionally, memoirists from Thoreau to Joan Didion have written their memoirs without the use of visual aids, and rely solely on the print to craft a story. In the case of *Bossypants* and *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*, however, visual aids are used to complement the themes that arise in the chapters themselves, and insert humor as needed. The visual representations, along with the written personas, of each writer are necessary to combat the celebrity persona that has been thrust upon each of the comedians. These representations include more than the cover art, as Fey and Kaling



Figure 7

include photos from their own personal photo collections, stills from their television shows, professional photographs, and other graphics to include reprinted scripts and hand-drawn charts.

The themes of the memoirs can be determined from the cover designs of each of the texts found in paperback form. This is seen first in the significant amount of text on Handler's cover, which sets her apart from the Fey and Kaling, as their covers are made up mostly of the image of the author.

Handler appears on the cover, but her portrait serves as a backdrop for the large text. For

the portrait, Handler appears lying on her stomach on a bed, whose sheets and pillows are ruffled, giving the viewer the idea that she has just woken up, or more likely, that she has recently had sex. Given the title of the book, which is the largest text aside from Handler's name, this portrait's intention is to play off the title and give the viewer the idea that Handler is most comfortable in bed. This idea is solidified as the viewer sees very little of Handler's clothing. She is wearing a sleeveless tank top, but because a pillow or blanket is pushed against her chest, the viewer is only able to see the straps. Most importantly, the viewer cannot see all of Handler's face. Her hair obstructs the viewer's ability to look at her entire face, and Handler is positioned so that her eyes are looking down and away from the camera and viewer. Her lack of eye contact is worth noting as it allows the reader to infer more about Handler's sexual representation in the book. Viewers and readers assume that Handler views sex casually. She exploits sex for readership, because each of the eighteen chapters in the book are about one-night stands, or very brief sexual encounters, and by including a photo of herself in bed on the cover of the memoir, she is reinforcing the idea promiscuity is a prominent theme in the book.

Handler's cover focuses on the text of the title, author name and review, all of which stretch horizontally across the cover. The horizontal layout of the text is notable because it stretches across the entirety of the book cover as boldly colored stripes, drawing attention to the title of the work, a review, and the endorsement of "Over one million copies sold!", which appears at the top of the cover itself. The review from Jennifer Weiner, author of *Good in Bed*, states: "Chelsea Handler writes like Judy Blume, if Judy Blume were into vodka, Ecstasy, and sleeping with midgets and nineteen-year-olds." This one line gives the reader an idea of the sexual nature of the memoir, and was

presumably chosen of the various reviews the book received for its provocative language and apt description of the subject matter. Aside from its astute description and its endorsement of Handler's writing, the review capitalizes on the audience of Weiner's book as well. By including her name and the title of her work on the cover page, audiences who are familiar with Weiner will be interested in Handler's work. Similarly, this paperback cover takes advantage of the success of this memoir to market Handler's other works as well. The smallest text of the cover appears in the bottom corner of the

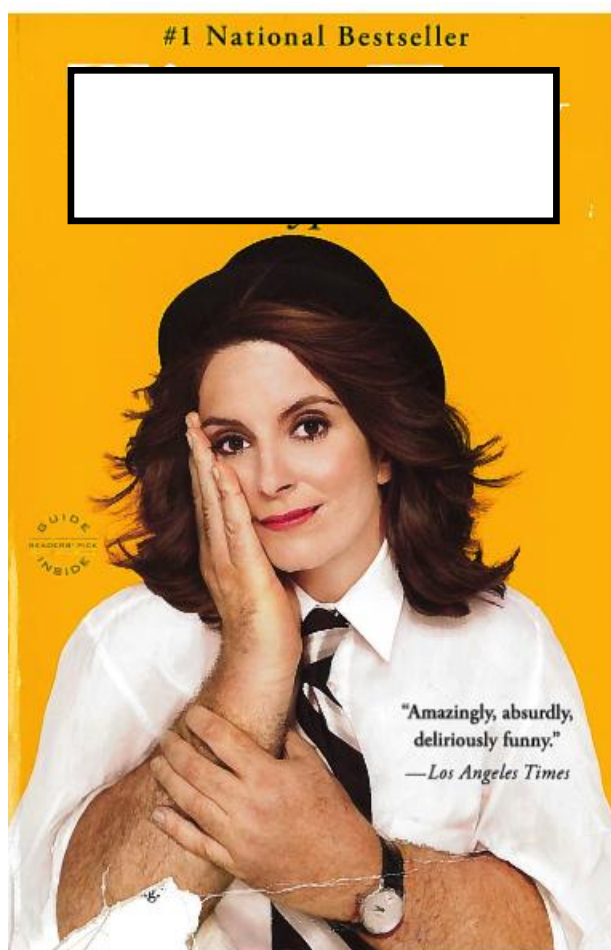


Figure 8

cover, and reads: "Author of *Are You There Vodka? It's Me, Chelsea* and *Chelsea Chelsea Bang Bang*." By mentioning these books, the cover is relying on the success of her other work to propel the sales of *My Horizontal Life*. The cover of this specific work is unique to Handler because it explicitly describes in its image and text what the memoir will focus on, rather than including an image that would appeal to a greater audience. Handler's cover works well as an symptom of the themes present in the memoir, due to the

staging of the photo, and the content of the review on the cover, but it is in this way that Handler's memoir remains a foil for both Kaling and Fey's memoirs.

In contrast, Fey's cover does not reveal the many themes that arise in the memoir, but like Handler's, plays off the title of the work. The image is of Fey looking straight at the camera or viewer, dressed in a men's shirt, tie and hat. Along with the menswear, Fey's arms have been replaced with men's arms, so that one is crossed in front of her body, and the other positioned so that her face rests in the palm. This cover has sparked attention in the book, because of its unique use of a man's arms, rather than the cover made up entirely of Fey's image. In addition to the shock of the image of Fey with a man's arms, the portrait works well as a reiteration of the title. The rolled up sleeves and tie force readers to think of Fey as a casual authority figure, while her relaxed face and slight smile act as a symptom of Fey's sense of humor. Any reader would be able to discern what sort of writer Fey is by looking at the cover, because of the mixed images accompanied by the text on the cover as well.

In addition to the image on the cover, very little text is used to describe the book or its reception. Fey's name appears in large, white letters across the top of the cover, as the title of the work, *Bossypants*, appears in much smaller black print underneath Fey's name. Similar to Kaling or Handler's covers, the text runs across the top of the cover, in large text. Her name is the largest element on the cover, aside from the image, and it allows the reader to associate her name with the face on the cover. The author is the most important part of the cover, rather than the title. Above Fey's name is a single line stating "#1 National Bestseller," yet the reader is unsure of what newspaper or other ranking organization lists Fey's work as the national bestseller. Toward the bottom of the cover, written across Fey's portrait is a single line of a review from the *Los Angeles Times*, stating "Amazingly, absurdly, deliriously funny." While the national bestseller line is not

credited to any one organization, the inclusion of the review is notable, as this specific edition is a paperback. The inclusion of reviews and national rankings is useful to the reader, as it lends credibility to Fey as a writer, and helps Fey to combat her celebrity persona that has been thrust upon her. A reader unfamiliar with Fey's writing could assume her celebrity persona is what made *Bossypants* a "#1 National Bestseller," but the inclusion of a review that specifically comments on her writing as "amazingly, absurdly, deliriously funny" allows for the reader to evaluate the memoir for its writing, rather than its content. The simplicity of the cover and its visual elements allows Fey to be treated



Figure 9

cover photo. Written across the top of the cover is an excerpt of a review from the *New York Times*, stating, "[Kaling is] like Tina Fey's cool little sister. Or perhaps...the next

more as a memoirist and less as a celebrity comedian, all before the reader has had the chance to familiarize herself with the themes of the memoir.

