

Narratives in Psychology: A Qualitative Analysis of

Individuals' Life Stories

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### Abstract

The researcher's aim is to examine how individuals structure the narrative of their own life story and examine how this influences their own sense of identity and psychological well-being. This qualitative study involved two structured interviews, one with a 23-year-old white male and the other with a 56-year-old white female. Participants were sought through word of mouth and had minimal acquaintance to the researcher. Each participant participated in an in-depth semi-structured interview, where they were asked to narrate the story of their life. Interviews were coded both inductively and deductively to determine the nature of how these stories were articulated by the participant and their relationship to the participant's well-being. It was found that the participant who had more redemptive sequences and themes of agency throughout their narrative had a stronger sense of identity within themselves and had a higher sense of life satisfaction. Being that there were only two participants, these results are not generalizable. However, they can be used as a reference for future research and forming hypotheses.

*Key Words:* Psychology, Qualitative Research, Redemption, Contamination, Coherence, Communion, Agency, Identity, Story, Narrative Identity, Mental Health

### Narratives in Psychology: A Qualitative Analysis of Individuals' Life Stories

The stories that we tell on a daily basis can be used to construct our own identity, learn about ourselves, or even as a form of entertainment. When an individual narrates their life story, it can help psychologists and others understand how they make meaning out of their lives and their identity. Stories are as fundamental as food, water, or shelter to human beings. They are essential in creating a connection with others and we are innately social animals. Understanding the significance of these personal narratives is important, which is why there have been so many researchers who use such stories to understand notions of individual well-being, identity, and happiness.

#### **Literature Review**

There have been many studies in the past which have proposed theories to explain how an individual's narrative can affect them. The literature review serves to provide background information on Narrative Psychology and previous findings. Many studies focused on the following factors; the degree to which an individual believes they have control over events in their life (agency), the participant's desire to form bonds with others (communion), Whether the participant perceives the outcome of an event as bad (contamination) or good (redemption), and the participant's concern for future generations (generativity). It is believed that each of these factors may influence an individual's psychological well-being and their ability to form a clear sense of identity.

Research conducted by Adler et al. (2015) explored the relationship between narrative identity and its effect on mental health. In particular, they studied the concepts of agency, contamination, and redemption in stories. They conducted two longitudinal studies and found

that participants whose narratives include high levels of agency and minimal contamination sequences experienced positive developments of mental health over the course of the four-year study. They also found that contamination sequences were associated with poor effects on mental health (Adler et al., 2015). So, participants who felt they were able to influence parts of their life as opposed to feeling bullied by uncontrollable circumstances had more favorable outcomes.

A study by McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, and Bowman (2001) focused on the association between generativity and narrative by collecting open-ended narratives of significant life events from college students and mid-life adults. The findings indicated highly generative adults constructed life-narrative scenes with higher levels of redemption imagery and lower levels of contamination imagery compared with adults who were low in generativity. In addition, it was found that contamination sequences were a strong predictor of depression and low self-esteem (McAdams et al. 2001).

McAdams, Hoffman, Mansfield, and Day (1996) conducted a series of three studies where over 350 participants were asked to share narratives of personally important scenes in their lives. It was found that agency was positively correlated with measures of achievement and motivation. Communion scores were found to be highly correlated with motivation for intimacy and the need for affiliation and nurturance. However, in this study, agency and communion were found to be relatively independent of one another.

A research study conducted by Waters and Fivush (2014) examined the autobiographical narratives of college students and examined the relationship between the way their stories were told and the status of their mental health. It was found that narratives do, in fact, play a role in psychological well-being. Emerging adults who solve identity problems in a coherent manner develop a sense of purpose, whereas those who do not experience identity confusion and

psychological distress (Waters & Fivush, 2014). The findings suggest that telling coherent stories which make meaning of one's identity is extremely beneficial to one's mental health, while an incoherent narrative could have the opposite effect and could potentially be detrimental to one's psychological well-being.

McCoy and Dunlop (2016) studied the relationship between narratives and emotional functioning in adult children of alcoholics (ACOA). In this study, it was found that ACOA's produced stories with less agency compared to those who didn't have alcoholic parents. It was also found that among ACOA's, redemption sequences and agency had a negative correlation with emotional functioning (McCoy & Dunlop, 2016). This could be due to the cognitive dissonance felt when a vulnerable individual (such as a victim of abuse) feels pressure to interpret their experiences in positive ways, despite the objective reality.

As the previous literature proposes, there are several factors in how one structures their narrative that could have an influence on their psychological well-being. High levels of generativity, agency, and redemption in narratives were all predictors of positive developments in mental health, whereas themes of contamination and incoherent narratives typically resulted in psychological distress.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this paper was to examine how the formation of an individual's narrative influences their sense of identity and psychological well-being. The current study aims to examine new data and determine whether the findings are consistent with the findings of previous studies done by researchers such as Waters and Fivush (2014), who had found that individuals who were lacking coherence in their narratives tended to have higher levels of

identity confusion and psychological distress. The participants' narratives in the current study were read thoroughly, and any indication of these themes was addressed.

### **Method**

The author of this paper took part in the Narratives in Psychology Seminar at SUNY New Paltz, where each student was tasked with conducting an in-depth interview on the life story of a person of their choosing. Students were tasked with interviewing one individual and performing a qualitative analysis of the resulting narrative. Once a participant was selected and the participant's consent was given, a structured interview was conducted. The interview was structured in a way that guided the participant to tell the story of a high point, low point, turning point, and vivid memory in their life. They were then asked several questions about their fundamental beliefs and values and what their plans were for the future. This interview was recorded. The recording was used to transcribe the interview and then deleted immediately to ensure the participant's anonymity. From this transcription, a re-storied summary was written, so that a reader could understand the gist of the person's narrative. In addition, sections of the interview were deductively and inductively coded using materials and charts provided in the class. This process was repeated by the researcher independently with a second participant in an attempt to extend the findings from the previous participant.

### **Analytic Strategy**

The narratives collected during the interview were analyzed in three ways with a re-storied summary, deductive analysis, and inductive analysis. The re-storying process began with organizing all of the information that was gathered throughout the interview. This included piecing together stories that may have been told out of order or had background information shared mid-story. The smaller stories that did not contribute to the overall picture for the

purposes of this paper were removed from the summary. However, a copy of the full transcribed interview is attached should the reader be interested. With all of the significant events organized and arranged in a coherent manner, the summary was written. All names mentioned in the interviews were substituted with pseudonyms, and for the purposes of this paper, the participants will be referred to as “Jeff” and “Gina”.

The deductive analysis was based on a coding chart provided by the professors of the Narratives in Psychology Seminar at SUNY New Paltz. Using the chart provided, the researcher measured whether motivational themes (agency, communion, and growth goals), affective themes (contamination, redemption, and positive resolution), coherence, and identity were present throughout each participant’s story. To search for motivational themes, the high point, low point, turning point, and vivid memory were each examined closely to determine whether agency, communion, or growth goals were present. In Jeff’s interview, he indicated that the high point was also the turning point, so only three stories were measured. However, in Gina’s interview, there was no overlap, and each of these sections were measured separately. To determine whether affective themes were present in these sections of the interview, themes of contamination, redemption, and positive resolution were searched for. In order to recognize the presence of coherence in the high point, low point, and turning point, descriptions that consisted of chronology, context, and themes throughout were considered. Finally, a sense of identity was coded using a Likert scale from 0-3. A 0 was coded when there was no content that the memory defined or enhanced identity, a 1 was coded at any mention of similarity or difference in a sense of self or labeling oneself as a part of a group, a 2 included an elaboration of the aforementioned criteria, and a 3 meant that an in-depth description of why the event changed the individual’s

sense of identity, how this changed them, and elaboration on the impact of the event was included in the story.

In order to conduct the inductive analysis on the section of the interview where the participant spoke about their core values and beliefs, it was necessary to create meta-codes. This was done by examining the transcribed interview line by line and searching for recurring themes or patterns. For Jeff and Gina, both were assigned the meta code “views”, which was then categorized into more specific codes; positive views, negative views, and neutral views. This was done so there would be a reference point to compare the two participants for the inductive coding. Jeff was also assigned the meta code “change”, with the following categories; positive change, negative change, and lack of change. This theme was coded due to Jeff’s consistent mention of changes in his life or for his desire to have change. The second code assigned to Gina was “connectedness”, which was then further characterized with the following codes; connectedness with self, connectedness with friends and family, connectedness with others, because Gina’s stories consistently revolved around her relationships with others/

### **Results**

#### *Re-storied Summary – “Jeff”*

The first participant in this study, to be referred to as “Jeff”, was a single, 23-year-old Caucasian male who grew up in a low-income area. Jeff is a distressed individual, who has overcome many adversities in his life, beginning with his parent’s divorce when he was a young boy. He has a high school diploma but chose not to pursue higher education due to lack of funds, and not wanting to risk having student debts he may never be able to pay back. He currently works as a salesperson in a pawn shop and makes less than \$20k annually.

