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Exploring the Differences in Life Stories of Young and Middle-Aged Adults

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Abstract

Over the course of their lives, people experience a lot of events that stand out for one reason or another. These events build up what is called an individual's life story. This study aimed at discovering potential differences and similarities between the life stories of two demographic groups, young and middle-aged adults. In this qualitative multiple case study, four participants, two of which were in their twenties, and two in their forties, were interviewed using McAdams' life story interview. These interviews were coded for a range of features, such as narrative sequences, including redemption or contamination sequences, coping strategies, focus, meaning whether stories were self- or other-focused, and overarching life themes. Overall, differences were found between the two groups in all domains except for coping strategies, for instance young adults had more self-centred life themes and told more stories that were self-focused than the middle-aged adults. In contrast, middle-aged adults' life themes were more focused on other people and most of their stories were also about other people. These findings could most likely be explained by the age gap of the two groups and by the middle-aged adults being parents, hence taking increased care of their children and families.

Keywords: Life story, Differences, Contamination, Redemption, Life themes

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Introduction

When people talk about their lives, they often talk about their lives as journeys or stories. These life stories are the stories of themselves, what they experienced, the type of person they have once been, and have become, but also maybe the type of person they would have wanted to be. A life story is personal and since every person is different, so is their life. Over the course of their lives, there may be moments that may be of crucial importance for them, that stick with them for long periods of times. These moments, also called “life events” are the building blocks of every life story and can shape a person in various ways. Such events can be characterised as any event or sequence that has happened in an individual’s life. In general, one can broadly distinguish between two types of life events, positive life events, which are thought to be positive by the individual, such as for instance giving birth to one’s first child, and negative life events, such as the death of a loved one. With this study, the researcher is going to explore said life stories and what characterises them.

Life events can also be coined as sequences of redemption (positive), or sequences of contamination (negative) (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten & Bowman, 2001). This study focuses on shining light on such sequences. Whether a life event or sequence is regarded positive or negative is dependent on the narrative of the event. A redemption narrative is characterised by a story or event, which starts out negatively and ends in a positive way (Jayawickreme, Brocato & Blackie, 2017), such as for instance a life event where someone gets out of a toxic relationship and because of this, perceives positive changes in themselves or their environment. Contamination narratives in contrast, consist of stories or events that start out good or positive and end in a negative way (Jayawickreme et al., 2017). An example of this would be if after a long and happy marriage, one’s partner dies and after that one’s life seemingly begins to fall apart.

According to McAdams et al. (2001), life events can bring a handful of changes for a person, which can be roughly divided into three kinds of changes. Firstly, changes in self, such as a shift in certain personality traits, like becoming a more generous person after a memorable scene in life. Secondly, changes in relationships, for instance giving more value to certain relationships, while eventually abandoning other ones. Thirdly, changes in philosophy of life and beliefs, such as a revised perspective on certain domains in life. Moreover, it is assumed that the narrative of a person, whether they are more likely to report redemption or contamination sequences, may indicate a person’s mental well-being. It is thus said that redemption sequences are an indicator of positive well-being, with consequences such as

increased satisfaction in life, higher self-esteem, and lower levels of depression. In contrast, contamination sequences are a likely indicator of poorer mental well-being (McLean & Lilgendahl, 2008).

Previous research suggested differences in the life stories, and changes in the life stories when comparing generations. It was found, for instance, that, although there was agreement over what constitutes an ideal life, young people tended to describe much more idyllic views on their lives when compared to older people, which means that they included less events that were connotated negatively, such as divorce of parents (Bohn, 2010). In contrast, Bohn also found out that older people had more realistic views, meaning that they more often included negative life events, and, unlike young people, also used their stories, in combination with the prototypical life script about what is important in life, to recall important memories. Next to differences in the overall stories, it was also found that people's narratives and personalities change over time. For instance, it was found that entering parenthood impacted the life story very much, by evoking changes in social role and narrative identity (Sengsavang, Pratt, Alisat & Sadler, 2017). One more very prevalent finding when comparing demographics was the so-called reminiscence bump for older adults, which is an enhanced recall of memories from between ages 15 to 30 and is said to be one of the most robust findings in autobiographical memory search (Thomsen, Pillemer & Ivcevic, 2011), which may become important when comparing the life stories of younger and older people.

There are, however, not only differences in demographic groups when investigating into life stories, but also when investigating into coping. Coping was defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person" (p. 141). This definition contains several aspects that were coined important by Amirkhan and Auyeung (2007). That is that coping is constantly changing, which means that coping is not trait-like, or fixed, that coping is an effort, thus not a reflex but a deliberate decision, that coping is attempting to manage rather than master demands, meaning that coping is not fully instrumental, and lastly that coping is not the same as success, hence efforts may be successful for one person, but not for another (Amirkhan & Auyeung, 2007). They found that there are relative differences in coping, meaning the extent to which one strategy is used and another is not, differs. Heady and Wearing (1989) classified coping strategies in terms of whether these help with reducing negative affect after an adverse life event. They termed such coping strategies "effective coping".

With all this information in mind, this study aims at finding out more about differences in the life story narratives for two demographic groups and if preceding assumptions hold. With this study, it will be investigated into differences in contamination and redemption narratives in young and middle-aged adults, with looking at the contexts, more specifically the contexts of the events, in which they employ a certain narrative style and if these contexts differ. It will also be investigated whether there are differences in the overall narrative identities of the groups, meaning whether there are differences in roles and foci in life events. This is then also related to the different roles that young and middle-aged adults hold in themselves, such as those of themselves as a person, friend, part of a family, et cetera. Moreover, it will be investigated into what coping strategies are used by the two groups. It will be looked at whether there are differences between the two groups and whether those strategies fall under the category of “effective coping”. The research question will thus be, whether there are differences in the life stories of the two groups regarding the frequency of contamination and redemption narratives, the individuals’ narrative identities and roles, and their coping strategies, and if there are in fact differences, it will be investigated what these differences are.

Method

Design

This study can be characterised as a multiple case study, which employs qualitative interviews aiming at comparing young and middle-aged adults in regard to their life stories, specifically life events and coping strategies.