Similarly, Mindy Kaling's cover capitalizes on endorsements in order to further identify her as a writer, rather than as a celebrity. Kaling, whose memoir was published after both Handler's and Fey's, uses as much text on the cover as the other two writers, in addition to a memorable

Nora Ephron.” This review is notable for its mention of Fey, as well as Ephron, further identifying these writers as part of a singular group of female comedian writers. But because Kaling is the youngest of these writers, and because her memoir was published after Fey, Kaling, and Ephron, the publisher relies on this text to identify herself as a writer first, and not a celebrity, to the reader. In addition to this review, a graphic is situated next to Kaling’s portrait, with the text “*New York Times* bestseller” the focal point of the graphic. This mention of *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* as a bestseller by *New York Times* standards works in the same way as the review and bestseller mention on Fey’s cover: the text is included in order to persuade the reader of the quality of the writing and entertainment value of the memoir, as a result of the good writing. Both the snippets of reviews and the mention of the memoir as a bestseller allow for Kaling—like Fey—to capitalize on the idea that she is a writer first.

Though Kaling’s cover contains more text than Fey’s or perhaps Handler’s, the memoir does also include a cover portrait of Kaling. She appears in the lower right hand corner of the cover, appearing to look either slightly pensive or confused, underneath the title *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?*, under which the subtitle, *(And Other Concerns)* appears. Her mouth, cocked to one side, and her eyes looking off frame convey the feeling of anxiety produced in the title. The backdrop of the cover is made to appear as wallpaper that is distinctly feminine in its use of pastel colors of pink and blue, in addition to the flowers and vases. Combined with Kaling’s bright pink dress and well-groomed appearance, the cover portrays femininity in all aspects. Like Fey, Kaling’s portrait is a direct visual interpretation of the title. It suggests that her concerns are that she is being left out of friendships, perhaps to echo the Everyday Woman persona the

reader finds Kaling emulating in the text. Because of the flowery background, as well as the fact that Kaling is positioned with her back against a wall, the reader gets the idea that Kaling is a wallflower, as she conveys anxiety and loneliness. The image the reader is sees Kaling as an unsure figure, with the same concerns as her readers, which helps her confront and dispel the idea that her celebrity persona reigns over her relatable one. This specific image is useful as it gives the reader a better idea of how to envision Kaling as a narrator, ensuring her control over the persona that the readers will encounter when reading the memoir. The visual is integral to Kaling's construction of the relatable, non-celebrity persona, similar to Fey.

How to Write a Memoir Using All Your Embarrassing Childhood Photos

I Forget Nothing: A Sensitive Kid Looks Back



Figure 10

While the cover photos provide much needed visual portrayal of the writers themselves, Fey and Kaling also include photos from their own personal collections throughout their texts. Each writer includes a few photographs from their childhoods, as well as a few from young adulthood. Both Fey and Kaling include a young photo of

themselves early in their memoirs, either in the introduction or immediately after. Kaling, whose memoir has been divided into sections, includes a photo of herself at a young age,

possibly around five or six years old on the title page for the section “I Forget Nothing: A Sensitive Kid Looks Back.” This section appears after the introduction and the chapter “Alternate Titles for This Book,” and sets the tone for the upcoming section on Kaling’s childhood. In the photo, she is sitting on a swing, wearing glasses, a striped shirt, looking at the camera, and appearing very different from the polished version of Kaling that the reader finds on the cover. The inclusion of this photo is important as it reiterates the theme of relating to her readers that Kaling is after for so much of the memoir. In this section, Kaling reflects on her childhood and recalls the various moments when she was bullied, or when she played sports. The photo, then, is included in order to give the reader a visual representation of the young Kaling that is the subject of the chapters that follow.



Figure 11

And because it is a photo in which the clothing, glasses and hairstyle are dated by Kaling’s terms, she is able to use it as evidence of her Everyday Woman status, presuming that readers also have similar photos in their personal collections as well.

Fey makes a similar move by including a photo of herself as a young teenager in the introduction, earlier than Kaling’s first photograph. In this particular section of the introduction, which appears toward the end, Fey is writing her reason for writing the book, which is to trace her life’s

steps to figure out how she got to be a famous writer and actress. She includes a series of photos to demonstrate her development as a person, the first of which is the photo of Fey

as a teenager. In the photo from Fey's personal collection, she is standing in what looks to be a school-issued gym uniform, wearing tall tube socks, standing with all her weight on one leg, looking at the camera. Presumably, Fey included this photo as a way of proving to the reader yet again that she is an Everyday Woman, who went through the same awkward stages of puberty as her readers. Yet, like Kaling, she reprints the photo in order to give the reader an idea of what young Fey looked like, so that when readers encounter anecdotes in which Fey was a young person, they are able to visualize her.

Professional Photo Shoots are “THE FUNNEST”

Fey's inclusion of her adolescent photo works a bit differently, though, because it



Figure 12

is coupled with a professional shot of Fey in order to demonstrate her journey of becoming a celebrity. This shot, which appears on the next page, is of Fey in a green, one shoulder dress, using both hands to hold her hair up onto her head, while she smiles and looks up and away from the camera, giving a glamorous effect to the photo. Obviously a more polished version of Fey, this photo is not from Fey's

personal collection, but rather a professional photo taken of Fey for promotional purposes for a time when she hosted *Saturday Night Live*. The photo negates the idea that Fey is an Everyday Woman, as she only presents the photo of herself as a young, awkward girl in order to dispel it by including a professional-grade photo of herself. Only women with

celebrity status are able to have their photos taken professionally and then reprint them in their memoir. Fey, while attempting to construct the Everyday Woman status, ultimately



Figure 13

fails because this photograph appears so soon after the photo from her personal collection.

Fey's introduction is not the only place in her memoir where the inclusion of the professionally photos works against her relatable persona. For example, in the chapter entitled "Amazing, Gorgeous, Not Like That," Fey is sure to include some of photos of her that have been taken professionally and edited with Photoshop.

She even goes so far as to include "the best Photoshop job [she] ever got" for the cover of the feminist magazine *Bust*. It is clear that Everyday Women do not have access to photographers who will use Photoshop to enhance their images, and because Fey includes this in her chapter, she works against the Everyday Woman persona she has constructed up until this point. Fey begins the chapter by writing:

People sometimes ask me, "What it like to do photo shoots for magazines?" "Do you enjoy that kind of thing?" Let me be completely honest here. Publicity and press junkets are just part of the job. Your work is what you really care about because your work is your craft and your craft is your art and photo shoots are THE FUNNEST! (Fey 147)

Here, Fey opens the chapter by stating that photo shoots are "just part of the job," but also giving the reader a sense that she is also being a bit sarcastic. The last line about

photo shoots being “THE FUNNEST,” written in capital letters, can be read in one of two ways: that Fey is legitimately gets excited for photo shoots, or that she abhors them and the entire process. The use of a made-up word to describe the photo shoot process invokes a younger persona, and gives the reader the idea that she is most likely being sarcastic in her “excitement” over the process. The entire chapter is dedicated to instructing the reader on what happens in a photo shoot, with detailed advice on what to do when posing, how to enjoy the process, and how to deal with what is said to you. The latter part of the chapter is dedicated to Fey’s stance on Photoshop, which is where the *BUST* magazine cover appears. She writes that “some people say [Photoshop is] a feminist issue,” to which she agrees, while also noting that Photoshop is here to stay (Fey 159). In discussing her stance on Photoshop, Fey walks the line between the Everyday Woman persona and the celebrity persona. While discussing Photoshop and her desire to have some part of her edited for the *BUST* cover, she becomes a relatable person, as many other women would care to have parts of their bodies edited to look the best if given the chance. Fey in this chapter demonstrates that though she is a celebrity, with access to a photographer and Photoshop, she is still a woman who is most concerned about making “a photo look as if [she] were caught on [her] best day in the best light” (Fey 160).