As a child, Jeff looked up to his father and thought he was what a 'real' man was supposed to be. He wanted to be just like him when he grew up; to be a proper 'man'. Around the age of 5-8, he didn't know much about sex or what anything related to it meant. So, when he found a porn magazine with his male cousin Charlie one day at his father's house, he was very confused. Jeff doesn't remember much about what happened in the hours after finding the magazine, but he remembers falling asleep in the same bed as his cousin. They were both naked. He was startled, confused, and scared when his father came into the room to check on them and was furiously yelling. He grabbed Jeff's arm and pulled him out of bed and dragged him downstairs into the living room for all of his aunts, uncles, and family to see. His father had made him tell all of them that they were having sex, despite him not knowing what had really happened. Jeff had never been more humiliated in his life than he was at that moment. To this day, he will never be able to forget the look on his stepmother's face, the sound of all of his relatives crying, or the disappointed look of his mother when he returned home. He felt broken and that his family hated him.

As Jeff got older, he found that he didn't fit in much in school. He didn't have many friends, and the friends he did have were considered to be the outcasts of the school. His mother and stepfather thought that he lacked discipline, so they made him join the Cadets. This is similar to Boy Scouts but is military training for youths where they go camping together and learn how to become a soldier. Jeff resented his parents for making him join, but he enjoyed going away for those weekends and hanging out with the other boys. It was a tradition in this group to scare all of the new recruits. One night, Jeff was told to go into a closet and tie a rope around his neck and pretend he hung himself, so they could scare a new recruit. Jeff was also relatively new, so the other boys didn't tell him why this would scare the new recruit. He was doing exactly what a

man named Gary Gibbons did. Where Jeff grew up there were a lot of gangs and they regularly fought with one another. Gary Gibbons was on the run from one of the gangs, and he knew he couldn't escape them, so he hung himself before they could get to him. Jeff didn't know all of this until after the fact, so when he returned to school he was approached by Gary Gibbon's cousin who was furious about his involvement in the prank. He was ready to attack Jeff, but Jeff lied his way out of it and convinced the cousin that it never happened. Right after that, two other boys snuck up behind Jeff to punch him in the head, and he didn't do anything about that. He was humiliated and regretted not doing anything about it.

At the age of 16, Jeff met a girl named Anne and they fell in love. They spent every second of every day together while they were still in school and loved it. Anne had initially been cheating on her boyfriend with Jeff, but she eventually broke it off with her ex so she and Jeff could be together. When Jeff graduated high school two years before her, things changed because they couldn't be together all the time anymore. They moved in together when she graduated, and this led to them fighting regularly. Anne would say extremely hurtful things to Jeff, poking fun at the fact that his family didn't have as much money as hers, call him pathetic among many other derogatory terms, and he would call her fat and more. They never went out together as a couple. She would go out with her friends, and he went out with his. It wasn't long before their arguments became physical. They would hit each other, scream in each other's faces, and threaten each other with knives. Jeff discovered that she had been cheating on him, and this made him very depressed and angry. He lost his job and his apartment which resulted in their breakup. He still loved her and this unrequited love drove him mad.

He mindlessly searched dating apps looking for something to fill the emptiness he felt. He would spend hours trying to look for a meaningless hookup, thinking that would help him

feel better, and he hated that he was like that. Eventually, he met a girl who he connected with immediately. They kept seeing each other after that and he fell in love with her. He became close with all of her college friends, and they all felt like a family. This was one of the happiest times of Jeff's life because these girls taught him that it is important to live life and have fun and that friends will always be there. Eventually, they all graduated and left to pursue jobs and graduate degrees. Jeff felt this was a bittersweet time in his life, but he is still with the girl he loves and has been with her for two years. He plans on moving in with her when he gets enough money to start a life with her and hopefully begin a career as a musician in the future.

*Deductive Analysis – “Jeff”*

Jeff had compelling evidence of **coherence** throughout his life story. In terms of chronology, each story was told in a logical manner that would make sense to someone who had never heard the story before. He provided ample context for the high point, low point, and vivid memory. Giving the reader relevant background information such as time, location, and his relationships with the individuals who were involved in the narrative. In each of these, a theme was present, a specific topic was introduced, developed, and resolved.

Throughout the majority of Jeff's story, **motivational themes** (agency, communion, and growth goals) were not present. A sense of **agency** was not found in the high point of the story as Jeff tended to go along with what everyone else was doing. For example, during the interview, Jeff had mentioned when he broke up with his girlfriend he spent a lot of time with a friend of his named Malcolm and he felt pressured to sleep with a lot of women to gain his approval. Not many choices were made of his own accord. He followed what everyone else was doing and agreed with their decisions despite his own conflicting feelings. During the low point, Jeff had a recurring theme of blaming others and feeling that he had little control over what went on around

him. He often worded his stories in a way where he was the victim despite acting like an abuser. For example, when telling the story of a previous toxic relationship, Jeff said “I know it was partly my fault as well because I did hit her. There were points where I hit her, but she gave just as good as she got.” and “The only time she would have sex with me was when she came home pissed out of her face. That’s the only time, any other time she had no interest whatsoever. And I know the only reason she wanted to have sex with me was because she had been with someone else but couldn’t have sex with them.” In addition to admitting to physically abusing Anne, he took advantage of her sexually when she was intoxicated and was not in a position where she could give consent on several occasions. Furthermore, during Jeff’s vivid memory, he had a semblance of agency when he said “I’m really bad for not getting in touch with people, but when I do I always end up having the best time, so I don’t know why I don’t. It’s just stupid.” In this particular story, he acknowledges his ability to initiate changes on his own and the influence his actions have in regard to the relationships in his life. However, due of the fact that he does not actually act on this notion, agency is still absent.

Themes of **communion** were present in every one of Jeff’s stories. In the high point, when he describes meeting his current girlfriend he says, “I thought, ‘she could be the one, she’s really cool.’ After chatting for a while, we had a laugh and we really hit it off from the word go and that’s really rare in this day and age.” This shows his comfort in being able to connect with an individual on a deep level. In Jeff’s low point, he described how lost he felt when his previous girlfriend had left him, “I think to be honest I was just afraid of being alone because we were together every second of the day and I just didn’t know who I was anymore. I wasn’t me if I didn’t have her. I didn’t know what I liked, I was with her for five years of my life spent glued to her side. It was terrifying the thought of being alone and not having a clue what to do anymore.”

His frantic need to have a sense of togetherness and harmony with another individual was so intense to the point where he felt he had no sense of self when this was gone. In Jeff's high point, he mentioned that when he keeps in touch with friends and family he always has "the best time", which demonstrates his desire for human connection and affection being prevalent across the board.

**Growth goals** were only prevalent in Jeff's high point. After spending time with his girlfriend and her housemates he explained "I always felt like an outcast but within a week they all made me feel so welcome. And I felt part of something and I felt like I didn't need to be on my own." This quote indicates that a lesson of self-development was learned. Jeff no longer felt different and he learned that he could feel worthy of being accepted by others. However, in the low point, Jeff had not mentioned or showed any signs of personal growth after his toxic relationship.

The coding for **affective themes** (contamination, redemption, positive resolution) was inconsistent. Only one of the three stories had a theme of **contamination**; this was the low point. When describing the conclusion of his previous toxic relationship with Anne, Jeff said "I don't really know. I still don't have any sort of closure... she's a fucking cunt and I hate her but at the same time, I kinda would like to apologize to her because I was a proper asshole as well. It wasn't just her. At that point, I was a real bastard. But towards the end, she was a manipulative asshole. She knew she had me exactly where she wanted me. She had broken me down until I was nothing and she knew it. She fucking reveled in it. She loved it because she was all about having the power." Although there is some indication of self-awareness of his actions at the time, in the end, there is no unambiguous evidence of growth or redemption. Themes of contamination were absent in both Jeff's high point and vivid memory. When remembering the conclusion of

his time with his girlfriend and her friends, he said “It was just the best, nothing beats it. Nothing beats those six months. I will cherish those memories until the day I die. It makes me so happy and so sad.” Jeff expresses a bittersweet feeling towards his friends moving away. Nonetheless, it is not an apologetic outcome, as the memories are remembered in a positive light. Jeff’s vivid memory of a time with his cousin was commemorated in a similar, affectively positive way: “I was so happy because it was just such an amazing night and we sat up until like 7 am just talking about stupid shit we used to do and our grandma, and we were hoping if she is watching us. We hope she’s proud of us. I really need to see more of him.” While Jeff and his cousin reminisced about memories of their departed grandmother, he remembers the importance of family.