Participants

Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. They were contacted by the researcher both in person and via text message, using WhatsApp. All participants were acquaintances of the researcher. This was planned with the intention of having a more intimate relationship with the participants, as to ensure that they are in a safe environment when talking about their life stories. There were no specific inclusion criteria for recruitment, the participants were simply chosen by considering the required age range, that is being 20 to 30 years of age for the young adults and 40 to 50 years for the middle-aged adults. In total, four (N=4) participants volunteered their time to get interviewed. The young adults were 23 and 25, and the middle-aged adults were 44 and 49 years old. All the participants were German, and two of the four participants were female.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty for Behavioural and Management Sciences of the University of Twente on the 28th of March (registration number.: 190262).

Materials

Materials used in the study were an instruction sheet with information about the interview, which participants were asked to read before the start of the actual interview which also served as informed consent to be signed by the participants, and the actual interview, which was the Life Story Interview by Dan P. McAdams (see Appendix B1), which was translated to German, since all of the participants had German as their mother tongue. The quintessence of this interview is finding out about adult identity. It consists of eight sections, in which the interviewee is asked about their life, to describe it as a book or novel, with different stages of life serving as the book's chapters, followed by focusing on specific scenes with different characteristics – for instance a high point, where the participant is asked to specify and elaborate on a particularly positive scene in their life, a low point, where the focus is laid on an especially negative memory or a turning point, which brought about important changes for the individual. The interview also focuses on both childhood and adult memories, by asking about a positive and a negative childhood memory, and by asking about a vivid adult memory. Moreover, the interviewee is asked about their values regarding religion or spirituality, politics, and social domains. Lastly, it is asked whether a certain key theme can be identified in the individual's life. A mobile phone was used to audio-record the interviews.

Procedure

Participants were seated face-to-face with the interviewer. Locations differed for every person, one participant was interviewed at his workplace, one participant was interviewed in the library of the University of Twente, and the other two were interviewed in their respective homes. The participants were interviewed between April 8th, 2019 and May 1st, 2019; interviews were conducted in German. Prior to the interview, participants were given the instruction sheet providing information about the overall content and goal of the interview. If there were questions remaining, the researcher answered them directly – however, since the interview itself contained an introduction and “welcoming” paragraph, no other verbal introduction was given before the beginning of the interview. After having read the sheet, they gave consent by giving a signature below. With this, they consented on being informed sufficiently before the interview. The interviewer then proceeded to start audio-recording and begin the interview. The

interviews were semi-structured, with the researcher sticking to the scheme as much as possible, so that input was the same for all participants, however also leaving room for the participants to talk and elaborate as much as they wish. The interviewer began with shortly introducing the interviewee to the interview, what was about to happen and how long the interview would approximately take. The interviewer then worked through the interview with the interviewee, going from section to section, with the interviewee answering the questions. After having finished the interview, the interviewer thanked the interviewee for taking their time and proceeded to close the interview. The duration of the interviews ranged from 32 to 72 minutes, and the combined lengths of the two groups' interviews were one hour and 57 minutes for the young adults, and one hour and 31 minutes for the middle-aged adults.

Data Analysis

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, however, any names or locations, and filler-words such as “uhm”, were removed from the transcript. After transcription, the researcher translated the interviews from German to English. For coding purposes, the software Atlas.ti (Version 8.2.32) was used to assign codes to sections of the interviews. Here, a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches was used. The main focus was on identifying certain narratives within the life stories. These two codes, contamination and redemption, were the pre-determined codes. A third pre-determined code should identify sequences that deal with coping strategies and whether these were to be regarded as effective or ineffective. Those predetermined codes were derived from the literature referenced in the introduction, such as McAdams et al. (2001), thus being the result of a top-down approach. Moreover, the researcher investigated into differences regarding overall themes of the stories, as assigned by the interviewees during the interview, and differences in self- or other focus. These codes were derived from passages of the interviews and during the coding procedure themselves, thus being the result of a bottom-up approach. A list of codes with short definitions for each is provided in Table 1. To tackle eventual biases during the coding procedure, a colleague researcher was consulted to code one of the interviews with the coding scheme used in this study. Cohen's Kappa was used as a measure of interrater agreement. The measure gave a value of 0.26, which means that there is fair agreement between raters.

Table 1. List of Codes and Classifications.

Main Code	Sub-Codes	Definition
Narrative Sequences	Contamination Sequence	Positive sequence that turn negative
	Redemption Sequence	Negative sequence that turn positive
	Generally Positive Sequence	A positive sequence that is only positive
	Generally Negative Sequence	A negative sequence that is only negative
Coping Strategies	Effective Coping	Coping Strategies that minimise negative affect
	Ineffective Coping	Harmful coping that does not minimise negative affect
Focus	Focus on Self	Events / Themes that focus on the person itself
	Focus on Others	Events / Themes that focus on other persons, such as friends, family, co-workers, etc.
Theme	Theme	Central themes in the life of the participants as asked in the interview

Results

The results will be given per participant. In the end, a comparison between the two groups will be made.

Case 1

The first participant was a 23-year-old male, who is currently in his first year of schooling for his desired profession. The central idea or theme of his life, what he thought his life was all about, was helping those who are close to him, especially friends and family, due to a history of negative events in his close group of friends.

“A second event that eventually changed the way I think... or brought to a turn, is, not that long ago, like, yeah, now almost two years ago... a very, very good, long-time friend of ours... killed himself [...].”

A second prevalent theme identified was that he wanted to achieve something that those around him, in his environment and surroundings, will remember him for in a way that he will be able to contribute to society in one way or another.

“I want to, like, achieve something, I want to, on the long term now, not regarding my training, but my life, I want that at least in the surroundings that I was active in, that people remember, even when I’m gone.”

In general, this participant’s life story has a handful of ups and downs. He told that when he was a kid, his parents separated, which led to him living with his sisters and her mother. He talked about various instances of him having to care for other people, since he had many friends who suffered from psychological issues, such as depression or anorexia. However, these events have shaped him in a way that he looks out for such things in the people around him and will be very careful when dealing with such topics.

This participant has, as stated, experienced several events in which a good situation has turned bad, especially regarding close friends. One of these sequences, for instance, was one of his female friends started having some psychological issues, which resulted in her cutting herself, which led to another friend holding herself guilty for that, and him being in between the two parties. A second such event in his life was the suicide of a close friend of his, because he never noticed that his friend was struggling with a negative mindset and suicidal thoughts.

Despite those negative events, the participant also told stories that would classify as redemption sequences. One of those was about a female friend, who struggled with anorexia, that he was able to persuade to seek help in a clinic.

Although this participant's central theme was all about helping people, he was also really focused on himself and his identity. He told more stories about him than about others, and these stories about himself mostly featured some sort of self-reflection and contemplation about what will be in the future, but also simply events he recalled, both good and bad.

