

IDS 493 Cybersecurity Personal Narrative Essay

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Abstract

The following is a personal narrative essay meant to serve as a reflection upon the events that led to my personal path to choosing a major. Going by work that proposes that identity is shaped by narrative, and an eportfolio can help develop a narrative, the reflection will serve to help both further develop and shape identity and a personal narrative.

Keywords: Personal narrative, eportfolio, identity, cybersecurity

While the complexities of the individual, consciousness, one's personality, and psychology are far from solved science, there are some ideas that the research seems to heavily support and have useful explanatory power. For instance, the idea that identity itself is built through an internalized life story seems to hold quite a bit of weight in explaining the observed behavior of people (McAdams). Not only are these stories pivotal, but they seem to develop quite early on. Once people reach early adulthood, they begin to really start constructing their story and, thus, their identity, if they haven't already begun to do so. These stories, as previously stated, then serve to create the very identity they will live with every day of their lives. With the importance of shaping a personal narrative in mind, when further research shows that an eportfolio serves as a tool for students to reflect and craft their personal narrative, that seems to indicate quite heavily that eportfolios could in turn be excellent and important tools in crafting not only a personal narrative but a person's very identity (Nguyen). In the following, I will embark on an exercise of attempting to detail and construct a personal narrative on my own. This narrative will detail the steps I feel led me towards choosing my major and the path along the way. This narrative will then be a part of my own eportfolio, where it can serve to further shape and develop my narrative and, thus, my identity.

The first part of the journey towards my eventual major and career would likely begin before I even existed. While I believe every person has a say in their development and journey, their environment does indeed play a pivotal role in shaping and starting that development. I grew up in a very traditional, and some could even say "old-fashioned," family in rural Appalachia. The county and area I am from were very poor, with little access

to infrastructure and new technology. There were many social issues, and the population was shrinking, with the remaining populace being much older.

This all instilled a number of lessons in me, some positive and some that I had to grow past over the years. I think the most important, though, was the importance placed on personal growth, learning, innovation, and cutting-edge technology. Often, the pitfalls and horrors of being deprived of the aforementioned concepts were shown to me quite directly. In addition, many of my guardians in life knew of those lessons as well. In wanting the best for me and my own growth, many would encourage me in those pursuits. All-in-all, it provided me with intimate knowledge of what it's like to stagnate, experience technological deprivation, and be left "out in the dark" when it comes to important innovations. This left me with the negative motivation to never experience such downsides and lows, and the positive motivation to learn and grow more and more each day and strive for a better future for myself and others.

Another set of events that further entrenched and developed some of these lessons was the "Great Recession", or the financial crisis of the late 2000s. As stated previously, I came from quite a poor and underdeveloped area. My mother did remarry a little in my childhood, though, and our position became somewhat more advantageous. Our family owned a small convenience store. When the financial crisis came around, though, our financial situation worsened, the store stopped succeeding, and my situation afterward did have an effect on me.

Importantly, though, I think that after reflecting on my circumstances, I have concluded that poverty, suffering, or negative conditions are not really positive in any way, even if the lessons learned from such circumstances may be seen as positive. A common tendency among many I have seen is for people to rationalize suffering or harm they have

dealt with by imaging they “came out on the other side a better person”, or a similar rationalization. Like pressure turning coal into a diamond. I have come to realize, though, that the lessons learned from these events could very well have happened without any suffering at all. Even if one does learn an important lesson or develop certain advantageous habits or outlooks, it does not follow that these side effects of negative events can only occur due to negative events. Likewise, many experience the same negative events (poverty, suffering, etc.) and don't experience any of, or a few of, the positives others have claimed to have gained. With that in mind, I do feel these conditions did lead me to develop a number of interests and tendencies that did steer me more towards my selected major.

For one, having little access to fast and easily replaceable technology led me to really appreciate and investigate the things I was able to get access to. I, for instance, still remember having a dial-up internet in my house, even for a brief time. In addition, if something were to break or malfunction, it would often simply mean “tough luck” for some time. I believe this led me to really appreciate and value the things I did have. If something broke, I wanted to know why, what caused it to malfunction, and whether I could fix or improve it. In addition, I often found myself learning about the many things I didn't get to experience, studying intensely almost as a proxy for having access to a certain thing. So, in addition to the aforementioned curiosity to learn about new and innovative things and the inquisitiveness to diagnose problems and intricacies, the environment of my earlier development also led me to be safety-oriented and cautious.

Choosing a career in cybersecurity was, for me, a decision I wouldn't really make until the end of high school. I started to hear more and more about successful and quality cybersecurity programs available in Virginia. I also heard about the severe demand for cybersecurity professionals. Furthermore, I heard that not only were sheer numbers needed,

but in general, the whole country was in need of an increase in cybersecurity knowledge as a whole. For me, just having demand for a major or role is not enough. Positions like electrician, nurse, and plumber are also always in need, yet I did not show any interest in those paths. To me, the demand for cybersecurity positions wasn't just about job security or salary, but for a variety of deeper reasons.

While we'll likely always need a number of jobs, at least for the foreseeable future, cybersecurity professionals were not even really thought about 50 years ago en masse. Now, we can't imagine a scenario where it won't be one of the most in-demand fields there is. It's almost like the need for electricians right after the advent of mass electrification, or the need for farmers after agriculture began to develop. Again, the salary or job security alone were not enough to sway me. Instead, the desperate societal need seemed to be what really captured my interest. As we integrate our daily lives with mass communication and network technologies, the desperate need for professional cybersecurity knowledge will only expand further. For society to run properly, such jobs must be undertaken, and I almost felt a calling or purpose in filling that need. From there, I embarked on my journey towards a professional cybersecurity career, and until the present day, I have continued down that path.

In conclusion, a person's very identity is shaped by their own personal narrative. The eportfolio is a good tool to help craft that narrative and this identity. For my own narrative, I believe a number of circumstances and events throughout my development helped guide me towards a career in cybersecurity. The tendencies developed and lessons learned, combined with the circumstances surrounding my chosen career path, created an enticing and intriguing major for me to pursue and follow.

References

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