The majority of the stories had themes of **redemption**. When telling the story of his high point, Jeff described how he was at his lowest point before he met his current girlfriend and her friends. They made him feel like “less of an outcast and that [he] didn’t need to be on his own”. This section of the story explains how Jeff was essentially at the worst point in his life but building relationships with these people helped boost his self-esteem. Similarly, in Jeff’s vivid memory, he explains that he was at a very low point in his life. He was extremely depressed and isolated himself, but when he reunited with his cousin after years of no communication he felt happy. Despite these two affectively positive outcomes, Jeff’s low point had shown no signs of redemption whatsoever. After being asked what the story of his toxic relationship had said about him as a person he replied “I don’t really know. I still don’t have any sort of closure. It still pops up in my mind every now and again. I still think of [Anne] every once in a while.” Jeff had explained that thoughts of this past relationship still cross his mind and that he is still unsure of the impact this chapter in his life had on him.

The only story of Jeff's that had a **positive resolution** present was the high point. He explained how he was hanging out with a coworker who slept with many women, so he did the same, and he wasn't proud of it, but when he met his current girlfriend he let that all go and in turn felt better about himself. Jeff's actions at the time put him at a point of cognitive dissonance, but he found a way to come to peace with and let go of these internal feelings of incongruity.

Throughout Jeff's high point, low point, and vivid memory, there seemed to be a weak presence of **identity**. The high point was coded with a 2, meaning that a notable change in perspective was mentioned, however, there was no elaboration. Jeff stated, "I always felt like an outcast but within a week they all made me feel so welcome. And I felt part of something and I felt like I didn't need to be on my own..." Jeff had never explained how these people had changed his attitude on life and how he concluded that he didn't need to isolate himself anymore. The story of Jeff's low point was coded with a 0, as there was no content to suggest his memory defined or enhanced his identity. "I become this person sometimes. This person is inside me and it's like I go away and it's like somebody else is at the forefront. Somebody else has took the wheel completely and I don't know what the fuck is happening. I was that person for about a year. I honestly, it's hard to remember parts of what happened when I was in that apartment." Jeff had fully removed himself from the memory of his past relationship, stating that it wasn't him acting the way he did. The disassociation from himself showed a lack of identity at this point. Jeff's vivid memory was coded with a 1 because he had mentioned self-deprecation because of remembering the fun he had with his cousin. "I'm really bad for not getting in touch with people, but when I do I always end up having the best time, so I don't know why I don't. It's just stupid." Jeff had mentioned how he should keep in touch with those close to him, however, there was no indication or elaboration on his intention to do so.

*Inductive Analysis – “Jeff”*

The section of the interview where Jeff had discussed his personal values and beliefs was inductively coded with two meta-codes which were themes that were present throughout the section. These were Views (C1) and Change (C2). These were then broken down into more specific codes; Positive Views (C1P), Negative Views (C1N), Neutral Views (C1L), Positive Change (C2P), Negative Change (C2N), and Lack of Change (C2L). A chart with these codes is attached, along with the inductively coded section of the conversation with additional examples.

Jeff typically saw the world in a negative light during the interview, as there were far more examples of C1N than C1P. Jeff often mentions how people, in general, are inherently flawed, powerless, and oblivious to their wrongdoings; For example, when Jeff said “My moral code for life is very simple, don't be a dick, that's is literally all you have to do in this life and so many people somehow manage to royally fuck that up.” This quote demonstrates his cynical view on humankind. Jeff also explained “I completely gave up on politics when I realized that it was all a bunch of bullshit. It's all rigged, and it doesn't matter who the public votes for, the government are in charge and that's it.” Jeff's feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness are prevalent in this section of the interview. In addition to this, Jeff exclaimed: “The world could be such a beautiful place if we'd all stop being such a fucking disgrace, if we'd all just stop for a second or two and think about all the shitty things we do.” Jeff demonstrates his overwhelmingly angry view of people as a whole, clearly indicating the presence of C1N.

Despite the abundance of C1N, there were still several examples of C1P. Jeff had stated the importance of being good to one another several times, saying things like “Be kind to others,” and “Just be nice, it really is that simple, there's nothing else to it.” Perhaps his need to reiterate this theme is due to his feelings of powerlessness in the aforementioned section.

Notwithstanding these views of the world, Jeff had many changes happen throughout his story which he shared in this piece of the interview. He had mentioned that "anxiety and depression... is something that I have struggled with for years but had only recently found out what it was and different ways in which to cope with it." indicating that he has learned new information about his well-being and is making the effort to help himself, indicating C2P.

Jeff also disclosed how he has seen a lack of change (C2L) regarding his aspirations to be a musician due to mental illness. He stated, "My biggest regret that is still happening now is that I don't put myself out there... because of my anxiety I never do anything to further myself as a musician," The distress he feels as a result of his lack of progress is prevalent. Jeff also expressed his frustration with where he is in life. "I care way too much what people think and I hate that I'm like that. It makes me miserable because I'm not doing what I want to do, instead of being out there on the stage, playing music, I'm stuck in a shitty dead-end job and I'm losing my fucking mind." This external locus of control clearly indicates C2N, as Jeff explicitly states the dwindling of his mental state as a result of his belief that he is trapped in a job he loathes.

#### *Re-Storied Summary – "Gina"*

The second participant of this study, who will be referred to as Gina, is a 56-year-old, married white woman, who immigrated to the United States when she was 3 years old from Italy. She traveled on a boat with her two deaf-mute parents, and her 3 siblings; to where they settled in New Jersey. The neighborhood in which Gina grew up was a segregated, low-income area. She attended Catholic school, where she learned how to read, write, and speak English because she only knew Italian sign language upon her arrival to the United States. Gina was never one to fully abide by the rules and often found herself getting into trouble with the nuns for wearing makeup and having a sarcastic attitude.

In high school, Gina became very close to her group of friends and enjoyed their time together. After she graduated, she attended business school for a year and obtained a well-paying job as a secretary in Manhattan. Gina was never a career woman, she enjoyed living life, and often went out to parties and traveled with her friends from high school. She and her lifelong friends would plan two to three vacations each year and travel all over the world together. They traveled to Jamaica on one of the trips, which is where she met her husband. It was his first night staying at the resort and her last, and they connected almost immediately. So, when Gina returned home, her friends encouraged her to call him, and they dated for about seven years before they got married.

Gina had the fairytale wedding of her dreams and she often remembers this time in her life dearly. She and her husband paid for the whole thing themselves and did not receive any help from others. There were approximately 350 people at the reception and multiple limousines. After the reception, she and her husband used the money from their gifts to go on a honeymoon to Spain. Gina had made many priceless memories with her friends and family that day and remembers her relatives that attended who passed away fondly.

Gina and her husband lived with her in-laws at the beginning of their marriage, so they could save money to get a house of their own. Since then, they have had four children, and have lived a comfortable life. Gina and her husband worked hard to raise their children and put them through college, and she is very proud of all of them. Gina is now preparing for retirement with her husband and she plans to move somewhere warm with a beach, so she can relax by the ocean in her golden years.

*Deductive Analysis – “Gina”*

**Coherence** was not very strong throughout Gina’s story. In each of Gina’s stories, she structured it in a logical sequence which made sense to the reader. However, much of the context to each of these stories was absent. There was no context of any kind in either her low point or turning point, nor context of time during her high point. Nevertheless, in each of these stories a specific topic was introduced, developed, and resolved.

The stories that Gina shared with the researcher had strong **motivational themes** (agency, communion, growth goals). Taking a closer look at the high point, low point, turning point, and vivid memory of Gina’s story, themes of agency and communion had a solid presence. Half of these sections also had also indicated personal goals for growth. In Gina’s life story, themes of **agency** were consistent, and it was apparent that Gina believed she could initiate changes on her own and achieve a degree of control over the course of her experiences. For example, When Gina was remembering when her husband was laid off and she and her family were in a dire financial situation, she expressed, “That was a really tough time, but we worked through it, we managed, and we were pretty smart about things, we-we made it”. Gina expressed that because she and her husband worked hard, they were able to find a way to navigate the circumstances they found themselves in and were able to provide for their family once again.

A significant theme throughout Gina’s story was her desire to connect with and care for others. The substantial themes of **communion** are present and can easily be seen when Gina was telling the story of the turning point in her life, “there’s, uh – a point in your life where you have to decide, is this what you want? Or do you want to start a family, have a fam- have a family and just slow down a little bit.” In this, she went from going out with her friends to parties and traveling the world together, to settling down and focusing on creating a family of her own. This

human connection with others has a positive effect on Gina, as she couldn't think of one memory to choose for the high point in her life, and all of the examples she had mentioned were memories with her children. In addition, her vivid memory was based on her reconnecting with her husband after years of working tirelessly to raise their children.