"[...] we had to start thinking about 'What will I be', and, yeah that chapter would, like, rather be reflecting, like, where I'm thinking about what I wanna do and so on."

Case 2

The second participant who volunteered for an interview was a 25-year-old male, who is currently in the third year of his Bachelor. This person's main idea or theme in life is more self-centred than that of the other young adult; it can be explained as being able to do what one wants to do, which was also described as freedom to live one's own life. Moreover, he stated that since it is his life, he himself is the central theme of it. Next to this, just like the other young adult, he stated that he wants to contribute to society in one way or another.

"I hope I can contribute to society; I think, I say I hope, but to be honest I think I am able to contribute to society."

Just like the other young adult, the second participant also lived through a number of adverse life events, those that took a bad turn, but also some that turned out good, mostly in the domains of education and close friends.

"At the last year, they said like 'Okay, you're now officially kicked out of high school' [...], I thought to myself [...] I don't wanna be, like, an actual high school drop-out, [...], I think I locked myself up for two months in my room, maybe one and a half months, [...], and went to the exams and somehow managed to pass it all [...]."

As can be inferred from the participant's overall life theme, he told far more stories about himself than stories that had friends or family as protagonists, 17 in total as opposed to six. These stories are mostly about things that he lived through, both positive and negative, but also in part reflecting about life.

"So in a way you could say that my most negative experience in my life is the best thing that happened to me, because it managed to, it managed to make me, like, gain balls or guts to actually do stuff that's important, instead of just slacking and just messing around."

This quote related to some sort of retrospection over his past self, who was very lazy and lacked conscientiousness. During his first studies after high school, where he studied economics at a University, he stated that he spent his time slacking around, doing drugs and playing video

games with friends. However, this experimenting with drugs lead to him having a change in his mindset, since he suffered strong adverse psychological effects from them.

Case 3

Participant number three was a 44-year-old woman, and mother of three girls. She most prominently fulfilled the role of a housewife, however, also did some small work here and there. Her most central idea and theme in life was her family, and especially her children, since two of her daughters were abused during their childhood. She wanted to help her children cope with those events, and told that she wants them, despite those events, to be happy in life.

“That my entire family lives through the bad events in a positive way, that, that my children can live their lives I would say, happy and content [...].”

Most of the stories she told, 22 opposed to seven, were about her family and close friends. The abuse of the children was a very prominent topic, which extended through almost the entire interview and was labelled in many ways as having left permanent negative effects on her.

“The low point in my life... was definitely the abuse of my children [...] In the end, the offender abused our trust so blatantly, and I was deceived by this man [...].”

The participant also talked about how she coped with those events, which was by openly talking about it with close friends, also being able to vent from time to time, generally just seeking help in her social environment.

“How did I cope with it, well, I’ve like, talked about it with friends, about my worries and fears, or rather with, like, ‘certain’ friends, was also able to cry in their company [...].”

This hints at effective coping, yet at times, the participant also shifted blame on herself as to how she was unable to identify what was going. Although the participant told more negative than positive stories, there were some stories that had positive outcomes, like for instance one where her mother had to undergo an operation due to calcification of the main artery, but where everything worked out.

It can be said that, overall, her most positive events, as told by her in the interview, were ones that involve other people, such as giving birth to her first daughter, or her marriage.

“Me and my husband’s marriage [...] that was a really memorable [experience].”

Case 4

The other middle-aged adult was a 49-year-old woman, who is currently leading her own company and is mother to one boy. Her central theme in life as told by her was her child, since

she originally should not have been able to have children due to bad physical health conditions. She stated her theme to be taking care for her child and providing for it.

“I have responsibility for this child and I have to see that this kid properly finds into life, and I’m also responsible for it becoming a reasonable person, that, that, yeah that he, like, has values and appreciates other people [...].”

A second theme in her life would also be her company, which she has taken over from her father. She stated that she desired to work in this company for some more time, albeit gradually shifting the amount work she has to do away from her, and to give that company to another person in the end.

Many of the stories that this participant told that took place prior to the birth of her only child, also dealt with her family. Most prominently here were the discrepancies between her and father, which ranged from young adolescence to young adulthood.

“Back then, my grandmother lived with us, she had Alzheimer’s or was senile or whatever... I walked into the kitchen and see my grandmother with a spoon in her hand with a plant poison called Metasystox. [...] I smashed it out of her hand [...] and my grandmother told my father that I beat her. Then my father beat me through the house with a coat hanger and with a belt [...].”

Despite these discrepancies, she told that she was able to overcome all this and worked in her father’s company for several years, and also took the lead of it in 2007. They were able to grow closer to each other, because they worked together and followed similar interests, which then caused his drop-out out of the company and his death years later, to be an even harder blow.

“When my mother had the stroke, [the father] was out of the business instantaneously, what had me, had me confronted with some situations that weren’t so easy, and, yeah now in retrospect, I got to say that I really miss him, also because I really would’ve wanted to talk with him about a lot of things or ask him for advice, and yeah, those are some things, that, that yeah, that make the loss really serious.”

The participant did not only tell negative stories, but also positive ones, all of which were in relation to her building a family on her own, such as, as stated above already, giving birth to her child, but also moving in her own house with her husband.

“[...] Then I have met our neighbour, well now one of my best friends so to say, and then we celebrated topping out and that was really, really cool, we celebrated a really cool party and great friendships resulted from this, which lasted till this day.”

Comparison of young adults and middle-aged adults

In total, the interviews of middle-aged adults generated more coded sequences than did those of young adults, 106 as opposed to 99. Moreover, they had more ascribed sequences for all the codes, except for “Contamination Sequence” and “Focus on Others” (see Table 2).

The most prevalent difference between young and middle-aged adults was what they deemed as being the central notion of their respective lives. While the young adults put a focus on themselves and what they want to achieve in their lives, the middle-aged adults focused on their families and especially their children, how their children develop, and what they want them, and their families in general, to achieve.

