

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Authorizing the Self: Negotiating Normality in Contemporary American Memoir

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This study examines the contemporary American memoirs *Goat* (2004) by Brad Land, *Prozac Diary* (1998) by Lauren Slater, and *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* (1976) by Maxine Hong Kingston to reveal how these texts push traditional thematic and genre boundaries as well as conceptions of minority identity. Their inclusion of fictional aspects, episodic structure, narrative excesses, and non-teleological endings work to enhance their status as sociocultural critique and protest.

This dissertation utilizes a social oppression angle within disability studies to demonstrate the overlapping processes and experiences of marginalization faced by these disparate protagonists who are dis-abled due to their undesired bodily variations and their failure to meet sociocultural standards of appropriate embodied behavior. Society is ideologically unwilling to accommodate or accept the differences the protagonists possess. Such a frame expands the artificial and culturally constructed notion of disability by illustrating the ways that discourse and ideologies of embodied normalcy intersect to constitute various minority identities as incompetent and

unworthy. The texts bear witness to each protagonists' struggle to cultivate meaningful subjectivity and reject passive victim status; however, their resulting survivor subjectivities are both resistant to and complicit with hegemonic tenets.

This literary project augments ongoing work in minority, identity, autobiography, cultural, and disability studies that deconstructs essentialist paradigms while reinforcing the important cultural and literary work of contemporary memoir. Moreover, it fills a critical gap with respect to *Goat* and *Prozac Diary*, bringing these two texts into the critical discussion of autobiography. Finally, this dissertation illustrates that memoir is uniquely positioned within literary genres to navigate the interconnectedness of identity, subjectivity, and ideology, thus challenging readers to confront the injustice of a sociocultural structure that sanctions these inequities in the first place.