Themes of personal **growth goals** were not as prevalent throughout Gina's story, as they were missing in both her high point and vivid memory. However, Gina had learned from the time her husband was laid off, and said, "you as a person must always save and have money set aside for emergencies and a rainy day because you never know what's gonna happen tomorrow financially, so it's very important to have money put away." As a result of her experience, Gina had set a goal to always have enough money in her savings in the event of another financial blow. Moreover, during Gina's turning point, she had come to the realization that what she was doing with her life at that moment, was not how she wanted to spend the rest of her life. "I was a free will kind of person, I never abided by any rules, I went and came as I pleased, I did what I wanted, but there comes a point in your life where you have to decide is this how you want to spend the rest of your life? ... Or do you want to start a family, have a fam- have a family and just slow down a little bit?" Through this realization, Gina had formed a new goal to guide her self-development in a personally meaningful direction.

The **affective themes** (contamination, redemption, positive resolution) in Gina's life story were predominantly positive, and there was only one story that had an indication of **contamination** or describing an event that moves from a good scene to a bad one. This was the story where Gina's husband was laid off. She stated, "if you have a job and you're relying on that job, they could get rid of you no matter how dedicated or hardworking you are, there's no

loyalty there.” In saying this, she expressed her mistrust in employers as a whole, because her husband had a great job and they laid him off.

On the other hand, there was a plethora of **redemption** sequences in Gina’s story. From reacquainting with her husband on a summer vacation to learning to plan for her future, Gina has a trend of making light of undesired situations. One instance was when she went to a concert with her daughter in New York City. “Me and my daughter went to a concert I thought we were going to get killed... here I am an old lady with a bunch of young kids doing a mosh pit, and I was like *pinned up against the wall*, watching all these kids kill each other and I’m like ‘oh my god we’re gonna die here’ \*laughs\*... it was a memorable moment, definitely, definitely a big memorable moment. Good times, good times \*laughs\*.” Although Gina did not particularly like being near a mosh pit, she remembered the memory fondly, expressing what a fun time it was.

Gina was often able to come to peace with challenging events in her life (**positive resolution**). Like when she expressed how hard she and her husband worked to make through the time when he got laid off from his job. She also spoke of how she felt her connection with her husband weaken after years of raising children, but after spending quality time with her husband on vacation, she came to the realization, “I’m with who I’m supposed to be with.” Showing that all of the rough patches she and her husband faced throughout life did not matter because they were meant to be together.

Throughout Gina’s stories, she had a relatively weak explicit presence of a sense of **identity**, however many of her stories indicate that her identity is found in her relationships with others. Gina’s high point was coded with a 1, as she expressed “What [this story] says about me as a person? That I enjoy seeing the joy in my children’s eyes.” Although, she does not elaborate on the significance her children have on her identity, it is evident that she identifies strongly as a

loving and caring mother. Similarly, for Gina's vivid memory, she expressed that she is "with who [she's] supposed to be with." She does not elaborate why that is, but this implies that being a wife is another strong factor in her sense of identity. The low point of the story was coded with a 0, as there was no content provided which suggested her memory defined or enhanced a sense of identity. Gina's turning point was coded with a 2, as she explicitly indicated this was a milestone in her life and that she had a change in perspective. This was when she realized she no longer wanted to spend her time going out to parties with her friends, but she wanted to settle down and start a family.

*Inductive Analysis – "Gina"*

The section of the interview where Gina discussed her personal values and beliefs was also inductively coded with two meta-codes. These were Views (C1) and Connectedness (C2). Both aforementioned meta-codes were further defined for clarity, Positive Views (C1P), Negative Views (C1N), Neutral Views (C1L), Connection with Self (C2S), Connection with Friends and Family (C2F), and Altruism (C2A). A chart with these codes is attached to the end of this paper, along with the inductively coded section of the interview with additional examples.

Gina had a positive view of most things throughout her life. She acknowledged that there were difficult times, but things happen for a reason. She stated, "I'm happy with how things turned out they're what they're meant to be." This demonstrates C1P and that Gina is content with the way her life turned out, regardless of the various difficulties she may have faced.

Despite Gina's positive outlook on life, she did have a few examples of C1N. These were mainly regarding aspects of life outside of her control, such as politics and employment issues. Gina stated "I think the whole political thing is all bullshit. Most of the politicians in office are out for themselves," and there are "some traditions [in the church] that is just a money-making

racket”. Gina also explained how when she was young, her father’s employer “took advantage of him because he was handicapped” and didn’t pay him enough to support a family. Through these examples of C1N, it can be inferred that Gina tends to be skeptical of powerful authority figures and assumes the worst of them.

In addition to holding both positive and negative views, Gina also holds some views close to her which can be considered neutral (C1L). When it came to politics, Gina exclaimed “I don’t believe there’s a right or a wrong I don’t think the Republicans are always right I don’t think the Democrats are always wrong. They just need to take care of their people and their country.” This quote illustrates that Gina is able to see multiple perspectives within the Republican-Democrat spectrum and believes that taking care of one another as human beings is more important than individual opinions and beliefs themselves.

Gina expressed in her interview that she was a very spiritual person; however, she did not believe in the formalities of the church. She creates a spiritual connection to herself (C2S) by following her own moral code. “If you could look in the mirror and say okay I didn’t hurt no one today. I did my best to help whoever I can and be at peace. Look yourself in the mirror and say okay we did good today. I try to give a compliment to a person once a day if not more. I try to make people feel good.” Through helping others, Gina finds a sense of self-satisfaction to help her get through the day.

A common theme throughout Gina’s interview was her desire to maintain strong connections with her friends and family (C2F). This is demonstrated when she said, “what I hope to see in the future will be my family loving one another, that we’re still connected with each other, that we don’t drift apart, that our family will grow, spouses and grandchildren, that would be a beautiful thing.” Gina seems to derive a great sense of self-fulfillment when those close to

her form bonds. In this section of the interview, Gina stated that she had already accomplished everything she wanted to in her life. Now she wants to witness her children have successful lives.

Gina desired to be connected to others who aren't close to her as well through altruism (C2A). When expressing her fundamental beliefs in life, she listed a set of rules to live by; "Don't do reckless things, don't hurt people, don't steal from people, just do selfless things and treat people the way you want to be treated." Forming a sense of community through mutual altruism is a very important aspect of Gina's sense of self.

### **Personal Biases**

There are several personal biases that may have shaped how I analyzed both Gina and Jeff's story. With Jeff, I did not know him very well before this interview. We had met a few times because we have mutual friends, but we never hung out. My initial response to the interview was very contemptuous, I found Jeff was deceptive, manipulative, abusive, and more. I felt I was judging him too harshly because he seemed to have grown into a better person during the interview as he was telling the story of his high point and his plans for the future. I felt uncomfortable during the part of the interview that Jeff defined as his low point. He described himself as being very violent in that chapter. He was physically abusive towards his cat and his girlfriend. I was a bit irritated at times because he used numerous justifications for his actions and tended to blame others instead of taking responsibility and acknowledging what he did, realizing he was wrong, learning, and moving on from it. I had trouble empathizing with Jeff during and after this section of the interview due to past experiences in my life. These clouded my judgments and prevented me from looking at the data objectively. With that being said, I'm glad to have experience with crisis intervention because I was able to keep a neutral face during the story and direct the conversation to a place that was less severe.

My relationship with Gina was similar to my relationship with Jeff in the sense that we had been acquaintances and knew of each other through mutual friends. However, we never spoke or got to know each other. Part of me found it difficult to fully understand and empathize with Gina's story, as much of it was very foreign to me. Gina is an older woman who is married with kids and is preparing for retirement. She had already accomplished everything she wanted to in life, and I am just getting started. In addition, Gina's interview was much shorter because she shared less information. Her interview was significantly less intense than Jeff's, and my initial response was feeling that there may not have been enough content because it was very neat and tidy. I then realized that Gina had provided plenty of content and I was able to sufficiently

### **Discussion**

It is evident that individuals whose narratives resolve identity issues in a coherent manner tend to develop a sense of purpose, and those who do not, experience identity confusion and psychological distress (Waters & Fivush, 2014). There seems to have been a limited amount of growth throughout Jeff's life, even though he does not clearly express it. It is extremely difficult to get a full and clear picture of an individual's life in a three-hour interview so they may have had more to say or have forgotten to say it. This could be because he describes several disturbing actions he has done throughout his life up until recently when he met his current girlfriend, who he claims to have helped him grow and be a better person. However, he does not talk about how or why she helped him mature and there seems to be a large gap in the narrative that has not been told. There is no clear picture as to how he reached the point in his life where he is now, and his story lacks coherence. Jeff also indicated that he suffers from mental illness, so there seems to be a positive correlation between coherence and mental well-being in this particular narrative.