A second important difference was in what stories they told. As can be seen in Table 2, middle-aged adults told almost twice as many, 32 as opposed to 20, stories that classified as having other persons as protagonists, such as family and friends. This is in a sense related to the foregoing point, however now the stories included do not necessarily feature a life theme but are simply stories about other people. Looking through the examples in the cases, one gets an idea that many of those stories deal with the middle-aged adults’ children, what happened to them and also how the mothers experienced said situations, but also about the aging process of their parents and eventual health complications. In the case of young adults, such stories would revolve about events, positive or negative, concerning friends and family, that is parents, siblings, or grandparents. Respectively, young adults told twice as many stories or gave twice as many statements that focused on themselves than middle-aged adults did, 32 in total, while for middle-aged adults, only 16 sequences qualified as focused on the self. Such stories dealt with, for instance, personal development and growth as a person.

Regarding contamination sequences, young adults told almost twice as many stories that were categorised as being contamination sequences. Those sequences were, for young adults, mostly about bad events that happened in the context of family or friends and often featured reflection about their experience and reaction. For middle-aged adults, such stories mostly featured bad events happening to their children. In contrast, middle-aged adults told more than twice as many redemption sequences compared to young adults. Whilst young adults focused such stories on positive outcomes regarding themselves, for instance academic performance, middle-aged adults talked about positive outcomes regarding family.

Nonetheless, there are also similarities between the two groups. Both groups named more events or sequences in which they employed effective coping strategies after adverse life events, such as seeking social support, or by focusing one’s own growth, than in which they

employed ineffective coping strategies, such as blaming themselves for negative events that happened to others or themselves, or by isolating from friends and family.

Table 2. Number of Codes for Young and Middle-Aged Adults.

Main Code	Sub-Code	Young Adults	Middle-Aged Adults
Narrative Sequences	Contamination Sequence	9	5
	Redemption Sequence	5	11
Coping Strategies	Generally Positive Sequence	7	11
	Generally Negative Sequence	13	17
	Effective Coping	3	4
Focus	Ineffective Coping	1	2
	Focus on Self	32	16
Theme	Focus on Others	20	32
	Theme	9	8
Total		99	106

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

In this study, interviews were used to find out about possible differences in narrative styles, identities, coping strategies, and overall themes in life.

It was found that middle-aged adults in general told more stories than young adults. Their stories were more other-focused than those of young adults, who told more stories that were self-focused. It was also found that middle-aged adults' stories focused mostly on their children and their parents, more specifically their parents' health. Middle-aged adults also had more other-focused life themes than young adults, with mostly revolving around their children's well-being, while those of young adults were more about their own performance and well-being. So overall the research question can be answered as that there are differences between the two demographic groups in the narrative styles employed, the kind of sequences that were disclosed, and the focus that was given to stories and the overarching life themes of the individuals.

The difference in foci, meaning “self-focus” versus “other-focus”, may in part be explained due to the middle-aged adults having entered parenthood, being parents to both teenagers and young adults. A shift in narrative could then be the result of having caretaker responsibilities, which is in line with the findings presented in the introduction, thus putting the interests and well-being of the offspring above those of oneself. Such a change in narrative, how the story is told, is in line with given literature and was also found by Sengsavang et al. (2017), who claimed that adopting new social roles, in this case becoming a parent, was a predictor of how the life story is expressed. A second explanation for the difference in self- and other-focus may in fact be the age gap of the groups. Young adults were very much focused on themselves and their own, both academic and social performance. Moreover, they used their narratives to reflect on themselves and develop. This is supported by Esposito and Freda (2015), who found that in a sample of university students, around 50 per cent of the narrative corpus dealt with some sort of reflection. This reflection was most prevalent in negative events. In contrast to this, middle-aged adults were more focused on the state of their family. While young adults are often still not the final version of themselves, middle-aged adults and especially those who have children and are settled will often prioritise their family over themselves, also due to the fact that when having a family, one is often already in a stable profession for a longer time.

This factor may also be explanation for the difference in topics of certain events between groups. This may be especially applicable to events that feature family, meaning parents of the individuals. Since the parents of young adults are not as old as those of middle-aged adults, thus young adults may be less likely, in their current age, to experience losses or physical health issues involving their parents. It can of course never be entirely ruled out; however, with increasing age people are more prone to diseases or medical conditions such as strokes.

Strengths

A first strength may be that this study delivered some clear-cut results for answering the research question. The results that there are differences for the two demographic groups, as described in detail in the results section, are in line with current research into the domain of life stories and provide some more evidence for generational differences in narrative styles, life topics and themes, and provides some insight into the thought processes and reflection that the two groups undertake.

Another strength would be that the study employed a very straightforward and simple design yet managed to provide a considerable amount of data. The study consisted of only one interview session, followed by analysis with simple codes. This design can facilitate replicating

this study under different circumstances in order to shine even more light on the issues at hand and to stimulate further research into said area.

Limitations

Although this study has brought about a handful of different results, it too has things that may be improved in future iterations of such a study. A first such limitation would be that, albeit intended so by the researcher, the interviewees have all been acquaintances of the researcher. It was originally thought that this would have been useful since it is more comfortable for acquaintances or friends to talk about intimate topics than for complete strangers. However, during recruitment it became apparent that being acquainted with potential participants may even be an obstacle, since some of the people that were asked by the participant declined, with the excuse of the procedure of the study being “too analytic” or that they would feel too much as a subject of some sort of therapy or testing for mental illness. Additionally, another issue with being acquainted with the participants may be that it can be harder to keep confidentiality up when being friends with people. One may not disclose information to third parties, however gaining sensitive information about acquaintances may affect the relationship in general. It can be said that both approaches may have their positive and negative aspects.

A second limitation of the data may lie in the sample itself. The researcher split the participants into two groups, young adults and middle-aged adults. However, both of the young adults were male, and both of the middle-aged adults were female, thus, mothers. It can thus not fully be ruled out that gender may have had an effect on the results. It could for instance be that a young female adult may have a rather “other-focused” mindset than a male has, and that a middle-aged father’s life theme may differ from those of the two mothers.

A limitation regarding the design of this study may be the fact that the interview scheme used for the study was originally written in English and had to be translated to German in order to be used for interviewing the native German speaking participants. Despite having thoroughly checked for any errors during translated, it may still be possible that certain original meanings may have gotten tainted due to translation. There was one question that repeatedly caused confusion in the participants, which was section B7 (Wisdom Event, see Appendix B1) of the life story interview. The issue was that the whole idea of a “Wisdom Event” was not clear to the participants, meaning they often did not fully understand what was meant with a wisdom event or how wisdom in this sense was defined.