Similarly, Kaling also includes a chapter on being in a photo shoot. In the chapter “When You’re Not Skinny, This is What People Want You to Wear,” Kaling plays upon her insecurities in order to create a relatable persona for her readers, by demonstrating that she too has body issues. The first part of the chapter includes a photo of Kaling as a child in what looks to be a school photo, as Kaling is leaning against a prop, while

wearing a sweater with reindeer on it, large glasses, and sporting another short haircut. The caption reads, “Cosby sweater on, lovin’ life” (Kaling 191). The photo demonstrates what Kaling aimed to show with the photo from the introduction: that she also went through an awkward stage and that she is an Everyday Woman. The photo in this part of



Cosby sweater on, lovin’ life.

Figure 14

were to her. Yet when she does finally begin to speak about photo shoots, there is no photograph to accompany the anecdote of getting her photo taken for a magazine. In this way, Kaling remains more of a relatable persona than Fey, who shows her favorite Photoshop job in her memoir. Kaling does not include a photo from her photo shoot with *The Office* costar and friend Ellie Kemper for *People* magazine’s Most Beautiful People issue in 2011. In doing so, the emphasis is on the story, in which Kaling has issues with the gowns that do not fit her, yet the reader is still struck by her celebrity status of being

the chapter is used to complement what Kaling writes about herself: “Getting professionally beautified was all that I dreamed about doing when I was an asexual-looking little kid” (Kaling 191). Because she sets up the chapter in order to demonstrate her attempt to be considered a relatable figure, Kaling relies heavily on the photo in order to keep the “asexual-looking little kid” in mind as she progresses to write about her photo shoot experiences and how important they

named one of *People's* Most Beautiful People. In the absence of a photo from this shoot, Kaling and Fey are on equal ground as they walk the fine line between the Everyday Woman persona and the celebrity persona.

How to Prove You Actually Have a Day Job



Thomas Jefferson. Played, for dream-logic and financial reasons, by Alec Baldwin.

MAURY POVICH

Sally Hemings just called you a dog, Thomas Jefferson.

THOMAS JEFFERSON

I don't care. This is about Tracy. I rode a horse all the way from Heaven to tell him something.

Figure 15

they distract the reader from the persona that they are famous enough to have their photos appear on the cover of magazines. These scripts reprints play an integral role in demonstrating to the reader that they are dedicated to their craft and retelling their stories of being writers first.

Because both Fey and Kaling have written for television shows, their writing is part of their persona as well. In order to demonstrate that they are writers who happened to become celebrities, each includes stills from their shows as well as scripts to demonstrate their work. In doing so, Fey and Kaling don't necessarily perpetuate the persona of the Everyday Woman, rather,

Fey uses visuals of scripts when describing how *30 Rock* became a show in the chapter “*30 Rock: An Experiment to Confuse Your Grandparents*” when naming her

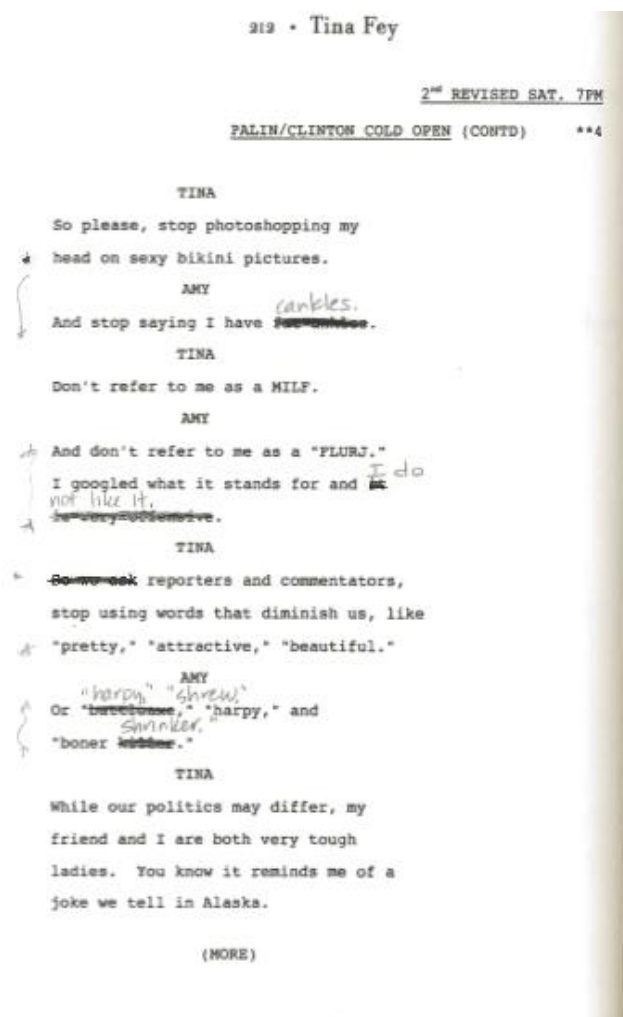


Figure 16

favorite jokes from the *30 Rock* writers. Rather than attempt to describe the jokes in the show, she reprints how they jokes appear in the script, perhaps for comedic effect. In reprinting these jokes, Fey demonstrates to the reader that she thinks of creating the show as a significant part of her career as a writer—and thus a significant part of her constructed persona. This is important to note because much of the memoir is dedicated to Fey’s experience writing and acting for either *30 Rock* or *Saturday Night Live*, and by familiarizing the reader with the work that went into creating the show, Fey shows the reader how invested she is in writing good comedy. This sets the stage for the chapter in which Fey details her experience in portraying Sarah Palin for *SNL*, for which she became immensely popular.

Even more important than documenting the comedy in *30 Rock* is this chapter on parodying Sarah Palin, entitled “Sarah, Oprah, and Captain Hook, or How to Succeed by Sort of Looking Like Someone Else.” In it, Fey writes about how she came to

parody Sarah Palin on *SNL*, complete with the full script of the first skit she acted in as Sarah Palin. She writes, "...Seth [Meyers] had written a very good sketch. I was not nervous at all, and doing that sketch on live TV was pure joy I had never before experienced as a performer" (Fey 208). In writing about her performance, she transcends the celebrity persona to one that is craft-driven. The reader recognizes the constructed writer-first persona that is not the one they have seen before from Fey; rather than an Everyday Woman persona, Fey demonstrates her willingness to be seen as a writer and performer who gets "pure joy" from appearing in good sketches. By reprinting the script in its entirety, with her handwritten notes, Fey forces the reader to see her as a writer and performer, rather than the celebrity who enjoys professional photo shoots. She grounds herself in the work that made her famous—parodying Sarah Palin for *Saturday Night Live*—in order to remind the reader that she is a writer and performer first.

Kaling includes scripts that work in a similar manner. Before she was a writer and actress on *The Office*, Kaling first wrote and starred in an off-Broadway play called *Matt & Ben*, which ultimately propelled her into a career of writing and acting for television. She writes about *Matt & Ben* in the chapter entitled, "Matt & Ben & Mindy & Brenda" (chapter twelve), where she also reproduces the first scene that she and her friend Brenda wrote for the play. Kaling writes, "I was finally paying my bills, but Brenda and I weren't doing anything creative...Because no one was hiring us to act or write, Brenda and I decided to create something to perform in ourselves" (Kaling 85). In the opening lines of the chapter, the reader is aware that Kaling was always looking to make a career out of writing or performing, which is something she ultimately achieved by writing for *The Office* and writing the memoir. But by including the script for *Matt & Ben* in this chapter,

Kaling, like Fey, signals to the reader that she takes pride in being a writer first, thereby dismissing the celebrity persona and constructing an alternate persona of the writer in her memoir.