Furthermore, Jeff had indicated at one point in the interview that he had completely disassociated with himself for the duration of the low point in his story, making it impossible for him to form a sense of identity, and process the events that took place. On the other hand, Gina told a narrative which developed a sense of purpose for her life. She wanted to spend her life making connections with others; whether it be with friends, starting a family, or being kind to those in her community. Based on the content which was provided in her interview, she did not experience any abnormal psychological distress, or identity confusion. On the contrary, she found positives in the negative events in her life and strongly identified as a wife, a mother, and a friend. Jeff's identity confusion and psychological distress and Gina's lack thereof further support the findings of Waters and Fivush (2014) which state that individuals who are able to solve identity problems coherently develop a sense of purpose in life, and those who do not experience poor mental health.

Many of Jeff's stories had lacked agency. The low point of his story, in particular, had a clear contamination sequence. When explaining the story, he expressed a severe emotional disconnect from himself. Furthermore, Jeff seemed to be functioning relatively well emotionally at the point in his life when he told his story, as he had a steady girlfriend and a job. Since Jeff is a vulnerable individual (having experienced emotional abuse as a child and having been both abused and the abuser in his previous relationship) it would make sense that he acknowledged these past experiences objectively for what they were and tried not to make light of a dire situation. His approach to these traumatic experiences further supports the findings by McCoy and Dunlop (2016), which stated that vulnerable individuals who did not submit to the pressure of interpreting their experiences in a positive way had an easier time functioning emotionally. Gina did not share anything that would have categorized her as a vulnerable individual, so the

findings of this study did not apply to her. Similarly to what was mentioned with Jeff, it is tough to get a complete image of an individual's life in such a short interview. Perhaps there were things that Gina had forgotten to mention, or she just was not comfortable with it. Moreover, it was found that contamination and redemption sequences in an individual's narrative had a relationship with their mental well-being (Adler et al., 2015). Both of Jeff's high point and vivid memory had a redemptive sequence present. Since these were not traumatic experiences, seeing these stories through a redemptive lens did not cause any sense of cognitive dissonance. In fact, Jeff seemed to have a much healthier mental well-being at the time of the interview than he did during the low point of this story. Conversely, Gina's narrative encompassed high levels of agency and minimal contamination sequences. At the time of the interview, there was no mention of issues regarding mental health and she was alert, present in the conversation, and had a positive affect. The structure of her stories and seemingly positive sense of life satisfaction further support the findings of Adler et al. (2015) as well.

It is also worth mentioning the lack of generativity in Jeff's stories. He does not specify any type of concern for future generations at any point in this interview. In the study by McAdams et al. (2001), it was found that highly generative adults tended to be more likely to have redemptive sequences in their narratives, and contamination was a strong predictor of depression and low self-esteem. While Jeff was not generative, he still had more redemptive sequences than contamination sequences. However, during the part of Jeff's story where he did have a contamination sequence, it was evident that at the time he had very low self-esteem and could have possibly been battling with deep-seated feelings of depression at that point. Gina's narrative had overwhelming amounts of generative themes throughout. Her concern for younger

generations and redemptive sequences throughout her narrative gave her a strong sense of identity and purpose in life, which further supports the literature by McAdams et al (2001).

#### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Due to time constraints and the time-consuming nature of the qualitative analysis process, only two participants were analyzed for this study. Since there was such a minuscule number of participants, the results of this study are not generalizable. The participants had met the researcher in the past, which could have led to several biases, both with the researcher and the participants. In addition, both participants were white and heterosexual. Due to the highly subjective nature of the data, replicating the results of this study could be extremely difficult to achieve. Everyone holds a unique perspective on the events which occur in their lives, and there could potentially be a different result each time.

Furthermore, the analyses in this study were based on one individual's perspective. Having a team of researchers and multiple minds could potentially limit any biases that may have occurred during the analysis. It may benefit future research in the field to have a larger and more diverse pool of participants, and to focus the study on a specific population (i.e. college students, middle-aged adults, etc.). The participants in this study had only participated in one interview. It may have helped the researcher to obtain more information and get a clearer picture of who the individual was had they met with the participants more than once. With that being said, a longitudinal study could be beneficial to future research as well.

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## Definitions

1. **Affective Themes** – Themes relating to moods, feelings, and attitudes. Includes themes of contamination, redemption, and positive resolution.
2. **Agency** – The degree to which the protagonist can initiate changes on his or her own, achieve some degree of control over the course of his or her experiences, and affect his or her own life. This is often exemplified by aspects of self-mastery and control, status striving, achievement, and power.
3. **Communion** – The degree to which the protagonist aims to have a sense of togetherness and harmony with other people or their environment, to share, help, connect to, and care for others.
4. **Contamination** – The protagonist describes an event that moves from a good, affectively positive scene to a bad, affectively negative scene, in which good things turn into bad outcomes.
5. **Generativity** – Concern for people other than the self and family. Typically associated with a need to care for and guide young people and contribute to the next generation.
6. **Growth Goals** – The degree to which the protagonist makes intentional efforts to guide his or her self-development in a personally meaningful direction, orientated toward personal growth.
7. **Motivational Themes** – Themes that could potentially reveal the reasoning behind an individual's actions or behaviors. Includes agency, communion, and growth goals.
8. **Narrative identity** – A person's internalized and evolving life story, integrating the reconstructed past and imagined future to provide life with some degree of unity and purpose (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

9. **Positive Resolution** – The protagonist is able to come to peace with or let go of a challenging event.
10. **Redemption** – The protagonist describes an event that moves from a bad, affectively negative scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive scene. The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good.

Deductive Coding – “Jeff”

Coding Category		High Point		Low Point		Turning Point		Vivid Memory	
Motivational themes	<b>Agency</b>	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	<p>The degree to which the protagonist can initiate changes on his or her own, achieve some degree of control over the course of his or her experiences, and affect his or her own life. This is often exemplified by aspects of self-mastery and control, status striving, achievement, and power.</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> [Participant tended to go along with what everyone else was doing, first his friend Malcolm where he slept with many women, and then his girlfriend when he tried to sleep with her the first time, and her friends, basically moving into their apartment. Not many choices were made at his own accord]</p>	<p>Example: [Participant had a recurring theme of blaming others and having little control of what went on around him. He often worded his stories in a way where he was the victim despite acting like an abuser]</p> <p>“I know it was partly my fault as well because I did hit her. There were points where I hit her but she gave just as good as she got.”</p> <p>“the only time she would have sex with me was when she came home pissed out of her face. That’s the only time, any other time she had no interest whatsoever. And</p>	<p>Example: [Participant indicated that their high point was also the turning point in their life]</p>	<p>Example: “I’m really bad for not getting in touch with people, but when I do I always end up having the best time, so I don’t know why I don’t. It’s just stupid. “</p>				

			I know the only reason she wanted to have sex with me was because she had been with someone else but couldn't have sex with them. "		
	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	Y N <b>Y</b> N
<p><b>Communion</b></p> <p>The degree to which the protagonist aims to have a sense of togetherness and harmony with other people or their environment, to share, help, connect to, and care for others.</p>	<p><b>Example:</b> "I Thought, she could be the one, she's really cool. After chatting for a while, we had a laugh and we really hit it off from the word go and that's really rare in this day and age."</p> <p>"I met the best people that I've ever met in my entire life"</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>"I think to be honest I was just afraid of being alone because we were together every second of the day and I just didn't know who I was anymore. I wasn't me if I Didn't have her. I didn't know what I liked I was with her for five years of my life spent glued to her side it was terrifying the thought of being alone and not having a clue what to do anymore."</p> <p>"We used to break up with each other all the time and get back together. And I think this time I broke up with</p>	<p><b>Example:</b></p> <p>"I'm really bad for not getting in touch with people, but when I do I always end up having the best time, so I don't know why I don't. It's just stupid."</p>		

			her... But she was adamant that that was the last time. We were done. But I couldn't.						
	<b>Growth Goals</b> The degree to which the protagonist makes intentional efforts to guide his or her self-development in a personally meaningful direction orientated toward personal growth.	<b>Y</b>	N	Y	<b>N</b>	Y	N	Y	<b>N</b>
		<b>Example:</b> "I always felt like an outcast but within a week they all made me feel so welcome. And I felt part of something and I felt like I didn't need to be on my own."		<b>Example:</b> [Participant showed no signs of personal growth after this experience]		<b>Example:</b>		<b>Example:</b> [Participant specifies that they do not know why they don't get in touch with others, but there is no indication that they will take the necessary steps to do so.]	
Affective Themes	<b>Contamination</b> The protagonist describes an event that moves from a good, affectively positive scene to a bad, affectively negative scene, in which good things turn into bad outcomes.	Y	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	N	Y	N	Y	<b>N</b>
		<b>Example:</b> "It was just the best, nothing beats it. Nothing beats those six months. I will cherish those memories until the day I die. It makes me so happy and so sad." A bittersweet feeling, not necessarily a bad outcome		<b>Example:</b> "I don't really know. I still don't have any sort of closure... she's a fucking cunt and I hate her but at the same time, I kinda would like to apologize to her because I was a proper asshole as well it wasn't just her. At that point, I was a real bastard. But towards the end, she was a		<b>Example:</b>		<b>Example:</b> "I was so happy because it was just such an amazing night and we sat up until like 7 am just talking about stupid shit we used to do and our grandma and we were hoping if she is watching us we hope she's proud of us I really need to see more of him."	