Future Research

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, replicating this study will most likely bring different results with different participants. Nonetheless, future research in this area may shine more light on the differences between young adults' and middle-aged adults' ways of telling their life stories, especially focusing on what they build their life around and when exactly the change from a more selfish mindset to a more "other-focused" mindset takes place, and if parenthood is the only factor that is relevant to this question. Additionally, future research is required in order to solidify an eventual pattern for the groups, meaning if there are themes, events, topics, thought processes or else that are recurrent in other members of both groups. Future research may also take a completely different stance and further elaborate on the similarities of both groups and to find out why this may be the case.

Every person is different, and every person has had different experiences in life and incorporates them into their life differently. One should keep that in mind when desiring to explore this field.

Conclusion

This study has provided some broad insight into a comparison of narratives of young and middle-aged adults. It was found that there are differences in the overarching life themes of the two groups, that young adults are more focused on self-reflection than middle-aged adults, and that there has been a difference in the narrative identities of the two groups, which is most likely due to parenthood.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent (German)

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

Danke, dass sie an unserer Studie teilnehmen.

Das hier ist ein Interview über dein/ihr Leben. Als Psychologe bin ich sehr interessiert darin, deine Geschichte zu hören. Dies beinhaltet Teile deiner Vergangenheit, so wie du sie in Erinnerung hast, und die Zukunft so wie du sie dir vorstellst. Diese Geschichte ist selektiv, das heißt dass sie nicht alles beinhalten muss was dir widerfahren ist. Stattdessen möchte ich, dass du dich auf einige Schlüsselereignisse fokussierst – Bestimmte Szenen, Charaktere, und Ideen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten auf meine Fragen. Ganz im Gegenteil, deine einzige Aufgabe wird es sein, mir von den wichtigsten Ereignissen deines Lebens, und Vorstellungen deiner Zukunft zu erzählen. Ich werde dich durch dieses Interview begleiten, sodass wir in circa 2 Stunden fertig sind, eventuell auch weniger.

Das Interview wird aufgezeichnet, jedoch werden die Aufnahmen vertraulich behandelt und sicher verschlossen aufbewahrt. Es werden keine Namen verwendet, und falls doch, werden sie vorher geändert, sodass Daten nicht auf sie als Person zurückgeführt werden können. Die Aufzeichnungen werden nach der Analyse vernichtet.

Vom Teilnehmer auszufüllen

Ich bestätige hiermit, dass ich in ausreichender und verständlicher Form über die Natur, Methode, das Ziel, und [falls vorhanden] die Risiken dieser Studie informiert wurde. Ich weiß, dass meine Daten und die Ergebnisse der Studie vertraulich, und nur in anonymisierter Form an Dritte (z.B. Fachblätter) weitergegeben werden. Meine Fragen wurden ausreichend und zufriedenstellend beantwortet.

Ich stimme freiwillig zu an dieser Studie teilzunehmen, wobei ich mir das Recht einbehalte die Studie zu jeglichem Zeitpunkt abubrechen, ohne einen Grund zu nennen.

Für weitere Fragen kontaktieren sie:
p.a.buscher@student.utwente.nl

Name Teilnehmer:

.....
.....

Datum:

Unterschrift Teilnehmer:

Appendix B1: Life Story Interview (Original)

Introduction

This is an interview about the story of your life. As a psychologist, I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life – a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life and how you imagine your life developing in the future. I will guide you through the interview so that we finish it all in about two hours or less.

Please know that my purpose in doing this interview is not to figure out what is wrong with you or to do some kind of deep clinical analysis! Nor should you think of this interview as a “therapy session” of some kind. The interview is for research purposes only, and its main goal is simply to hear your story. As social scientists, my colleagues and I collect people’s life stories in order to understand the different ways in which people in our society and in others live their lives and the different ways in which they understand who they are. Everything you say is voluntary, anonymous, and confidential.

I think you will enjoy the interview. Do you have any questions?

A. Life Chapters

Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To begin here, please describe very briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please give each chapter a title, tell me just a little bit about what each chapter is about, and say a word or two about how we get from one chapter to the next. As a storyteller here, what you want to do is to give me an overall plot summary of your story, going chapter by chapter. You may have as many chapters as you want, but I would suggest having between about two and seven of them. We will want to spend no more than about 20 minutes on this first section of the interview, so please keep your descriptions of the chapters relatively brief.

[Note to interviewer: The interviewer should feel free to ask questions of clarification and elaboration throughout the interview, but especially in this first part. This first section of the interview should run between 15 and 30 minutes.]

B. Key Scenes in the Life Story

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I would like you to focus in on a few key scenes that stand out in the story. A key scene would be an event or specific incident that took place at a particular time and place. Consider a key scene to be a moment in your life story that stands out for a particular reason – perhaps because it was especially good or bad, particularly vivid, important, or memorable. For each of the eight key events we will consider, I ask that you describe in detail what happened, when and where it happened, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling in the event. In addition, I ask that you tell me why you think this particular scene is important or significant in your life. What does the scene say about you as a person? Please be specific.

1. High Point

Please describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point scene of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting, or wonderful moment in the story. Please describe this high point scene in detail. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so good and what the scene may say about who you are as a person.

2. *Low Point*

The second scene is the opposite of the first. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not the low point in your life story. Even though this event is unpleasant, I would appreciate your providing as much detail as you can about it. What happened in the event, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, please say a word or two about why you think this particular moment was so bad and what the scene may say about you or your life.

[Interviewer note: If the participant balks at doing this, tell him or her that the event does not really have to be *the* lowest point in the story but merely a very bad experience of some kind.]

3. *Turning Point*

In looking back over your life, it may be possible to identify certain key moments that stand out as turning points -- episodes that marked an important change in you or your life story. Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life. If you cannot identify a key turning point that stands out clearly, please describe some event in your life wherein you went through an important change of some kind. Again, for this event please describe what happened, where and when, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, please say a word or two about what you think this event says about you as a person or about your life.

4. *Positive Childhood Memory*

The fourth scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *positive* in some way. This would be a very positive, happy memory from your early years. Please describe this good memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or about your life?

5. *Negative Childhood Memory*

The fifth scene is an early memory – from childhood or your teen-aged years – that stands out as especially *negative* in some way. This would be a very negative, unhappy memory from your early years, perhaps entailing sadness, fear, or some other very negative emotional experience. Please describe this bad memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

6. *Vivid Adult Memory*

Moving ahead to your adult years, please identify one scene that you have not already described in this section (in other words, do not repeat your high point, low point, or turning point scene) that stands out as especially vivid or meaningful. This would be an especially memorable, vivid, or important scene, positive or negative, from your adult years. Please describe this scene in detail, tell what happened, when and where, who was involved, and what you were thinking and feeling. Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

7. Wisdom Event

Please describe an event in your life in which you displayed wisdom. The episode might be one in which you acted or interacted in an especially wise way or provided wise counsel or advice, made a wise decision, or otherwise behaved in a particularly wise manner. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you and your life?