Kaling is also sure to include photos of herself as a director and actress as well, primarily in chapter fourteen, “All About The Office.” In doing so, she continues to construct the persona of herself as a writer, most dedicated to the craft of writing comedy.

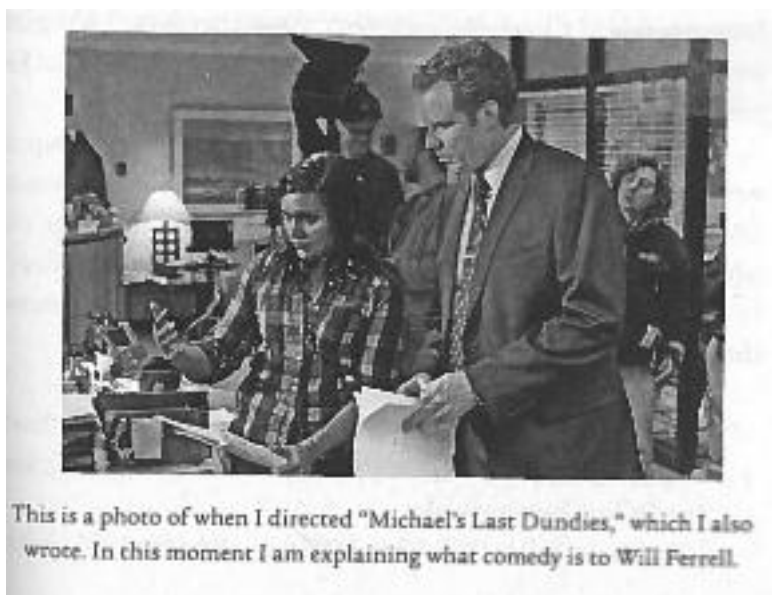


Figure 17

In this chapter, Kaling inserts a photo of herself directing an episode, as Will Ferrell looks on. This particular photo is of note because it attempts to show Kaling as an authority figure working on set, as she is particularly in tune to the comedic value of the episode, “Michael’s Last Dundies,” while also showing that she has been in contact with Will Ferrell. This additional persona of the producer/director Kaling, similar to the photos Fey included of herself in professional photo shoots, works in different ways regarding Kaling’s personas. She intends for the photo to be proof of her commitment to being a writer first, yet it also shows that she has some celebrity status, due to the inclusion of a famed comedy actor. But because the emphasis is on Kaling’s director abilities, the photo, like the scripts, forces the reader to accept her writer persona.

In this chapter, Kaling inserts a photo of herself directing an episode, as Will Ferrell looks on. This particular photo is of note because it attempts to show Kaling as an authority figure working on set, as she is particularly in tune

Visuals Are Your Friend in Memoir, Kinda

Having examined the numerous kinds of visual aids present in these women's memoirs, the reader comes to rely on them in order to gain a better understanding of the persona the women attempt to create for themselves in their work. In order to better counteract the persona of the celebrity that readers have already designated for each woman, each writer included visual representations of a more relatable persona. This was done to complement the themes that arise from the writing itself: rather than simply write about relatable issues of womanhood or writing styles, the writers included visual representations of themselves as children, teenagers, or in their workplace, in order to give the reader an actual image of the writer, to prevent the reader from projecting any other kind of persona onto the writer. This is true of Fey and Kaling's work, as they openly include chapters to combat the celebrity persona, yet Handler again is the outlier. Handler's single persona is one of a sexually empowered or deviant woman, and so her single image on the cover of the photo was designed to further present this theme to the reader before even reading the text. With no photos included inside the memoir, the reader is forced to read Handler as a static, singular persona of the unashamed sexual deviant. Her reader-invented persona and her textual persona are one in the same, and in fact exploited by the portrait on the cover.

Fey and Kaling, however, use their covers to create a more controlled persona. Each of their portraits are visual representations of the women they would like to be in their work, exemplified by the quirky, neurotic and comical versions of themselves on the cover. This is seen again in their inclusion of many photos from their personal

collections, as each of the photos selected for analysis in this chapter provide visual context for the constructed personas Fey and Kaling put forth throughout their memoirs. Fey and Kaling use photographs of themselves in various stages of their lives to prove that they are relatable women, who also went through stages of bad fashion, or awkward teenage years. Their use of these images are accurate portrayals of the relatable personas found in parts of their memoir, and provide an interesting tension with the celebrity persona that has been projected upon them by readers, but also one that they seem to perpetuate with some of the reprinted photos. Similarly, Fey and Kaling also work to ensure their status as writers dedicated to the craft of comedy writing is clear in the photos of each of the writers working on some aspect of their shows—either through the inclusion of scripts or photos that actively show the writers at work. These photos are perhaps the most important ones included in the memoirs, as the writers specifically chose these images to visually represent their constructed personas, so that the reader would identify them as career-minded women rather than women with the celebrity status that informs the readers' understanding of the memoirs.

GOODBYE

Conclusion, or Why This Matters to Me

As a creative nonfiction writer, I wanted to feel as if the memoirs I enjoyed reading were ones that were useful to me in my own writing, which was ultimately the goal of this project. After reading and getting to know each of the writers, my intent was to demonstrate that the various selves they present to the reader were ones distinctly different from non-celebrity memoirs. But instead, I located various personas that are in fact useful to me and other writers. Fey and Kaling present alternate, constructed personas when it seems most beneficial to them, in this case, their memoirs. Each has a distinct voice and persona that has already been imposed onto them by their fans or the general public, based upon their work as actresses in successful television shows. But in their memoirs, they can create a persona in order to combat the public's preconceived notion.

Kaling demonstrates her own neurotic, anxious persona rather than the one of the narcissistic, immature character of Kelly Kapoor, whom she plays on *The Office*. Kaling constructs this persona carefully, through her use of home photographs, numerous subheadings, essays on relatable topics, and her overall style and voice, in order to display her true self to the reader. At times, she fails to stop the publicly informed persona from being the dominant one—when she speaks of being named one of *People* magazine's Most Beautiful People in 2011, for example, or when she notes that she attends the Writer's Guild of America gala. Though these events may be inform the public persona she is working against, ultimately these are aspects of her life that she is

unable, or unwilling, to cover up entirely. These small instances of celebrity are ultimately overshadowed by the reader's understanding of her work as a whole. In considering the entirety of the text, the reader is inherently aware that Kaling's goal is not to be compared to other female comedians or writers, rather, her main goal is to be thought of as a writer first, and through her memoir, she states her case, relying on her overall tone and comedy in her writing. In addition, she includes chapters on being a writer, by giving the reader thorough context for her career as a writer, beginning with her stint as a co-writer for *Matt & Ben*, working briefly at *Saturday Night Live*, and then working as a writer, director and producer on *The Office*. With the inclusion of these chapters, Kaling's memoir is focused on her career as a writer, rather than her life as the character she plays on television.