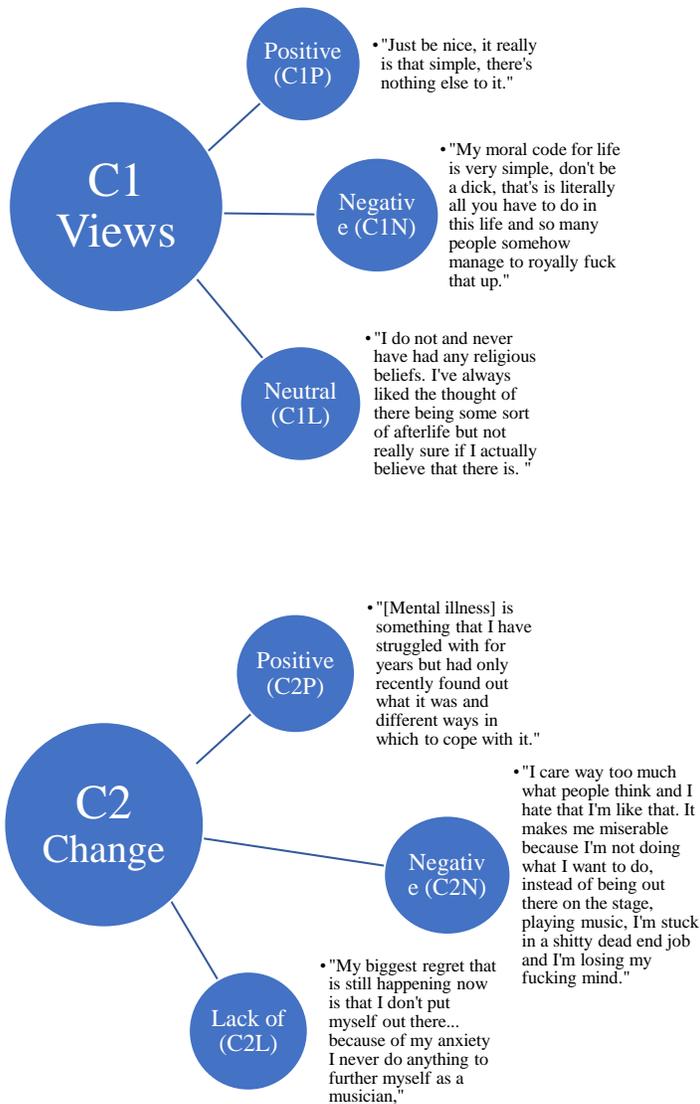
			manipulative asshole. She knew she had me exactly where she wanted me she had broken me down until I was nothing and she knew it she fucking reveled in it she loved it because she was all about having the power.”			
<b>Redemption</b>	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	N
The protagonist describes an event that moves from a bad, affectively negative scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive scene. The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good.	<b>Example:</b> [Participant describes how he was at his lowest point before he met his current girlfriend and her friends, who made him feel like “less of an outcast and that he didn’t need to be on his own”]	Example: “[after being asked what this chapter says about them as a person] P: I don’t really know. I still don’t have any sort of closure. It still pops up in my mind every now and again. I still think of her every once in a while.”	Example:	Example: [Participant explains how they were at a very low point in their life, but when they reunited with their cousin they were happy]		
<b>Positive Resolution</b>	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
The protagonist is able to come to peace with, or let go of, a challenging event.	<b>Example:</b> [Participant explains how he was hanging out with a coworker who slept with many women, so	Example: “[after being asked what this chapter says about them as a person] P: I don’t really know. I still	Example:	Example: [Participant mentions a low point but there is no indication as to how they moved past it in this story]		

		he did the same, and he wasn't proud of it, but when he met his current girlfriend he let that all go]	don't have any sort of closure. It still pops up in my mind every now and again. I still think of her every once in a while."										
	<b>Coding Category</b>	<b>High Point</b>		<b>Low Point</b>		<b>Turning Point</b>		<b>Vivid Memory</b>					
<b>Structural/Coherence</b>	<b>Chronology</b> temporal sequencing	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	Y	N	<b>Y</b>	N				
		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.		Example:		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.					
	<b>Context</b> time and place information	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	Y	N	<b>Y</b>	N				
		<b>Example:</b> [Participant explains that this was after his breakup and took place in the city he lived in]		Example: [Participant gives context and explains time periods and locations of each event in the chapter]		Example:		Example: [Participant describes the time he reunited with his cousin on his birthday after years of isolation as a result of his previous relationship]					
	<b>Theme</b> A specific topic is introduced, developed, and resolved	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	Y	N	<b>Y</b>	N				
		<b>Example:</b> [Participant explains how he met his girlfriend and made many friends afterward, also how it has come to a bittersweet end]		Example: [Participant tells the story of a previous toxic relationship and how it came to an end]		Example:		Example: [The story of told of his reunion with his cousin and what they did that night]					
<b>Ide</b>		0	1	<b>2</b>	3	<b>0</b>	1	2	3	0	1	2	3

	<p><b>0-</b> No content suggesting the memory functions to define or enhance identity.</p> <p><b>1-</b> Any mention of self-enhancing or self-depreciation due to reflection or remembering the experience, any mention of similarity or difference of self and other, any labeling of self as a member of a group, identification with an individual or a group without further elaboration, identification of personal goals, or explicit mention of personal traits.</p> <p><b>2-</b> Any mention of a turning point, milestone, eye-opening experience,</p>	<p>Example:                  “I always felt like an outcast but within a week they all made me feel so welcome. And I felt part of something and I felt like I didn’t need to be on my own. It was just the best, nothing beats it. Nothing beats those six months. I will cherish those memories until the day I die. It makes me so happy and so sad.”</p> <p>[Participant Did not elaborate on how they made him feel that he didn’t have to be alone anymore]</p>	<p>Example:                  “And I become this person sometimes. This person is inside me and it’s like I go away and it’s like somebody else is at the forefront. Somebody else has took the wheel completely and I don’t know what the fuck is happening. I was that person for about a year. I honestly, it’s hard to remember parts of what happened when I was in that apartment.”</p>	<p>Example:</p>	<p>Example:                  “I’m really bad for not getting in touch with people, but when I do I always end up having the best time, so I don’t know why I don’t. It’s just stupid.”</p>
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	<p>change in perspective regarding identity or elaboration on the content listed in scoring criteria for a “1”.</p> <p><b>3-</b> Elaboration on why event/experience was a turning point, milestone, eye-opening experience, or an explanation of how experience led to a change in perspective in relation to identity or elaboration of the impact of the event on identity or elaboration of change in personal goals or attitudes relevant to identity.</p>				
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### Inductive Coding – “Jeff”



Interviewer: So, we discussed your past. Now I'd like to talk about your future. What you think the next chapter will be. 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?

Participant: The next chapter in my life will be moving in with my girlfriend and starting a proper life together, we plan on working until we can save enough money to travel the world and see everything there is to see. I would also very much like to be playing my music to people around the world while on the road

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

Participant: At the moment I am looking to better myself by finding a full-time job, getting my anxiety and depression under control and hopefully getting my music out there for people to hear.

Interviewer: 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 or for other people.

Participant: To be perfectly honest as far as life goes, I'm pretty much just winging it and hoping for the best.

Interviewer: 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. 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?

Participant: My greatest challenge in life so far has been coming to terms with the fact that I have a mental illness and trying to deal with it on a daily basis. I can't pinpoint exactly why I suffer from anxiety and depression, I know there's probably quite a lot of reasons for it developing over the years but I don't know why really. I am still struggling with it today and every day, if I'm being truly honest recently I haven't really done a lot to help myself out, I haven't been very nice to myself and I've not done much to make myself feel better, I know I want to get better but

Commented [KF1]: C2P

Commented [KF2]: C2L

some times I feel like the more I try the worse it gets. It is something that I have struggled with for years but had only recently found out what it was and different ways in which to cope with it.

Commented [KF3]: C2N

Commented [KF4]: C2P

Interviewer: 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?

Participant: My biggest regret that is still happening now is that I don't put myself out there, I want nothing more in this life than to play music for people to listen to and hopefully enjoy but because of my anxiety I never do anything to further myself as a musician, I don't go to open mics because I'm fucking terrified of people not liking me, I don't post online for the same reason, I care way too much what people think and I hate that I'm like that. It makes me miserable because I'm not doing what I want to do, instead of being out there on the stage, playing music, I'm stuck in a shitty dead-end job and I'm losing my fucking mind.