8. Religious, Spiritual, or Mystical Experience

Whether they are religious or not, many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Thinking back on your entire life, please identify an episode or moment in which you felt something like this. This might be an experience that occurred within the context of your own religious tradition, if you have one, or it may be a spiritual or mystical experience of any kind. Please describe this transcendent experience in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? Also, what does this memory say about you or your life?

Now, we're going to talk about the future.

C. Future Script

1. The Next Chapter

Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your future. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

2. Dreams, Hopes, and Plans for the Future

Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the future in your life story?

3. Life Project

Do you have a project in life? A life project is something that you have been working on and plan to work on in the future chapters of your life story. The project might involve your family or your work life, or it might be a hobby, avocation, or pastime. Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future. Tell me what the project is, how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for other people.

D. Challenges

This next section considers the various challenges, struggles, and problems you have encountered in your life. I will begin with a general challenge, and then I will focus in on three particular areas or issues where many people experience challenges, problems, or crises.

1. Life Challenge

Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced in your life. What is or was the challenge or problem? How did the challenge or problem develop? How did you address or deal with this

challenge or problem? What is the significance of this challenge or problem in your own life story?

2. Health

Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe a scene or period in your life, including the present time, wherein you or a close family member confronted a major *health* problem, challenge, or crisis. Please describe in detail what the health problem is or was and how it developed. If relevant, please discuss any experience you had with the health-care system regarding this crisis or problem. In addition, please talk about how you coped with the problem and what impact this health crisis, problem, or challenge has had on you and your overall life story.

3. Loss

As people get older, they invariably suffer losses of one kind or another. By loss I am referring here to the loss of important people in your life, perhaps through death or separation. These are *interpersonal* losses – the loss of a person. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest interpersonal loss you have experienced. This could be a loss you experienced at any time in your life, going back to childhood and up to the present day. Please describe this loss and the process of the loss. How have you coped with the loss? What effect has this loss had on you and your life story?

4. Failure, Regret

Everybody experiences failure and regrets in life, even for the happiest and luckiest lives. Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe the greatest failure or regret you have experienced. The failure or regret can occur in any area of your life – work, family, friendships, or any other area. Please describe the failure or regret and the way in which the failure or regret came to be. How have you coped with this failure or regret? What effect has this failure or regret had on you and your life story?

E. Personal Ideology

Now, I would like to ask a few questions about your fundamental beliefs and values and about questions of meaning and morality in your life. Please give some thought to each of these questions.

1. Religious/Ethical Values

Consider for a moment the religious or spiritual aspects of your life. Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs and values, if indeed these are important to you. Whether you are religious or not, please describe your overall ethical or moral approach to life.

2. Political/Social Values

How do you approach political or social issues? Do you have a particular political point of view? Are there particular social issues or causes about which you feel strongly? Please explain.

3. Change, Development of Religious and Political Views

Please tell the story of how your religious, moral, and/or political views and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways? Please explain.

4. Single Value

What is the most important value in human living? Please explain.

5. Other

What else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world? What else can you tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?

F. Life Theme

Looking back over your entire life story with all its chapters, scenes, and challenges, and extending back into the past and ahead into the future, do you discern a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story? Please explain.

G. Reflection

Thank you for this interview. I have just one more question for you. Many of the stories you have told me are about experiences that stand out from the day-to-day. For example, we talked about a high point, a turning point, a scene about your health, etc. Given that most people don't share their life stories in this way on a regular basis, I'm wondering if you might reflect for one last moment about what this interview, here today, has been like for you. What were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview has affected you? Do you have any other comments about the interview process?

Appendix B2: Life Story Interview (Translated)

Einleitung

Das hier ist ein Interview über dein/ihr Leben. Als Psychologe bin ich sehr interessiert darin, deine Geschichte zu hören. Dies beinhaltet Teile deiner Vergangenheit, so wie du sie in Erinnerung hast, und die Zukunft so wie du sie dir vorstellst. Diese Geschichte ist selektiv, das heißt dass sie nicht alles beinhalten muss was dir widerfahren ist. Stattdessen möchte ich, dass du dich auf einige Schlüsselereignisse fokussierst – Bestimmte Szenen, Charaktere, und Ideen. Es gibt keine richtigen oder falschen Antworten auf meine Fragen. Ganz im Gegenteil, deine einzige Aufgabe wird es sein, mir von den wichtigsten Ereignissen deines Lebens, und Vorstellungen deiner Zukunft zu erzählen. Ich werde dich durch dieses Interview begleiten, sodass wir in circa 2 Stunden fertig sind, eventuell auch weniger.

Gibt es Fragen?

A. Kapitel des Lebens

Bitte beginne indem du dir dein Leben wie ein Buch oder einen Roman vorstellst. Stelle dir vor, dieses Buch hätte ein Inhaltsverzeichnis mit den Titeln der Hauptkapitel der Geschichte. Als erstes bitte ich dich, kurz zu beschreiben was für Kapitel deine Geschichte hat. Gib jedem Kapitel einen Titel, erzähle mir worum es in diesem Kapitel geht, und erläutere kurz wie wir von einem zum nächsten Kapitel gelangen. Du bist der Erzähler, und was ich möchte ist, dass du mir eine grobe Inhaltsangabe deiner Geschichte gibst, Kapitel für Kapitel. Du darfst so viele Kapitel haben wie du möchtest, eine Empfehlung wäre allerdings zwischen 2 und 7. Dieser erste Teil soll circa 20 Minuten dauern.

[Evtl. Fragen zur Erläuterung]

B. Schlüsselszenen der Lebensgeschichte

Jetzt wo du den groben Inhalt deines Lebens beschrieben hast, bitte ich dich als nächstes dich auf einige Schlüsselereignisse deiner Geschichte zu fokussieren. Diese wären zum Beispiel ein bestimmtes Ereignis oder ein bestimmter Zwischenfall, der zu einer bestimmten Zeit an einem bestimmten Ort stattgefunden hat. Sieh es als einen Moment in deiner Geschichte, der aus einem bestimmten Grund heraussticht – vielleicht war dieser Moment besonders gut oder schlecht, lebhaft, wichtig, oder denkwürdig. Für jede der acht Szenen bitte ich dich was passiert ist, wann und wo es passiert ist, wer beteiligt war, und deine Gedanken- und Gefühlslage im Detail zu beschreiben. Zusätzlich frage ich dich warum du denkst, dass genau dieses Ereignis wichtig oder einflussreich für dein Leben war. Was sagt dieses über dich als Person aus?