Fey does this similarly in her memoir. Having achieved fame by becoming the first female head writer at *Saturday Night Live*, she has gained notoriety as a woman in charge, which has led the public to assume that she is uncomfortable in the position. But she negates this persona first with the title of the book; by titling her memoir *Bossypants*, she works with the public persona of her as a boss figure in order combat her publicly constructed persona. In her introduction, she writes, "I've learned a lot over the past ten years about what it means to be the boss of people. In most cases being a good boss means hiring talented people and then getting out of the way," (Fey 5). This is perhaps why some chapters are dedicated to detailing her experiences in putting together a team of writers for *30 Rock*—to showcase the talent that she found for her show. From this point on in her memoir, Fey is able to use her personal anecdotes in order to construct her own relatable, yet advice-doling, persona for the reader. Similar to Kaling, she is

occasionally must write about parts of her life that highlight her celebrity status, yet her attempt to construct a different persona shows that she is aware of the preconceived notions the audience may bring to their reading of her memoir. But, by working with this public persona, she is able to dispel it, and rely primarily upon the text, the comedic timing, photographs and other visuals in order to effectively create a persona of her own.

But, what difference does this make for any memoirist? In tracing the origins and patterns of female memoir, I have identified the various themes that arise when female celebrities—more specifically, female celebrity *writers*—pen their memoirs. A female author writing her own life's story will most likely write about herself as a daughter, sister, wife, partner, caretaker, or other form of identity linked to another character, as men might write about themselves as sons, brothers, partners and husbands in their memoirs. Yet the difference is that in these specific instances, these female writers are writing to combat the female personas that are imposed upon them as women working in television who may have to also combat the issue of acting as authority figures in their careers—this was arguably one of the main factors for Fey's decision to write a memoir. The need to differentiate is what makes Fey and Kaling thematic concerns in their memoirs notable, as the many themes were necessary in order for the constructed personas to be the dominant voice in the memoirs.

A large portion of memoirs will include a reference to a traumatic event, in childhood or in parenting, as Ben Yagoda, author of *Memoir: A History*, identifies these popular categories of memoirs that are prevalent in the U.S. and the U.K. But *Bossypants* and *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* do only some of these things. Yagoda states that they would fall into the “mid-level celebrity” category, and so should be of little

substance for a nonfiction writer, yet here I disagree. In reading these texts, Kaling and Fey have established a precedent that is easily recreated in female nonfiction: the use of multiple personas. It is possible to write a memoir in which there is a mix of advice from a career woman, anecdotes of personal relationships, anecdotes of personal struggle in careers, and essay-istic pieces on physical beauty, men who put their shoes on too slowly, being friends with gay men, and on having unorthodox parents. These themes are presented to the reader in vignettes, alternating in voice, pacing, and narrative point of view, while complemented with visuals. These elements combine in the female celebrity memoir in order to effectively create a controllable persona that would be effective for a female non-celebrity memoir.

While the non-celebrity memoirist does not have to accept or dismiss a prior persona assigned to them by the public, there are prejudices readers may bring with them into a reading, and so this technique of integrating various stylistic techniques are ultimately relevant. Any nonfiction writer is subject to prejudices of the reader who might judge the work based upon its subject matter, and not the manner in which it was written, and so to combat this potential reading, nonfiction writers may integrate these numerous stylistic techniques to make the focus of the work the writing itself, as Fey and Kaling have done. For example, if a writer can shift the focus from a traumatic event to *how* the event is written about, the reader is more likely to accept the persona of the writer as he or she wishes to be seen, rather than the reader-informed victimized persona. In this way, writers have the ability to manipulate the various stylistic techniques employed by Fey and Kaling and apply it to their own work, in a way that still works within the definition of creative nonfiction. These comedic celebrity memoirs perhaps create another sub-

genre similar to the Yagoda-defined “mid-level celebrity” memoirs, in that non-celebrity memoirists could also recreate and imitate the visual elements in the memoirs, as well as the voice and treatment of the celebrity and the constructed persona. Writers such as myself can use these techniques in order to craft a persona on our own terms—by including visual elements and a specifically constructed voice in a similar manner as Fey or Kaling. As such, the creativity of creative nonfiction is expanded to include any visual tactics or breaks in narrative in order to create the persona the writer wishes to create. Creative nonfiction can be expanded to include the various stylistic, structural and organizational techniques, proving that Fey and Kaling are symptom of not only a change in the celebrity memoir, but perhaps female memoir itself.

Chicken and Waffles: Mindy Kaling

One of my committee members teaches an undergraduate course entitled Theory and Practice of Tutoring Writing, for which I am the teaching assistant. The course is required if students wish to work for the university Writing Center, and so the entire semester is geared toward training students to become tutors. An entire unit is dedicated to personal statements, in which students are introduced to persona and an exercise entitled “Chicken & Waffles.” In this multi-part exercise, students are first asked to write a paragraph on their own birth and early childhood. They then read first-person fictional narratives written by Charles Dickens, J.D. Salinger, Stephanie Meyer, and Mark Twain, and identify the specific rules one would have to follow in order to write like that author. Then, using those rules, students are asked to write about chicken and waffles, like Mark Twain’s Huck Finn, Charles Dickens’ David Copperfield, or Stephanie Meyer’s Bella

Swan. The final part of the exercise is that students revise what they had written about their birth and early childhoods to sound like one of the authors using the rules they identified in another first-person fictional narrative.

I adore this exercise. Not only are the results sometimes humorous, but I feel it is useful for students to get an idea of persona and how it works within a text, and to understand that emulating a persona is useful in their own writing, particularly when it comes to writing personal statements. Everyone has a persona, and writing like someone else makes students understand the importance of having their own voice in their writing.

In my examination of *Bossypants*, *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* and *My Horizontal Life*, I've come to know these texts, the writers, and the personas in the memoirs well. To further illustrate the meaning of this project to my growth as a writer in creative nonfiction, I chose to demonstrate how the themes and stylistic choices can be recreated in my own writing, and perhaps by other writers as well, and to do so, I wrote the "Chicken & Waffles" exercise. I imitated Mindy Kaling because her early childhood chapters take up more space in the memoir, and I felt I could relate on a personal level, as so much of my own writing is focused on my family. In her early chapters, Kaling gives a full character portrait of her mother and father, and brother, in a series of anecdotes about her weight, her relationship to athletics, and her early friendships. Because of these themes, I felt she was a good choice for me to emulate in a "Chicken & Waffles" exercise.

The first part of the exercise was to write about my own birth and early childhood so that I could identify my own voice and persona when I chose to write about myself.

And so here is what is dubbed “Exercise 2.1: What about your birth and early childhood?”:

My mother says I was planned, which is only notable because my older brother wasn't. My mom has told me that she got pregnant pretty easily, though she told me this sometime in my teenaged years, as a deterrent to sexual activity. “All you father had to do was look at me and I was pregnant,” she told me.

My father joined the Navy right around the time I was born. So though I was born in Arkansas, my father was sent to Newport, Rhode Island for Naval Justice School soon after, where we lived for a few months. We moved to Corpus Christi, Texas, my father's first real duty station, where we lived in a tiny house for a family of four. I have no memory of any of this.

The next part of the exercise is to examine another first-person narrative in order to identify a set of rules to apply to a revision of my own writing, known as “Exercise 2.2: Revision.” I chose to use Kaling's chapter three, “Chubby for Life,” as this is the first chapter in which she writes about her own childhood:

I don't remember a time when I wasn't chubby. Like being Indian, being chubby feels like it is just a part of my permanent deal. I remember being in first grade, in Mrs. Gilmore's class at Fiske Elementary School, and seeing that Ashley Kemp, the most popular girl in our class, weighed only thirty-seven pounds. We knew this because we weighed her on the industrial postal scale they kept in the teacher's supply closet. I was so envious. I snuck into the supply closet later that same day to weigh myself. I was a whopping sixty-eight pounds.

