

Discovering Myself Through Cybersecurity

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Abstract

This narrative essay explores my journey from early interests in criminal justice and technology to my current pursuit of a career in cybersecurity. Drawing on formative experiences in high school, work, and military experience, I reflect on how these events shaped my academic choices and personal growth. Through the lens of narrative identity, as discussed by McAdams (2001), Nguyen (2013), and Smith (2024), I examine how my experiences have influenced my self-image, career aspirations, and understanding of resilience and adaptability.

Introduction

From a young age, I have been fascinated by the ways in which societal and technological systems shape and respond to human behavior. My early dreams of becoming a state trooper or FBI agent reflected an interest in justice and problem-solving. As I grew older, my curiosity progressed into a fascination with computers and cybersecurity, guiding my academic and career choices. Through my work, military service, and academic experiences, I have developed a narrative identity that reflects resilience, adaptability, and a desire to contribute meaningfully to society. This essay recounts the key experiences that shaped my journey, connecting my story to the broader concept of narrative identity (McAdams, 2001), the role of reflective ePortfolios in self-development (Nguyen, 2013), and the two kinds of stories we tell about ourselves (Smith, 2024).

Key Experiences

When I was younger, I was highly interested by the idea of protecting others and upholding law. My dad and I use to always watch police shows together so I gradually grew a liking to the thought of being in law enforcement. I often imagined myself as a state trooper or FBI agent, intrigued by the idea of solving complex problems and maintaining justice. In high school, I enrolled in a criminal justice class offered through the Advanced Career Education Center which I did for two years. The course introduced me to practical skills such as, fingerprinting, conducting vehicle stops, and navigating real-world scenarios that law enforcement officers face daily. These experiences were formative, instilling in me a sense of discipline and responsibility. While my initial interest in criminal justice shifted over time, these early experiences laid the groundwork for a desire to pursue meaningful work where problem-solving and technical skills are essential.

Early Experiences in Technology

Alongside my interest in criminal justice, I was always intrigued by computers and technology too. I spent hours exploring computer configurations, learning about Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) and understanding firewalls. This curiosity eventually led me to discover cybersecurity as a potential career path. This is when I started researching the field, learning about the types of jobs available and the skills required. Thinking of getting a job being able to protect information, preventing cyber threats, and analyzing digital systems resonated with me, which then sparked a new direction for my future.

Work and Military Experience

After high school, I faced a difficult decision regarding college. I was concerned about accumulating debt from student loans. I took time thinking of how I could make college cheaper. My dad always mentioned the idea of joining the military which I thought the military was something interesting, but I didn't really see myself actually joining. I then started to contemplate joining the military to help pay for school. I remember being in the recruiting office at 19 with my dad and across the desk was my recruiter Staff Sergeant Ray. My dad and him were telling me all the reasons why I should join. Then I remember Staff Sergeant Ray telling, "No one in this world owes you anything." That advice became a guiding principle throughout my life and is something I continue to live by today. After that I decided to follow in my dad's footsteps and enlist in the U.S. Army. Being in military service taught me invaluable lessons in discipline, adaptability, and perseverance. The rigorous training and high expectations forced me to develop mental toughness and proficiency in a wide range of tasks. These experiences helped me grow as an individual, equipping me with skills and perspectives that I later applied to my academic and professional pursuits.

Academic Experiences

Once I was ready to pursue education, I enrolled at Old Dominion University to study cybersecurity. My coursework has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of the field. Some of the courses I've taken that have helped me are CYSE 200T, CYSE 20S, CYSE 300, and CYSE 301. The CYSE 200T: Cybersecurity, Technology, and Society course examines the interdisciplinary relationship between technology and cybersecurity across cultural, political, legal, and business domains. It taught me to think critically about the broader impacts of cybersecurity beyond technical solutions. The CYSE 201S: Cybersecurity and the Social Sciences course focus on human, social, and behavioral aspects, this course helped me understand the importance of human factors in cybersecurity, connecting technical skills to real-world behaviors. The CYSE 300: Introduction to Cybersecurity course is an overview of threats, cryptography, network security, and risk management, this course strengthened my foundational knowledge of cybersecurity. The CYS 301: Cybersecurity techniques and Operations course uses practical skills in C programming, network analysis, penetration testing, and forensic investigation were emphasized, bridging theory with hands-n practice. These courses not only developed my technical expertise but also reinforced my evolving narrative identity, reflecting a journey of growth, self-discovery, and professional purpose (McAdams; Nguyen, 2013).

Reflection

Looking back, my path has been shaped by curiosity, resilience, and reflection. My early interest in criminal justice demonstrated a desire to solve problems and contribute to society, while my fascination with technology offered a new way to achieve these goals. Military service taught me discipline and perseverance, and academic experiences at ODU have provided the tools to pursue a meaningful career in cybersecurity. As Smith (2024) suggests, the stories we tell

about ourselves, both “redemptive” and “contaminative”, shape our identity and guide our choices. My story is one of redeeming growth. Challenges like navigating career uncertainty and military training became fuel for development and self-understanding. Furthermore, Nguyen (2013) highlights the importance of reflective tools like ePortfolios in consolidating learning and identity. By documenting my journey in this essay, I am actively constructing a narrative that integrates my past experiences with future aspirations.

Conclusion

From childhood dreams of law enforcement to discovering a passion for cybersecurity, my academics, work, and military experiences have formed the foundation of my narrative identity. Each stage of my journey contributed to my understanding of resilience, adaptability, and purpose by reflecting on these experiences, I have gained insight into the person I am becoming and career I wish to pursue. This personal narrative not only recounts past experiences but also illustrates how my story continues to evolve, guided by curiosity, and a commitment to meaningful work. I also recognize that the field of cybersecurity will continue to challenge and inspire me, pushing me to learn and evolve alongside new technologies. With this understanding, I embrace the future with confidence, knowing that my past experiences have prepared me for whatever opportunities lie ahead. I am excited to see where this path leads and how my skills will continue to grow in a constantly changing digital world.

References

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Smith, E. E., & About the author Emily Esfahani Smith has an MA in positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. She writes about cultures. (2024, July 25). *The two kinds of stories we tell about ourselves*. ideas.ted.com. <https://ideas.ted.com/the-two-kinds-of-stories-we-tell-about-ourselves/>