Commented [KF5]: C2L

Commented [KF6]: C2N

Interviewer: 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. 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.

Participant: I do not and never have had any religious beliefs. I've always liked the thought of there being some sort of afterlife but not really sure if I actually believe that there is. My moral code for life is very simple, don't be a dick, that's is literally all you have to do in this life and so many people somehow manage to royally fuck that up.

Commented [KF7]: C1L

Commented [KF8]: C1N

Interviewer: 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.

Participant: I completely gave up on politics when I realized that it was all a bunch of bullshit, it's all rigged and it doesn't matter who the public votes for, the government are in charge and that's it.

Commented [KF9]: C1N

Interviewer: 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.

Participant: They have stayed pretty much the same. I've learned a lot about myself through bad times and good times but overall I'm the same person who believes it costs nothing to be nice in this world.

Commented [KF10]: C2L

Interviewer: What would you consider to be the most important value in human living?

Participant: Be kind to others. If everyone was nice to one another there would be no wars, no hate, no killing, the world could be such a beautiful place if we'd all stop being such a fucking disgrace. If we'd all just stop for a second or two, and think about all the shitty things we do.

Commented [KF11]: C1P

Commented [KF12]: C1N, Want of C2P

Interviewer: Is there anything else you can 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?

Participant: Just be nice, it really is that simple, there's nothing else to it.

Commented [KF13]: C1P

Interviewer: 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.

Participant: Learning who I am through my life experiences. It took me a fair while to finally figure out who I was because for a long time I used to just follow what everyone else was doing, then I got into a toxic relationship which didn't help because we spent every second of every day together and when it was over I wasn't me without her, so I basically had to start from scratch and figure myself out, I'm still learning new things about me all the time as everyone is and should be.

Commented [KF14]: C2P

Interviewer: 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?

Participant: It was nice to be able to get things off of my chest that I had held in for a long long time, some of them I had never spoken with anyone about until this interview. I did cry during this interview because it brought up a lot of emotional things that I had buried for years and kept hidden away. I'm glad I did it because it's never good to keep things bottled up, you should always talk to someone about an issue you may be having to do with your mental state.

Commented [KF15]: C2P

Deductive Coding – “Gina”

Coding Category		High Point		Low Point		Turning Point		Vivid Memory	
Motivational themes	<b>Agency</b>	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	The degree to which the protagonist can initiate changes on his or her own, achieve some degree of control over the course of his or her experiences, and affect his or her own life. This is often exemplified by aspects of self-mastery and control, status striving, achievement, and power.	<b>Example:</b> “I remember the special day that um when we went to the city, we went to the city. We – I played hooky from work, my daughter played hooky from school, we took a mental health day and we went to go see the um Christmas tree in New York City, that was a nice moment, that was a nice day.”	<b>Example:</b> “That was a really tough time, but we worked through it, we managed, and we were pretty smart about things, we-we made it”	<b>Example:</b> “That was a big point when I decided I wanted to get married.”	<b>Example:</b> “we took a uh cruise by ourselves without anyone else... we got reacquainted with each other after so many- you know with raising kids you could disconnect but then you reacquaint with each other as a couple”				
	<b>Communion</b>	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	The degree to which the protagonist aims to have a sense of togetherness and harmony with other people or their environment, to share, help, connect to and care for others.	<b>Example:</b> “Oh, there’s so many [memories], there’s not one in particular. Like when the boys got their black belts, when the kids got their driver’s license when the kids came home with an A on a test, or they had a good	<b>Example:</b> “When my husband got laid off from work. We had - We <i>have</i> four children, a household to run, and when my husband got laid off it was pretty tough, pretty tough.”	<b>Example:</b> “there’s, uh – a point in your life where you have to decide, is this what you want? Or do you want to start a family, have a fam- have a family and just slow down a little bit.”	<b>Example:</b> “Just, walking hand in hand having coffee having dinner just exploring just having fun with nothing to worry about just having plain fun.... I’m with who I’m supposed to be with.”				

		project that they were proud of, so many moments.”					
	<b>Growth Goals</b>	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	The degree to which the protagonist makes intentional efforts to guide his or her self-development in a personally meaningful direction orientated toward personal growth.	<b>Example:</b> [Participant does not indicate any goals towards personal growth in this particular story]		<b>Example:</b> “you as a person must always save and have money set aside for emergencies and a rainy day because you never know what’s gonna happen tomorrow financially so it’s very important to have money put away.”		<b>Example:</b> because I was a free will kind of person, I never abided by any rules, I went and came as I pleased, I did what I wanted, but there comes a point in your life where you have to decide is this how you want to spend the rest of your life? Hanging out all the time, partying all the time, going out all the time, dating different types of people, like, there’s, uh – a point in your life where you have to decide, is this what you want? Or do you want to start a family, have a fam- have a family and just slow down a little bit”	

Affective Themes	<b>Contamination</b>	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	The protagonist describes an event that moves from a good, affectively positive scene to a bad, affectively negative scene, in which good things turn into bad outcomes.	<b>Example:</b> [Participant does not make any indication to negative outcomes in this story]		<b>Example:</b> “if you have a job and you’re relying on that job, they could get rid of you no matter how dedicated or hardworking you are, there’s no loyalty there”		<b>Example:</b> [Participant does not make any indication to negative outcomes in this story]		<b>Example:</b> [Participant does not make any indication to negative outcomes in this story]	
	<b>Redemption</b>	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
	The protagonist describes an event that moves from a bad, affectively negative scene to a subsequent good, affectively positive scene. The bad is redeemed, salvaged, mitigated, or made better in light of the ensuing good.	<b>Example:</b> “I remember one time, me and my daughter went to a concert I thought we were going to get killed... here I am an old lady with a bunch of young kids doing a mosh pit, and I was like <i>pinned up against the wall</i> , watching all these kids kill each other and I’m like “oh my god we’re gonna die here” *laughs*... it was a memorable moment, definitely, definitely a big memorable moment.		<b>Example:</b> “That was a really tough time, but we worked through it, we managed, and we were pretty smart about things, we-we made it”		<b>Example:</b> “I don’t like surprises, so I like to know where my next meal is coming from or my next paycheck is coming from where I should be in one year from now I used to be extremely spontaneous- I like to be spontaneous sometimes with like silly things, but when it comes to serious items I like to know what’s happening. “		<b>Example:</b> “after so many- you know with raising kids you could disconnect but then you reacquaint with each other.”	

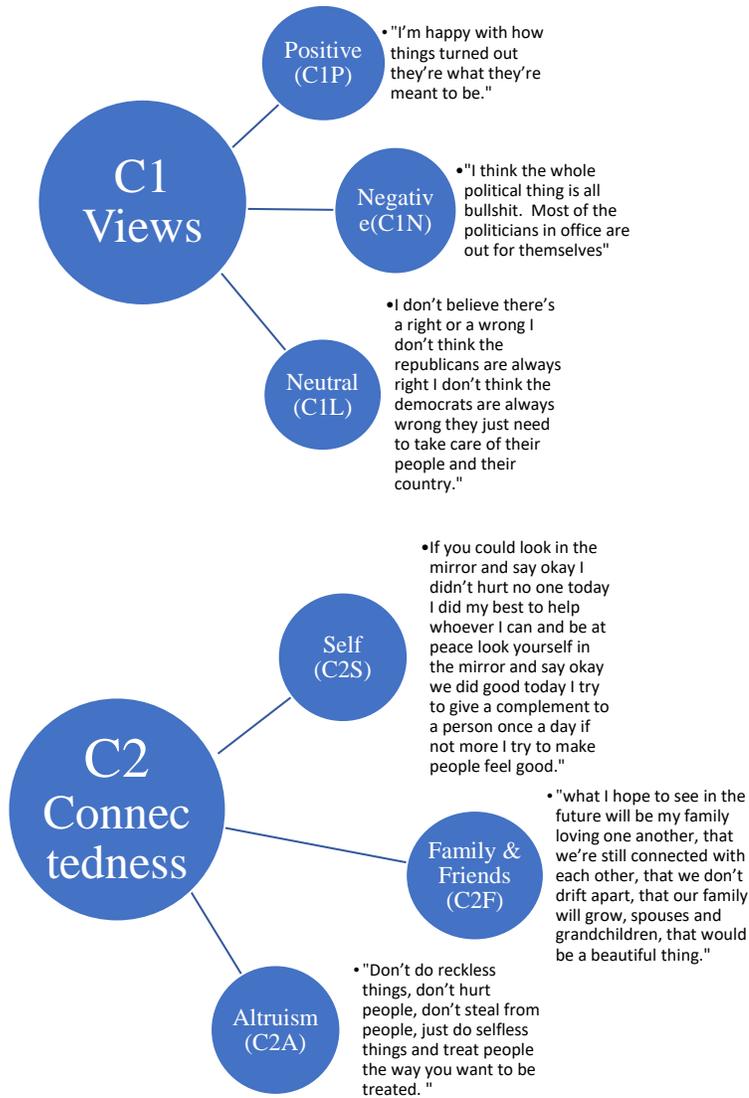
		Good times, good times *laughs**					
	<b>Positive Resolution</b> The protagonist is able to come to peace with, or let go of, a challenging event.	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N
		<b>Example:</b> “I remember one time me and my daughter went to a concert I thought we were going to get killed... here I am an old lady with a bunch of young kids doing a mosh pit, and I was like <i>pinned up against the wall</i> , watching all these kids kill each other and I’m like “oh my god we’re gonna die here” *laughs*... it was a memorable moment, definitely, definitely a big memorable moment. Good times, good times *laughs**		<b>Example:</b> “That was a really tough time, but we worked through it, we managed, and we were pretty smart about things, we-we made it”		<b>Example:</b> “I always say there’s a time and a place for everything. There’s a time to be serious and a time to go crazy, so everything comes in stages, I believe, everything comes in stages. And you have to take one day at a time, but you have to realize what you- where you see yourself in five years what you want to be doing what do you want to say about yourself how do you want to live your life.”	
	<b>Coding Category</b>	<b>High Point</b>		<b>Low Point</b>		<b>Turning Point</b>	
		<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N
<b>Structural/Cohe</b>	<b>Chronology</b> temporal sequencing	<b>Example:</b> “Oh we did a lot of things we took the train in from Long Island, we went to see the		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.	
		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.		<b>Example:</b> Story was told in a logical manner that made sense to the reader.	