Some of the first math I understood was that I was closer to twice Ashley's weight than to her weight.

“Don't be closer to *twice* a friend's weight than to her actual weight,” I told myself. This little mantra has helped me stave off obesity for more than two decades. (Kaling 11)

With this first-person account of Kaling's childhood, I was able to identify a set of rules of the writing style. They are:

- Proper nouns
- Past tense verbs
- Inner thoughts written as dialogue
- Many sentences begin with “I”
- Shorter, choppy sentences

With these rules, I revised my “Exercise 2.1: What about your birth and early childhood?” using the rules I had identified from Kaling’s chapter:

So, once, my mom told me when we were riding in our Toyota minivan how easily she’d gotten pregnant with me. “All you father had to do was look at me and I was pregnant,” she told me. Ever since then, I’ve always told myself, “Self, don’t even tell your daughter how easily you got pregnant. Because gross.”

If anything, I’ll tell my daughter how much it sucked moving so often, even if I don’t remember much of the early years. And she’ll be grateful and understanding because I will have raised an awesome kid. That is some of the first parenting advice I have ever given myself: raise an awesome kid.

In this completed exercise, I have read Kaling’s work in order to identify rules to write like her, applied them to my own writing, and produced a piece of writing about my own birth and early childhood that sounds similar to Kaling’s work. After this short exercise, I chose to write the “Chicken & Waffles” in long form, by using Kaling’s entire memoir as a means of locating rules for a longer piece of writing.

In preparing to write, I identified a set of rules to follow from a few chapters in *Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me?* They are:

- Conversational tone due to colloquial language (“like,” “you guys,” “totally”)
- Short, choppy sentences for comedic timing
- Use of photos from family collection
- Excessive punctuation
- Dialogue written as script
- Titles given to friends or characters in script
- Italics for emphasis
- Use of lists

The first, and perhaps most notable trait of Kaling’s writing, was the conversational tone used by Kaling. When reading her memoir, many of the anecdotes felt like they had been previously verbally expressed to a friend or family member, and that she was simply transcribing these conversations for her book. In order to capture this tone, I attempted to

include more colloquial language, such as “You guys,” and sudden transitions such as “So...” or “Anyway...” Through these specific moves, I was able to invoke the conversational tone the Kaling uses.

Similar to the conversational tone is Kaling’s comedic timing in print. This can be especially hard when writing a book, as an actor doesn’t deliver the lines. Instead, the timing is up to the writer to ensure that the reader is reading the lines with the correct

So, yeah, on my fourth consecutive visit to Sunshine Cupcakes, I was paying for my cupcake when the female manager (cupcake apron, Far Side glasses, streak of pink hair: the universal whimsical bakery lady uniform, as far as I can tell) approached me.

FAR SIDE: You’ve come here a lot this week.

ME (mouthful of a generous sample): Yeah, I love this place, man.

FAR SIDE: We know you’re on Twitter. (Leaning in conspiratorially) And if you’re willing to tweet about loving Sunshine Cupcakes, this cupcake (gesturing to the one I was buying) is free.

I did not know it was possible to be *triple* offended. First of all, Manager Woman, if you notice that a thirty-two-year-old woman is coming to your cupcake bakery every day for a week, keep that information to yourself. I don’t need to be reminded of how poor my food choices are on a regular basis. Second, how cheap and/or poor do you think I am? A cupcake costs two bucks! You think I’m miserly enough to think, like, Oh goody, I can save those two bucks for some other tiny purchase later today! And third, even if I were to buy into this weird bribery situation where I endorse your product, you think the cost of

Figure 18

more hard-and-fast stylistic moves that I could easily integrate into my “Chicken & Waffles.” By using lists as a structural move, I was able to emulate Kaling’s chapter “The Exact Level of Fame I Want,” which is divided into eleven sections, all on the topic of

timing. To do this, Kaling uses punctuation to ensure the timing of her humor is received and understood by her audience, perhaps drawing on her experience in writing scripts for theatre and television shows. As a result, her short choppy sentences were a writerly move I was sure to emulate for comedic timing.

The rest of the rules were less craft-driven, and

how famous Kaling would like to be. I attempted to do the same, by using a few moments from my childhood as examples related to the title of the piece. While using lists, I was also sure to integrate dialogue as script, as Kaling does in various parts of her memoir, seen in chapter sixteen, “Contributing Nothing at *Saturday Night Live*,” when she imagines a conversation between her and Kristen Wiig, and again in chapter twenty, “The Day I Stopped Eating Cupcakes.” In this chapter, Kaling relays a conversation with a woman in a bakery, who attempts to get Kaling to endorse the cupcakes because she eats there often. Kaling’s characterization of the woman is based on her cartoonish glasses, which leads Kaling to call the woman “Far Side Glasses” in the chapter. By giving characters alternate titles, Kaling is able to maintain discretion, while injecting humor into her script-style dialogue.

With all these rules in mind, I have written a piece about various moments from my life, in which my father is a major figure. Though the following is not about chicken and waffles, I was able to successfully capture Kaling’s persona and identify the governing rules needed to write like Kaling.

* * *

Things I Have Done That Make My Father Laugh Incredibly Hard

I can name a handful of things I have done from when I was a small child to the present that make my father laugh like he’s about to die. Even just mentioning “That one time Sarah...” can make my dad start laughing his high-pitched, true laugh, make his eyes water, while also leaving him gasping for air. And when I say a handful of things, I mean, like, two gigantic handfuls. For some reason, the things I do just make my father

laugh super hard, then wipe his eyes, and say “Oh, Sarah...” These are just a few of the things that bring my father to tears:

When I was four-years-old and set off the alarm clock my grandparents had just given me by accident:

This is only funny because 1) I was a small, helpless child and 2) my father has the episode on camera. My younger brother had just been born (thus my grandparent’s visit from Arkansas to our house in California), so my dad had the video camera out a lot. My grandma and grandpa gave me a Winnie-the-Pooh old-school alarm clock, one with the bells on top and the hammer that goes back and forth. I remember turning the crank on the back a bunch, and then forgetting about it and just going to bed. It went off at like 10 at night, and scared the ever-living shit out of me. I brought it out to my father, who cruelly taped me as I explained what happened, and tried not to cry from being so scared. My mom and my grandparents looked on as I fiddled with the hem of my nightgown and told them. “It scared me to deaf!”* My dad will watch this tape occasionally because he loves how scared I was and because he still has a VHS player in the house for some reason. Probably just to watch it over and over.

When, in fifth grade, I got up and walked out of the classroom because I thought the front desk lady had called my name, but instead called Zachary Urmacher:

Yeah, I just got up and left. “Zachary Urmacher” sounds literally *nothing* like “Sarah Bustamante.” When I got to the front desk, and said I had been paged, the Front Desk Lady just kind of stared at me.

* I did not go deaf. I had an adorable fear-induced speech impediment.

Front Desk Lady: Can I help you?

Misplaced Confidence Sarah: Yeah, I was called up here?

FDL: Who are you?

MCS: (Getting annoyed) Sarah from Mr. Anderson's class. You just called me.

FDL: Uh, no, we called Zachary Urmacher.

MCS: Oh.

FDL: Yeah. But can you take his lunch to him?

I got back to my class (with Zachary's lunch, I'm not an a-hole), and literally everyone in the class yelled, "HI, ZACH!" I crawled under my desk. Again, my father almost dies from laughing too hard.

When I fell down the stairs while rushing to leave for Sunday mass:

My dad has always been a stickler for being on time. Blame the military, but my father hates being late, and this goes double for being late to mass. So I was about 14 or 15, and I started playing my violin with the church choir, and my mother sang. My mom and I had to get there early for "rehearsal," which really just meant that we looked around the back of the church for half an hour to find our music stands, and then just winged it during mass. It was almost like being in a real band.