1. Hochpunkt

Bitte beschreibe eine Szene, Episode, oder einen Moment in deinem Leben der als besonders positive Erfahrung heraussticht. Es kann sich dabei um den Höhepunkt deines Lebens handeln, oder nur um einen sehr frohen, glücklichen, aufregenden, oder sonst positiven Moment deiner Geschichte. Bitte beschreibe diesen Hochpunkt im Detail – was passiert ist, wann und wo, wer beteiligt war, und was du gedacht und gefühlt hast. Erzähle auch bitte in ein oder zwei Worten warum du denkst, dass dieser Moment so gut war und was sie über dich als Person aussagt.

2. Tiefpunkt

Diese Szene ist das Gegenteil zur ersten Szene. Bitte versuche, beim Zurückdenken an dein Leben, eine Szene festzumachen die als ein Tiefpunkt, wenn nicht sogar der Tiefpunkt, deiner

Geschichte gilt. Obwohl dies zuerst unangenehm sein mag, wäre ich dir dankbar, wenn du so weit ins Detail gehen könntest wie möglich. Was passiert ist, wann und wo, wer beteiligt war, und was du gedacht und gefühlt hast. Erzähle, wie zuvor auch, bitte warum du denkst, dass diese Szene/ dieser Moment so negativ war und was diese Szene über dich oder dein Leben aussagt.

3. *Wendepunkt*

Beim Blick in die Vergangenheit kann es sein, dass man einige Momente identifiziert die als Wendepunkte herausstehen – dies sind Episoden, die wichtige Veränderungen in deinem Leben hervorgebracht haben. Bitte versuche so eine Episode zu identifizieren, welche du jetzt als solch einen Wendepunkt siehst. Wenn dir dies nicht gelingt, dann beschreibe bitte ein Ereignis in deinem Leben, welches eine wichtige Veränderung für dich mit sich brachte. Bitte beschreibe was passiert ist, wann und wo, wer involviert war, und was du gedacht und gefühlt hast. Und bitte erzähle auch kurz was dieses Ereignis über dich als Person oder über dein Leben aussagt.

4. *Positive Kindheitserinnerung*

Die vierte Szene ist eine frühe Erinnerung – aus deiner Kindheit oder aus deinem jugendlichen Alter – welche als besonders positiv heraussteicht. Es sollte sich um eine positive, glückliche Erinnerung aus deinen frühen Jahren handeln. Bitte beschreibe diese gute Erinnerung im Detail. Was passiert ist, wann und wo, wer beteiligt war, und was du gedacht und gefühlt hast. Was sagt diese Erinnerung über dich oder dein Leben aus?

5. *Negative Kindheitserinnerung*

Die fünfte Szene ist eine frühe Erinnerung – aus deiner Kindheit oder aus deinem jugendlichen Alter – welche als besonders negativ heraussteicht. Es sollte sich um eine negative, unglückliche Erinnerung aus deinen frühen Jahren handeln. Bitte beschreibe diese schlechte Erinnerung im Detail. Was passiert ist, wann und wo, wer beteiligt war, und was du gedacht und gefühlt hast. Was sagt diese Erinnerung über dich oder dein Leben aus?

6. *Lebhaftige Erinnerung aus dem Erwachsenenalter*

Widmen wir uns nun deinem Erwachsenenalter. Bitte identifiziere eine Szene, welche du noch nicht beschrieben hast (i.a.W. wiederhole nicht deinen Hoch-, Tief-, oder Wendepunkt). Diese sollte als besonders lebhaft oder bedeutsam herausstechen. Es sollte sich um eine besonders denkwürdige, lebhaft, oder wichtige Szene, positiv oder negativ, aus deinem Erwachsenenalter handeln. Bitte beschreibe diese Szene im Detail, erzähle was passiert ist, wann und wo, wer beteiligt war, und was du gedacht und gefühlt hast. Was sagt diese Erinnerung über dich oder dein Leben aus?

7. *„Weisheitsereignis“*

Bitte beschreibe ein Ereignis, in welchem du Weisheit gezeigt hast. Diese Episode könnte davon handeln, dass du besonders weise gehandelt oder interagiert hast, oder besonders weisen Rat oder Ratschläge gegeben hast, eine weise Entscheidung getroffen hast, oder dich auf sonstige Art weise verhalten hast. Was ist passiert, wann und wo, wer war beteiligt, was hast du gedacht und gefühlt? Was sagt diese Erinnerung über dich oder dein Leben aus?

8. *Religiöse, spirituelle, oder mystische Erfahrung*

Egal ob sie religiös sind oder nicht, viele Menschen berichten von Erfahrungen in ihrem Leben in denen sie ein Gefühl von Transzendenz gespürt haben, das Gefühl von einem Gott oder einer Art übersinnlicher Kraft, ein Gefühl von Einheit mit der Natur, der Welt, oder dem Universum. Denke bitte an dein eigenes Leben zurück und identifiziere eine Episode oder einen Moment in welchem du so ein Gefühl verspürt hast. Es könnte sich um eine Erfahrung handeln, die im Zusammenhang mit deiner eigenen Religion aufgetreten ist, falls du eine hast. Oder es könnte eine spirituelle oder mystische Erfahrung jeglicher Art sein. Bitte beschreibe diese transzendente Erfahrung im Detail. Was ist passiert, wann und wo, wer war beteiligt, und was hast du gedacht und gefühlt? Was sagt diese Erinnerung über dich oder dein Leben aus?

→ Wir werden uns jetzt über die Zukunft unterhalten.

C. Future Script

1. Das nächste Kapitel

Deine Lebensgeschichte beinhaltet Schlüsselkapitel und -szenen aus deiner Vergangenheit, so wie du sie beschrieben hast, und beinhaltet auch wie du deine Zukunft siehst oder sie dir vorstellst. Bitte beschreibe was du als nächstes Kapitel in deinem Leben siehst. Was kommt als nächstes in deiner Lebensgeschichte?

