

Writing Assignment 2: The Personal Narrative

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HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Dan McAdams describes a thematic theme to involve an "*overarching theme, value, or principle that... conveys the gist of who she is..*" (McAdams, 2001, p. 105). Most of us learn our values from our parents, often acquiring those values that our parents have or similar, as demonstrated by Social Learning Theory (Grusec, 1992). Ever since I was little, my mother knew when she saw me making meaningful scribbles on paper in my crib as well as my face that I would be an artist. Although I attended art academies in primary school, I was constantly reminded by my mother that being an artist was no way to make money, as money is the key to happiness. Growing up with just a mother who lived by the strict rigidity of Navy Officer values always had an unsaid pressure of ambition- to be nothing short of perfect. McAdams writes that in childhood and adolescence, we are "*gathering material for the identities [we] will someday make.*" (McAdams, 2001, p. 106). During this time is where I developed my ambitious and assertive tendencies, but also a rebellious nature and desire to create.

THE CHALLENGE

I had interests in joining the Navy like my parents as an officer- Navy life was all I knew even though I had the fortune of not having to move, it still wound its way into my life down to only wearing black long socks and my hair in a bun. Getting older, though, I came to understand that a life of chains and anchors was not a life for me as I was living it unconsciously. Emily Smith reflects on McAdam's theory of Personal Narrative, deriving two types of stories: Redemption and Contamination; that redemptive arcs shape people who are "*driven to contribute to society and to future generations*" (Smith, 2017). I found that my challenge was my desire to

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get out of my contamination story- break free from my own chain and make my own narrative.

But how was I going to do that?

In senior year, after being rejected from the Naval Academy (a relief), I still was not sure what I wanted to study in college. I did know, however, the faster I got a degree, the faster I could get a job and move out. Nguyen, reflecting on writings from Gadamer, notes “*When a fusion of horizons takes place, learning occurs.*” (Nguyen, 2013, p. 137). Here was when two horizons in my life merged. I had a passion for criminal justice like my mother but also a curiosity for technology and the future concerns of privacy and freedom of expression. These values and interests came together in selecting my major of Cybercrime at Old Dominion University (ODU) where I now study.

As a planner, I planned out my degree in my first semester; all the classes I would need up to graduation. I came to realize, though, that this major had a lot of wiggle room for choosing a path- somehow a blessing in disguise or fate that this was made just for me. A degree that would enable to me to exercise my inner artist to make it my own. While relieving, it was also an overwhelming wake up call to the dreaded question: what are my career goals?

THE JOURNEY

I have about fifteen iterations of my four-year degree plan. Most of us think of our classes as a giant checklist, forming the path to graduation. What we do not realize, but are to soon in our Eportfolio Class, IDS 493, is that our whole college curriculum is its own portfolio. At least for myself, Nguyen’s idea holds true: “*The ePortfolio holds potential for the creative process of expressing oneself in relationship to the other and describing identity through narrative.*”

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(Nguyen, 2013, p. 135). For myself, I realize now that the flexibility in my major helped me create a narrative for my wandering interests in possible career goals throughout college.

Exploring topics such as law, electronics, programming, and cybersecurity niches, these classes acted as small “episodes” in my thematic narrative to help guide me along (McAdams, 2001, p. 105).

Along the way, some classes I took gave me opportunities to really explore topics I wanted to write about, especially ones that aligned with technology and privacy. I found this led me to a passion for the First and Fourth Amendment, although I wrote more about the latter. I took a criminal justice independent studies class, CRJS 497, while being an observer in a lower-level class on law and the criminal justice system, CRJS 220. My tasking in 497 was to produce a research paper on a topic in my observation class that aligned with my major, Cybercrime. I knew early on that we would cover the Fourth Amendment and that I wanted to understand it better, so I chose to write about technology implications on the Fourth Amendment’s Reasonable Expectation of Privacy clause.

Together, I would describe these classes as Personal Event Memories, referenced from Pillemer by McAdams. A Personal Event Memory is described as self-defining ‘episodes’ in one’s life with five criteria but can be derived from a wide range of things such as “*analogous events, or episodes that are readily compared with similar other events to suggest a pattern or theme that runs through the person's life story*” (McAdams, 2001, p. 109-110). Here, especially given I constructed my own classes, I still manage to build upon the thematic coherence my life follows as my choices align with my interests and values to build a future where I can make a difference in the world.

A NEW CHAPTER

I would say my college theatre has inspired a desire to explore a career in law or cybersecurity and technology compliance. For now, I understand there are steppingstones between those bigger dreams and where I am now- room for more ‘episodes’ to further the theme of my life (McAdams, 2001, p. 105). McAdams also writes that as we get older, we construe an autobiographical memory, far more complex and rhythmic than the ‘overarching theme’ of life. It “is contoured by the person's current goals and anticipations of what future chapters and scenes are likely to bring” which is where I stand now. (McAdams, 2001, p. 117). Some room to make redemption and contamination stories as one takes steps forward and steps back (Smith, 2017). With my new ‘big boy’ job now, while it may not fully align with my interests, it is something that is new and allows myself and the people I work with to determine the direction that will help shape how the Navy protects their ships in cyberspace. How is that for a redemption story?

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