My dad knew that I was not an early-riser, but that I had to leave like an hour before him and my brothers, and so he's calling to me from the bottom of the stairs. I'm all dressed up because it's mass, and my dad forbids us from wearing jeans, and because my mother wants me to dress like a woman, not an androgynous teenager. So, I'm wearing these black, slip-on chunk heel things. They weren't boots, but they weren't

heels, it was a weird, god-awful hybrid. The sole on these things made me feel like I was wearing bricks on my feet.

So my dad's calling me, and I'm rushing down the stairs. My left chunk-soled-foot gets caught on the carpet, and then so does my right, and then I tumble down four or five stairs until I land kneeling in front of the crucifix my dad has hanging on the wall at the bottom of the stairs. I'm so pious, you guys.

My dad starts laughing, but in order to make him seem like not a dick, I have to tell his side, in his words: "I could see the look of panic on your face as you fell, which is why I laughed...it just got worse and worse and then suddenly you weren't in sight anymore. The next thing I know you're kneeling in front of Jesus."

Later, when I saw my dad and brothers entering the church, I rubbed my knee and mouthed "Ow," and he lost it all over again.

When I sprayed myself in the face with No-Chew spray:

Yeah, this happened. My husband and I had just bought a new couch, and our dogs had torn the old one to shit. Seriously, they just took the upholstery in the back and ripped it right up. And then the little bastards gnawed on the two-by-fours inside. So new couch = preventive measures. I bought some No-Chew Spray, simply for the wording on the label: "Deter your chomping chum from chewing furniture, drapes, bandages and more with this with this Top Paw Bitter No Chew Spray!" You had me at "chomping chum."*

* I'm a sucker for alliteration.

The label told me to test a small area of upholstery before spraying the whole couch. Let me be clear here: I never do this. It's stupid. If it stains, then I'm calling the company and raising hell. This is America. But, this time I thought I would actually test the small area, since it was a new couch that *we* had bought together. Ugh, marriage. Just kidding. The next part was to put the spray on your dog's tongue, so they know that taste is bad, and won't chew. This seemed like animal cruelty, but I loved this couch, so bottom's up, guys.

I held the spray bottle to a few paper towels to spread on the couch, pushed the spray-thing down, and the spray ricocheted off the paper towels and *into my face!* In my eyes, nose and mouth. Literally the opposite place it was supposed to go.

The next few minutes involved me pawing at my face a lot, dipping my head into a sink full of water, drinking orange juice straight from the carton, and brushing my lips with toothpaste. Not my teeth, but my lips. And stupidly, my very first thought was, *Oh shit, I have to make dinner tonight. What if the spray gets into the food?* As if that was a possibility.

So I realized after about 10 minutes that my two dogs were just sitting there, watching me run around the apartment. I had the spray in my mouth, but they didn't. I got vindictive. I pried open their mouths and wiped the spray-soaked paper towels on their tongues. Then all three of us sat on the floor moving the taste around in our mouths.

I relayed this story to my mother and father via Skype, and my dad laughed so hard he disappeared from the screen for a while. He resurfaced with a handkerchief. "Oh, Sarah...you crack me up."

Yeah, I know, Dad.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1.

My Horizontal Life: A Collection of One-night Stands – Chelsea Handler, 2005

1. Look Who's Having Sex with Mommy
 - Handler as a young child sneaks into her parent's bedroom and takes a photo of them having sex
2. The Beginning of the End
 - Anecdote of the first one-night stand Handler remembers
3. Dumb and Dumber
 - Teenage Handler and friend spend summer at Martha's Vineyard, drinking and partying
4. Guess Who's Leaving Through the Window?
 - Handler, still living at home with her parents as a twentysomething, brings home a black man, only to be discovered by her father the next morning
5. My Little Nugget
 - Handler's pseudo one-night stand with a little person while on a trip with her sister and friend
6. Desperado
 - After a rough break-up, Handler goes out with friends to be taken home by a man with a weird sexual
7. Skid Mark
 - Anecdote of a one-night stand that ends with Handler leaving her stained underwear at a man's house, for fear he thinks they're hers
8. Thunder
 - On Handler's short, sexually driven relationship with a male stripper
9. Shrinky Dink
 - Handler relates her sexual experience with a man with a small penis
10. Don't Believe a Word I Say
 - When Handler encounters a man she slept with at a restaurant, she pretends to be her own twin sister, lying to avoid an awkward encounter with him
11. The Cookie Monster
 - Handler describes a roommate, whom she calls "Dumb-Dumb," and her attempts to get "Dumb-Dumb" to sleep with a man
12. Doctor, Doctor
 - Handler visits an attractive gynecologist and goes sailing with him, only to discover he's gay
13. Oh, Shut Up Already!
 - Introduction of Handler's black friend Shoniqua and a work trip they took together, wherein Shoniqua attempts to get Handler to sleep with someone they just met
14. A Wedding Story
 - Handler introduces her gay friend Nathan, whom she invites to be her date to her sister's wedding, yet he disrupts all the wedding festivities

15. Overboard

- “Dumb-Dumb” and Handler go on a cruise together and Handler has sex with a nineteen-year-old by accident

16. Out of the Closet

- Handler goes to her friend Nathan’s high school reunion and makes a scene by making up lies about herself, and pretending to be married to Nathan

17. Rerun

- Handler attends a costume party, and gets caught breaking in to her own apartment by her landlord, whom she was sleeping with

18. False Alarm

- Shoniqua and Handler are on another business trip, and Handler attempts to sleep with a man she meets, though he does drugs and is unable to perform

Acknowledgments

Appendix 2.

Bossypants — Tina Fey, 2011

1. Introduction

- Fey addresses the reader and attempts to discern his/her reasons for purchasing her book

2. Origin Story

- On Fey’s early childhood, includes the story behind the scar on her face

3. Growing Up and Liking It

- Fey recounts her sexual maturation, from getting her period to her first trip to the gynecologist at 23 years old

4. All Girls Must Be Everything

- Fey lists what women can find wrong with their bodies, as well as the traits a perfect woman must have, and her own physical traits

5. Delaware County Summer Showtime!

- Fey’s summer job as a teenager, working at a children’s theatre putting on productions, and making her first gay friends

6. That’s Don Fey

- On Fey’s father—a depiction of him as a firm but fair figure in her childhood and adulthood

7. Climbing Old Rag Mountain

- Fey’s experience in college climbing a mountain at night with a boy she liked, only to find out he was interested in someone else

8. Young Men’s Christian Association

- Stories of Fey’s first job after college, working the front desk at a YMCA in Chicago

9. The Windy City, Full of Meat

- Fey begins working at the Second City improv group in Chicago, essentially marking the beginning of her career as a writer and actor

