

Wearing Many Hats: The Rise of the Professional Security Hacker | Data & Society

By Matt Goerzen and Gabriella Coleman

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Wearing Many Hats: the Rise of the Professional Security Hacker **chronicles the largely untold history of the hacker-turned-professional.** Through this seminal work, researchers **Matt Goerzen** and **Gabriella Coleman** collaborate to chart the movements of the digital underground during the 1990s to reveal what underground technologists or “hackers”, did—technically, linguistically, and culturally—to establish their legitimacy as employable, trustworthy security experts. Over the course of a decade, hackers were able to legitimize their professional place in society by 1) *negotiating full-disclosure security research practices* in which hackers and technologists openly published security vulnerabilities; and by 2) *reconfiguring their image* through a combination of PR stunts, media collaborations, and rhetorical interventions that gave rise to the adoption by hackers of imaginary hats (*black*, *white*, and *gray*) that expressed one’s level of willingness to work inside or outside the law. Both efforts proved sufficient in transforming a fringe, underground subculture into a security-minded workforce whose members are now recognized as trustworthy security experts and legitimate employees of governments and corporations.

Based on dozens of interviews and expert analyses of archival data, Goerzen and Coleman’s collection of this previously (mostly) untold history of the digital underground during the 1990s not only reveals a transformative period in which hackers transitioned from security risks to security professionals, but also provides insight into how many in the digital underground became outspoken advocates of both computer security and the public interest despite being characterized by government, private enterprise, and the media as anarchists and criminals.

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