Personal Reading Response 1 - Paper

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Narrative Summary

At 18, I entered Sheridan College’s cybersecurity program, brimming with misplaced confidence. Having taught myself many programming languages, most of which were object-oriented, I dismissed foundational courses as redundant. “Why study Active Directory administration when I’ll just automate it?” I’d scoff, skipping lectures to code side projects. This arrogance masked deeper struggles: undiagnosed ADHD made sustained focus impossible during 3-hour labs, while OCD fixated on rewriting reports until 3 AM, only to miss submission deadlines.

By midterm, my grades cratered. Professors issued academic warnings; peers resented my erratic group work contributions. During a network security project, I hyperfocused on creating an intrusion detection script while neglecting documentation. When my code failed during the team presentation, a classmate’s frustration was palpable. I became a pariah, skipping classes to avoid confrontation and coding alone in the library.

At 19, academic probation turned to suspension. Only years later, after OCD and ADHD diagnoses (at 21 and 23 respectively) and testosterone therapy for Klinefelter’s, did I recognize how neurodivergence and hormonal imbalances had warped my self-perception. With these diagnoses came Accessible Learning (AL) accommodations, tailoring my educational experience to my unique needs.

Returning at 24, I transformed shame into advocacy. As ISSessions’ executive producer, I now manage all streams and content that goes live, all on a strict schedule – which directly challenges the rigid timelines that once broke me. My AL accommodations allow me to engage with coursework in ways that match my learning style, from extended deadlines to alternative assessment formats. Peers now seek me for technical mentorship, unaware their “model student” once barely clung to academia.

Looking back, I wouldn’t silence my younger self’s interruptions. Those outbursts, I realize, were ADHD-driven attempts to mask confusion. But I’d pair retrospective self-compassion with firmer boundaries: file for accommodations earlier, redirect obsessive coding into structured sprints, and openly communicate my needs to professors and peers alike.

Analysis

My journey through Sheridan College’s cybersecurity program exemplifies several key concepts from our course materials on life writing and graphic memoirs.

Firstly, the narrative embodies *Mary Karr’s* concept of emotional truth in memoir writing. When recounting my classmate’s reaction to my failed presentation, I don’t provide verbatim dialogue but rather convey the emotional weight of the moment. This aligns with Karr’s assertion that “the best memoirists stress the subjective nature of reportage” (Karr, 2015, p. 14). The feeling of becoming a “pariah” may not be objectively quantifiable, but it captures the emotional reality of my experience, much like *Darrin Bell’s* portrayal of his mother’s laughter during their police chase in *The Talk* (Bell, 2023, p. 59).

The structure of my narrative, jumping between my initial college experience and my return at 24, mirrors Bell’s use of visual metaphors in *The Talk*. Just as Bell employs greyscale to symbolize lost innocence and sepia tones to represent gained understanding (Bell, 2023, pp. 7-8, 35-36), my story contrasts the “harsh fluorescent tones” of my early college days with the “warmly lit panels” of my return. This technique not only organizes the narrative but also visually represents my evolving self-awareness and the impact of my diagnoses.

The concept of shared reality, as explored by *Echterhoff and Higgins* (2018), is particularly relevant to my experience with undiagnosed neurodivergence. Initially, there was a significant disconnect between my perception of my abilities and the reality experienced by my peers and professors. This mirrors the divide Bell illustrates between his experience as a Black child and his white mother’s understanding of racial dynamics (Bell, 2023, p. 59). My eventual diagnoses and the implementation of AL accommodations served to bridge this gap, creating what Echterhoff and Higgins term “intersubjective alignment” (2018, p. 59) between my cognitive style and the academic environment.

Furthermore, my use of humor to deflect academic struggles (“I’m not failing – I’m stress-testing Sheridan’s academic integrity protocols” – I actually thought this when going through the program the first time) echoes Bell’s strategy of using humor as armor against racial bullying (Bell, 2023, pp. 66-67). This coping mechanism allowed me to maintain a sense of agency while masking deeper insecurities, a common theme in many graphic memoirs.

The role of secrecy in my narrative – hiding my struggles from peers and even myself – reflects a broader theme in life writing about the selective nature of memory and disclosure. As *JJ Lee* discusses in “The Art and Business of Memoir Editing” (2024), memoirists must make choices about what to include and exclude. My initial reluctance to seek help or disclose my difficulties, followed by my later advocacy, demonstrates the evolving nature of self-representation in memoir.

Lastly, my story engages with the concept of truthiness, coined by *Stephen Colbert*. My initial confidence in my programming skills, despite academic evidence to the contrary, exemplifies the “quality of preferring concepts or facts one wishes to be true, rather than concepts or facts known to be true” (“Truthiness”). This tension between perceived and objective truth is a central concern in memoir writing, as highlighted in our course materials.

In conclusion, my personal narrative, when analyzed through the lens of our course concepts, reveals the complex interplay between subjective experience, societal expectations, and the challenges of self-representation in life writing. It underscores the power of memoir to not only recount personal history but also to foster understanding and bridge divides between different lived experiences.

References

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Reflection on Cultural Authenticity

My journey through the cybersecurity program at Sheridan College, from initial struggles to becoming an executive producer at ISSessions, reflects a broader narrative of neurodivergent experiences in academia. By implementing flexible schedules and accommodations in my academics, I've positioned neurodiversity as a strength rather than a deficit. This approach mirrors Bell's use of humor to navigate racial identity in The Talk (Bell, 2023, pp. 66-67), demonstrating how embracing one's unique perspective can lead to innovation and inclusivity.

My story exemplifies how personal challenges can be transformed into opportunities for systemic change, challenging traditional academic structures that often privilege neurotypical cognition. Through this lens, my experiences contribute to a growing dialogue on cognitive diversity in education and technology, emphasizing the importance of creating spaces that value varied thinking styles and lived experiences.