

Cybersecurity Stories: Personal Narrative Identity

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### **Abstract**

This narrative essay highlights the small and seemingly random moments in my life that have shaped and molded me into the person I am today. Narrative identity concepts were drawn from articles by McAdams, Nguyen, and Smith, and how these pivotal moments helped transition from my early uncertain and insecure years to shaping my current career trajectory. Moments like working at a sushi restaurant, to long talks with my cousin, attending Old Dominion University, and working at Leidos, seemingly every day, normal, random events, collectively have led to a unified narrative identity that focuses on growth and development in transitioning from a student to a cybersecurity professional.

Growing up, I was an overly ambitious kid. I wanted to be an astronaut, a wrestler, or whatever sounded cool or inspiring at the time. Going through high school, I felt as if most of my peers already had a plan, whether it be a doctor, engineer, or lawyer, while I felt conflicted about what my passions were. After graduating high school, I felt as if I didn't have any specialty, and I was simply following the crowd and attending college. At this point in my life, I had no direction and no clue of what I wanted to do in the future.

In McAdams' article, one of the key components described is narrative identity and how it essentially is a continuing life story that evolves and gives us "unity and purpose" (McAdams, 2001). I had no unity or purpose at this point in my life. I was a young kid attending college, taking general education classes, working a part-time job, and enjoying the perks of being young. I thoroughly felt I was just learning bits and pieces of different specialties with no specific direction. Reflecting upon that time, I can see how my naivety and insecurity about my future really helped mold and shape me into who I am today.

I didn't realize it then, but my uncertainty allowed me to venture out and be open-minded about all the different opportunities and experiences I wouldn't have been a part of if I was determined on one single path. In Nguyen's (2013) article, one key component is the idea that ambiguity, or uncertainty, plays a big role in later development. My ambiguity in my future allowed me to be resilient and adaptable, a similar mindset that I still use today academically as well as professionally.

### **First Steps**

In Nguyen (2013) one of the highlights about our narratives is the moments that we feel appreciated and recognized. One of those moments for me was when I was working my

first part-time job. I was working at a sushi restaurant, and our manager was having issues with his computer. It was a simple issue where his internet was not working, and he needed to print some documentation. I was the closest one to his office, so I went in and saw he was clearly stressed. I proceeded to tell him I played around with PCs a bit and told him I could help. I checked his connection, ensured his drivers were up to date, and restarted his computer. These steps fixed the issue, and although the fix was relatively easy, my manager sighed a sigh of relief as he told me he had important documentation to print and thanked me. This moment was relatively short, but at that moment I realized that I found satisfaction in helping others and fixing technical problems.

My manager left for the day, but the satisfaction I received from his thank-you really awoke something in me. I had taken a beginner PC course in high school and really didn't think much about it at the time but began to realize that maybe this was one of my strengths. I thought about all the courses I've taken and realized my strongest skill set was mathematics and solving problems. I was a logical thinker and thoroughly enjoyed helping people. It started to click that maybe going down the route of Information Technology and helping people with technical issues and solving problems was something that I would enjoy and gain satisfaction from.

### **Mentorship: Shaping Identity**

The epiphany I had at my first part-time job got strengthened when I hung out with my older cousin. He was a network engineer for a Fortune 500 company, and we usually started our conversations with how I'm doing and what I wanted to do. I told him about the epiphany I had, and he suggested that maybe I should give it a go and figure out what my

specialty would be. Information Technology is a broad field, and he suggested cybersecurity due to all the skill sets that I had listed, with problem solving and helping others. After my conversation with my cousin, I went home and proceeded to do my own due diligence on the subject matter. I decided to give it a shot, and after a lot of self-studies and acquiring some certifications, I managed to land a role at Leidos, a Fortune 500 company in Norfolk, VA. Even though it was not for cybersecurity, I thought it was great to get my foot in the door and gain experience.

In an article by Smith (2017), one of the key highlights about narrative identity mentioned is the importance of community, validation, and support through mentorship, collective learning, and positive reinforcement. My older cousin has been a great supporter and mentor who has given me a lot of sound advice on what I should and shouldn't do. His constant support and know-how have really guided me to the right path to my ultimate destination, which is cybersecurity.

### **Attending Old Dominion University**

Working at Leidos has really been eye-opening, and I've gained quality experience, but I have determined that my main goal is to break into the cybersecurity field. I really wanted to finish college that I had started a couple of years ago and decided to pursue my bachelor's. I ultimately decided on Old Dominion University (ODU) due to proximity, but also due to the level of quality and support the cybersecurity degree has gotten online, as well as through fellow peers and coworkers from Virginia. Walking around campus, I really felt a bit surreal, as I felt like this was the turning point in my career trajectory.

I am working for Leidos currently, but it's not exactly what I want to do, and starting to finish my cybersecurity degree feels like a step forward in the right direction that I had wanted to do since that night I had a conversation with my cousin. It felt like all the confusion and ambiguity were coming to a singular point as I was finally achieving what I had set out to do. In Smith's (2017) article, it highlights the turning point as critical moments that help differ the before and after. Before attending ODU, I felt like a kid that was uncertain and unsure about what I wanted to do and was giving Information Technology a shot, but ODU feels like me doubling down and being a student with a goal and direction in mind.

### **Connecting Interdisciplinary Learning to Identity**

Throughout my past few years at ODU, I've managed to take a lot of interesting courses. Whether it be general education or major-specific, the course load as well as variety has been plentiful. Two courses really stuck out to me. One of those courses was CYSE 250, or Introduction to Python. Python is one of the many programming languages. Prior to this course, I've never taken any coding classes, so I went in as a beginner. The course was challenging but fun at the same time, and the moment that really stuck out to me was the final project. We had to create a code or program that you can ask general questions about a specific subject, and it should cater a certain response. I remember spending weeks on it and making sure it ran correctly, and when it finally ran how I wanted it to, the amount of satisfaction and glee that filled me was insurmountable. I felt a real amount of relief and accomplishment.

The other course is CYSE 280, which is Windows System Management and Security. One component of the class was listening to *Darknet Diaries*. This is a podcast that narrates real-life events of cybercrimes, hacking, etc. to the public. Not only are the stories interesting, but it made me realize the importance of cybersecurity and how it's not all just technical, but understanding different aspects like human behavior, resources, and implications to society. These courses are just two of the many that really taught me the importance of not just technical skills, but how my personal interest in technology and helping others can be realized in pursuing cybersecurity.

### **Integrating my Experiences**

Looking back at my current path, I can see how certain moments and incidents, although felt small and nonchalant the moment, collectively can connect and have pushed me into my current path. From the kid who was following the crowd having no idea what he wanted to do, thinking he would be a doctor one day, fixing the house router, to building my pc, all were moments that helped collectively become an integral part of my current story. In McAdams (2001) article, narrative identity is mentioned as linking the past, present and future as a unified whole.

### **Conclusion**

I've started to realize that I wasn't just going with the crowd but was unknowingly carving out my own path. Through my own trials and tribulations, my own identity is slowly starting to form shape. Utilizing concepts from Smith, Nguyen and McAdams, I'm able to interpret that my life's small seemingly meaningless moments were not random, but rather a collection of events that have created my evolving story. My decisions from

working part-time at a sushi joint, to not finishing college, to listening to my cousin, to applying to Leidos, to finally attending ODU, were all key moments that have shaped my story and self-development and growth.

### References

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