10. My Honeymoon, or A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again Either

- The title plays off David Foster Wallace’s “A Supposedly Fun Thing I’ll Never Do Again,” about his cruise experience—Fey uses this to tell the story of her ruined honeymoon on a cruise
11. The Secrets of Mommy's Beauty
 - In a list-structured chapter, Fey tells the “secrets” of her beauty routine
 12. Remembrances of Being Very Very Skinny
 - Paired with the following chapter, a bulleted list of things Fey remembers about being thin
 13. Remembrances of Being a Little Bit Fat
 - Similarly, a bulleted list of things Fey remembers about being overweight
 14. A Childhood Dream, Realized
 - Fey begins working for *Saturday Night Live* as a writer, lists what she has learned from Lorne Michaels, and how it affects her managerial style
 15. Peeing in Jars with Boys
 - Select anecdotes about Fey’s experience at *SNL*, from her favorite sketch to answering the question of “What the difference between male and female comedians?”
 16. I Don't Care If You Like It
 - Subtitled, “One in a Series of Love Letters to Amy Poehler,” Fey doles out advice to females in the workplace
 17. Amazing, Gorgeous, Not Like That
 - Fey addresses the reader directly, instructing them on what happens during a professional photoshoot
 18. Dear Internet
 - Fey responds to various critics from celebrity news websites
 19. 30 Rock: An Experiment to Confuse Your Grandparents
 - On *30 Rock*’s conception, Fey’s favorite jokes from the writers, the show’s reception, and how the show is filmed
 20. Sarah, Oprah, and Captain Hook
 - How Fey came to act in the Sarah Palin sketches on *SNL* (complete with scripts written by Seth Meyers for Fey and Amy Poehler), while filming *30 Rock* and preparing for her daughter’s birthday party
 21. There's a Drunk Midget in My House
 - Fey’s failed attempt at breastfeeding and instead using formula
 22. A Celebrity's Guide to Celebrating the Birth of Jesus
 - Fey recounts the past few Christmases, and how she and her husband split the time between his and her families
 23. Juggle This
 - On being a working mom and how it affects her work and her relationship with her daughter
 24. The Mother's Prayer for Its Daughter
 - A “prayer,” in which Fey lays out all the bad things mothers hope never happen to their daughters, including getting tattoos and majoring in acting
 25. What Turning Forty Means to Me
 - Entire chapter: “I need to take my pants off as soon as I get home. I didn’t

used to have to do that. But now I do.”

26. What Should I Do with My Last Five Minutes?

- On the question of whether or not to have a second child, and what to do after *30 Rock*

Acknowledgments

Appendix 3.

Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (And Other Concerns) — Mindy Kaling, 2011

Hello

1. Introduction
 - FAQ exchange between reader and Kaling
2. Alternate Titles for This Book
 - List of “rejected” titles for the memoir

I Forget Nothing: A Sensitive Kid Looks Back

3. Chubby for Life
 - On being a slightly overweight child and being teased for it in school
4. I Am Not an Athlete
 - Kaling describes various childhood experiences in riding bicycles, playing Frisbee and swimming
5. Don’t Peak in High School
 - Advice for female teenaged readers
6. Is Everyone Hanging Out Without Me? (Or, How I Made My First Real Friend)
 - Kaling describes pre-teen friendships and how she came to be friends with Mavis, an outcast

I Love New York and It Likes Me Okay

7. Failing at Everything in the Greatest City on Earth
 - On Kaling’s move to New York City and her struggles to find work as a television writer
8. The Exact Level of Fame I Want
 - List detailing how famous Kaling would like to be one day
9. Karaoke Etiquette
 - Short chapter on Kaling’s karaoke observations
10. Day Jobs
 - Kaling’s day job as an au pair for two children and her attempts to find work in the television industry
11. Best Friend Rights And Responsibilities
 - A manifesto of how to be a best friends, according to Kaling, in direct address
12. Matt & Ben & Mindy & Brenda
 - On writing, directing and acting in *Matt & Ben*, with best friend, and the play making it to off-Broadway; signals the start of Kaling’s career

Hollywood: My Good Friend Who Is Also A Little Embarrassing

13. Types of Women in Romantic Comedies Who Are Not Real
 - List of female archetypes in romantic comedies
14. All About *The Office*
 - Kaling's description of getting the writing job, acting as Kelly Kapoor, and the benefits of the show ("Becoming a Little Bit Famous")
15. Franchises I Would Like to Reboot
 - A list of movies that Kaling would like to see remade
16. Contributing Nothing at *Saturday Night Live*
 - On working at *SNL* during a hiatus between seasons of *The Office* as a guest writer
17. Roasts Are Terrible
 - Short chapter on why Kaling dislikes the comedy in roasts
18. My Favorite Eleven Moments in Comedy
 - A list of Kaling's favorite jokes from movies and television
19. How I Write
 - Kaling's habits when writing and how she becomes productive
20. The Day I Stopped Eating Cupcakes
 - Anecdote on Kaling being singled out by a cupcake shop owner for eating there often
21. Somewhere in Hollywood Someone Is Pitching This Movie
 - Kaling's dream of writing a movie, and her list of movies executives are interested in

The Best Distraction in the World: Romance and Guys

22. Someone Explain One Night Stands to Me
 - On being afraid of having a stranger in her house, thereby not understanding why one-night stands occur
23. "Hooking Up" Is Confusing
 - On misunderstanding the term "hooking up"
24. I Love Irish Exits
 - Anecdotes on Kaling's love of leaving a party without saying goodbye
25. Guys Need to Do Almost Nothing to Be Great
 - Essentially a list of things Kaling looks for in a partner
26. Non-Traumatic Things That Have Made Me Cry
 - Various events, movie characters, music albums and other things that have made Kaling cry
27. Jewish Guys
 - Kaling's observations about Jewish men
28. Men and Boys
 - Kaling's wish for a mature man
29. In Defense of Chest Hair
 - Short chapter on why men need to keep chest hair
30. Married People Need to Step It Up

- Married people need to be better in setting an example for single people
31. Why Do Men Put on Their Shoes So Slowly?
- Short chapter: exploring the question in the title

My Appearance: The Fun and the Really Not Fun

32. When You're Not Skinny, This is What People Want You to Wear
- List of clothing Kaling has been made to wear for photo shoots; anecdote about somewhat-positive photo shoot experience
33. These are the Narcissistic Photo in My BlackBerry
- Reprints of self-portraits of Kaling with explanations
34. Revenge Fantasies While Jogging
- Kaling daydreams of revenge when running in imagined scenarios

My All-Important Legacy

35. Strict Instructions for My Funeral
- List of things to be done for Kaling's funeral arrangements
36. A Eulogy for Mindy Kaling, by Michael Schur
- Fake eulogy written for Kaling by friend and *The Office* coworker, Michael Schur
37. Good-bye
- FAQ exchange between reader and Kaling; chapter ends like a letter

Acknowledgements

Appendix 4.

I Feel Bad About My Neck, And Other Thoughts on Being a Woman — Nora Ephron, 2006

1. I Feel Bad About My Neck
 - Ephron writes about how she hates the look of her neck now that she's older
2. I Hate My Purse
 - History of Ephron's purse carrying habits
3. Serial Monogamy: A Memoir
 - On cooking as a means of writing about relationships
4. On Maintenance
 - List of the elements of beauty Ephron keeps up with
5. Blind As a Bat
 - On not being able to see without glasses
6. Parenting in Three Stages
 - Parenting a small child, an adolescent and an adult
7. Moving On
 - The story of Ephron's loved apartment in New York City
8. Me and JFK: Now It Can Be Told
 - On Ephron's work as an intern in the JFK administration
9. Me and Bill: The End of Love

- Ephron's disdain for Clinton after the Lewinsky scandal
10. Where I Live
 - Ephron lists where she lives: New York City, her apartment, her neighborhood, her desk, and her kitchen
 11. The Story of My Life in 3,500 Words or Less
 - Mini-memoir in short vignettes
 12. The Lost Strudel or *Le Strudel Perdu*
 - On searching for a place that makes cabbage strudel
 13. On Rapture
 - On being caught up in a book, and the search to feel this way again
 14. What I Wish I'd Known
 - Entire chapter is one long list, each "lesson" Ephron has learned is one sentence
 15. Considering the Alternative
 - On age and aging, and having to think about death while maintaining a sense of optimism (Perhaps a chapter hinting at Ephron's own illness)
- Acknowledgements

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