2. Träume, Hoffnungen, und Pläne für die Zukunft

Bitte beschreibe deine Pläne, Träume, oder Hoffnungen für die Zukunft. Was hoffst du in der Zukunft zu erreichen?

3. Lebensprojekt

Hast du ein Projekt im Leben? Ein Lebensprojekt ist etwas an dem du gearbeitet hast und auch planst weiterzuarbeiten in folgenden Kapiteln. Dieses Projekt könnte sich um deine Familie oder deine Arbeit handeln, oder um ein Hobby, eine Berufung, oder einen Zeitvertreib. Bitte beschreibe irgendein Projekt, an dem du gerade arbeitest oder in der Zukunft planst zu arbeiten. Erzähl mir was das Projekt ist, wie du eingebunden wurdest oder eingebunden werden wirst, wie es sich entwickeln könnte, und warum du denkst, dass dieses Projekt für dich und/oder für andere Menschen wichtig ist.

D. Herausforderungen

Der nächste Teil handelt von den verschiedenen Herausforderungen, Sorgen, oder Problemen, auf die du in deinem Leben gestoßen bist. Ich werde mit einer generellen Herausforderung anfangen, und werde den Fokus dann auf drei bestimmte Felder leiten in denen viele Leute Herausforderungen, Probleme oder Krisen erleben.

1. Lebensherausforderung

Rückblickend auf dein gesamtes Leben, bitte identifiziere und beschreibe die größte Herausforderung der du dich in deinem bisherigen Leben stellen musstest. Was ist, oder war, die Herausforderung oder das Problem? Was ist die Bedeutung dieser Herausforderung oder dieses Problems in deiner Geschichte?

2. *Gesundheit*

Rückblickend auf dein Leben, bitte beschreibe eine Szene oder Periode in deinem Leben, eventuell auch in der Gegenwart, in welcher du oder ein nahes Familienmitglied mit einer schweren Krankheit, oder schweren gesundheitlichen Problemen konfrontiert wurde. Bitte beschreibe im Detail wobei es sich bei dem gesundheitlichen Problem handelt oder gehandelt hat, und wie es sich entwickelt hat. Bitte beschreibe auch jegliche Erfahrung, die du mit dem Gesundheitssystem gemacht hast, falls zutreffend. Bitte erzähle darüber hinaus auch darüber wie du mit dem Problem umgegangen bist, und welche Konsequenzen dieses Problem für deine Geschichte hatte.

3. *Verlust*

Menschen erleiden im fortschreitenden Alter immer mehr Verluste. Mit Verlust meine ich den Verlust von wichtigen Menschen in deinem Leben, durch zum Beispiel Tod oder Trennung. Diese Verluste sind interpersonal – der Verlust einer Person. Rückblickend auf dein Leben, identifiziere und beschreibe bitte den größten interpersonalen Verlust, den du erlebt hast. Dieser Verlust kann zu jeder Zeit gewesen sein, von deiner Kindheit bis zum heutigen Tag. Bitte beschreibe den Verlust und den Prozess dahinter? Wie bist du mit dem Verlust umgegangen? Was war der Effekt dieses Verlustes auf dich und deine Geschichte?

4. *Versagen, Bedauern*

Jeder versagt und zeigt Bedauern im Leben. Selbst im besten und glücklichsten Leben. Blicke auf dein Leben zurück, und identifiziere und beschreibe das größte Versagen oder das größte Bedauern, das du erlebt hast. Dies kann in jedem Teil deines Lebens passiert sein – Arbeit, Familie, Freunde, etc. Bitte beschreibe das Versagen oder das Bedauern und wie dies zustande kam. Wie bist du damit umgegangen? Was war der Effekt auf dich und dein Leben?
E. Persönliche Ideologie
Ich würde dir jetzt gerne Fragen über deine fundamentalen Einstellungen und Werte stellen, und über Sinn und Moralen in deinem Leben.

1. *Religiöse / Ethische Werte*

Denke für einen Moment an religiöse oder spirituelle Aspekte in deinem Leben. Bitte beschreibe deine religiösen Einstellungen und Werte in Kürze, falls diese für dich wichtig sind. Ob religiös oder nicht, bitte beschreibe deine generelle ethische oder moralische Einstellung zum Leben.

2. *Politische / Soziale Werte*

Wie gehst du soziale oder politische Probleme an? Hast du eine bestimmte politische Ansicht? Gibt es bestimmte soziale Fragen oder Probleme, die dich besonders beschäftigen? Bitte erläutere.

3. *Veränderung oder Entwicklung religiöser und politischer Ansichten*

Bitte erzähle wie sich deine religiösen, moralischen und/oder politischen Ansichten und Werte über die Zeit entwickelt haben. Gab es wichtige Veränderungen? Bitte erläutere.

4. *Der (wichtigste) Wert*

Welcher ist der wichtigste Wert im menschlichen Leben? Bitte erläutere.

5. *Andere*

Was kannst du mir noch erzählen, dass mir dabei helfen könnte deine grundlegenden Einstellungen und Werte über das Leben und die Welt zu verstehen? Was kannst du mir noch erzählen, dass mir dabei helfen könnte deine Philosophie zu verstehen?

F. *Thema des Lebens*

Wenn du auf deine gesamte Lebensgeschichte zurückblickst, mit all ihren Kapiteln, Szenen, und Herausforderungen, und über Vergangenheit und Zukunft erstreckend, erkennst du ein zentrales Thema, eine bestimmte Botschaft, oder Idee, die sich durch die Geschichte zieht? Was ist das große Thema deiner Lebensgeschichte? Bitte erläutere.

G. *Reflektion*

Das wars! Ich bedanke mich bei dir für dieses Interview. Ich habe nur noch eine weitere Frage für dich. Viele der Geschichten, die du mir erzählt hast, handeln von Erfahrungen, die aus dem Alltagsgeschehen herausstechen. Wir haben zum Beispiel über einen Hochpunkt, einen Wendepunkt, oder ein Ereignis in Zusammenhang mit deiner Gesundheit geredet. In Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass die meisten Menschen ihre Lebensgeschichte nicht auf diese Art und Weise erzählen, zumindest nicht regelmäßig, frage ich mich ob du für einen Moment über dieses Interview reflektieren könntest und wie du es empfunden hast. Wie hast du dich gefühlt und was hast du so gedacht während des Interviews? Denkst du, dass dieses Interview einen Effekt auf dich hat? Hast du irgendwelche Anmerkungen zum Interview?