		Christmas tree, we went to the American girl doll factory- or store- I forget – store!”															
	<b>Context</b> time and place information	<b>Y</b>	N	Y	<b>N</b>	Y	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	N								
		<b>Example:</b> Context of the location is provided but there is no indication of the time the story took place.				<b>Example:</b> No context of the time or place was provided.				<b>Example:</b> No context of the time or place was provided.				<b>Example:</b> Context of going on a cruise over the summer with husband to Cuba was given.			
	<b>Theme</b> A specific topic is introduced, developed, and resolved	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N	<b>Y</b>	N								
		<b>Example:</b> [Participant recounts two memories of going to the city with one of her daughters, what they did, and how the day went.]				<b>Example:</b> [Participant tells the story of when her husband got laid off and her family financially struggled.]				<b>Example:</b> [Participant remembers when she decided to get married]				<b>Example:</b> [Participant explains how a summer vacation with her husband allowed her to reconnect with him.]			
Identity	<b>0-</b> No content suggesting the memory functions to define or enhance identity.	0	<b>1</b>	2	3	<b>0</b>	1	2	3	0	1	<b>2</b>	3	0	<b>1</b>	2	3
	<b>1-</b> Any mention of self-enhancing or self-depreciation due to reflection or remembering the	<b>Example:</b> “What [this story] says about me as a person? That I enjoy seeing the joy in my children’s eyes.”				<b>Example:</b> No mention of identity was mentioned in this story.				<b>Example:</b> “A turning point in my life... I have to say... when I decided to get married, because I was a free will kind of person, I never abided by any rules, I went and came as I pleased, I did what I				<b>Example:</b> “after so many- you know with raising kids you could disconnect but then you reacquaint with each other as a couple... I’m with who I’m supposed to be with.”			

	<p>experience, any mention of similarity or difference of self and other, any labeling of self as a member of a group, identification with an individual or a group without further elaboration, identification of personal goals, or explicit mention of personal traits.</p> <p><b>2-</b> Any mention of a turning point, milestone, eye-opening experience, change in perspective regarding identity or elaboration on the content listed in scoring criteria for a “1”.</p> <p><b>3-</b> Elaboration on why</p>			<p>wanted, but there comes a point in your life where you have to decide is this how you want to spend the rest of your life? Hanging out all the time, partying all the time, going out all the time, dating different types of people, like, there’s, uh – a point in your life where you have to decide, is this what you want? Or do you want to start a family, have a fam- have a family and just slow down a little bit. So that was a big point, when I decided I wanted to get married.”</p>	
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	event/experience was a turning point, milestone, eye-opening experience, or an explanation of how experience led to a change in perspective in relation to identity or elaboration of the impact of the event on identity or elaboration of change in personal goals or attitudes relevant to identity.				
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### Inductive Coding – “Gina”



Interviewer: So, we've talked about the past, now I'd like for us to talk about the future.

Participant: Ooh, okay.

Interviewer: I'd like to talk about the next chapter in your life. 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. So, I want you to describe what you see as the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

Participant: Okay, I see a lot happening in my next chapter. I see travel, a lot of travel. I'd like to visit people who are moving abroad. I'd like to travel all over Europe and just travel a lot and we'll be able to do it since my husband will be retiring in three years so we're starting to plan for that.

Commented [KF16]: C2F

Interviewer: That's nice. Is there anything, in particular, you both plan on doing after retirement?

Participant: Well, we're actually starting to look for a retirement home, so we're taking little trips here and there to see where we'd like to live when we actually retire it's definitely gonna be someplace that is warm constantly and someplace near the ocean.

Commented [KF17]: C2F

Interviewer: What do you wish to accomplish?

Participant: What do I wish to accomplish? Well I pretty much accomplished everything I wanted to what I hope to see in the future will be my family loving one another, that we're still connected with each other, that we don't drift apart, that our family will grow, spouses and grandchildren, that would be a beautiful thing, and also to see my children succeed in whatever they want to do, watching my children like- I like to watch my children like a movie, I like to see how their life will lead, what's the next step for them.

Commented [KF18]: C1P

Commented [KF19]: C2F

Interviewer: 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. This 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.

Participant: Actually, I'm working on a project now of uh, organizing my life. When I say organizing my life it means the drawers and drawers of paperwork that I've saved. Like I'm trying to organize all my photos all my documents. I'm actually trying to clean out my house downsize everything cause I think of the day that if I should drop dead tomorrow. Will all of my children- I want them to know where all of

Commented [KF20]: C2S

my important paperwork is, know what they are, like, important things to me, my children should know about them, they should cherish them like I cherish them but I don't want them to have to go through cleaning out all of my junk cause I could be considered a hoarder at times \*laughs\* so I have to organize myself.

Commented [KF21]: C2S, C2F

Interviewer: 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.

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?

Participant: Okay let's see a challenge. I have to say it was childhood because I wouldn't say it was a normal childhood because I had to grow up very quickly I had to since both of my parents were handicapped I was I had to translate I actually had to make decisions as a child as to what my parents should be doing and that would be a simple thing as filling out paperwork to them as going to the doctor's office for them--with them. I would have to be the one- the translator- and I had to learn things quickly, so I could advise my parents and tell them what to do. So, I really didn't have guidance I was the one guiding my parents.

Commented [KF22]: C2S

Commented [KF23]: C2S

Interviewer: So, your parents didn't speak English when they moved to the united states?

Participant: They didn't speak English and they had no education.

Interviewer: What do you feel was so significant about this challenge?

Participant: It was very challenging because I never had a childhood and my parents were poor so we always struggled for- we always had food on the table, but the next paycheck was always a problem even though my father worked, it was always a challenge because it was never enough money and they took advantage of him because he was handicapped and here he is he had children to feed and take care of- we never had any toys growing up, we never had new clothing, it was always hand me downs from other people, so we struggled growing up.

Commented [KF24]: C1N

Commented [KF25]: C2F

Interviewer: What year was this, approximately?

Participant: What year? Uh, we came to America in 66 so between 66 and 75?

Interviewer: Okay thanks, that's just so I could have some context.

Participant: Sure.

Interviewer: So, 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?

Participant: I have to say regrets, one of the regrets I have is not finishing my college education. That is a big regret because I believe my life could have turned a different life if I decided to have a career, but I was enjoying life too much to think about it and I didn't take it serious.

Commented [KF26]: C2S

Interviewer: What do you think would be different for you?

Participant: Oh a lot of things could have been different, I could have had a career-a successful career, I had a career I made a lot of money I always made a lot of money it wasn't a title per se but I knew how to make money and things could have turned out differently, actually I'm happy with how things turned out they're what they're meant to be. But one of the regrets is I feel everyone should get an education and push themselves don't give up on themselves.

Commented [KF27]: C1P

Commented [KF28]: C2A

Interviewer: 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.

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

Participant: Okay, I do believe in god, I believe in Jesus, I was raised a Catholic but converted to orthodox. I believe there is a being out there greater than who I am, a greater being, and I believe everyone will be judged one day on how they live their life, so I try to lead a good life and be good to people, because I like to be good to people, but I feel you should be good to people, not that I'm gonna be judged, but I believe in doing good for people. Um but religious, like I don't believe in all the hoopla of going to church every Sunday doing the hail mary's, doing your confessions, you can talk to god anywhere you want if you believe in him and I believe in him and good things will come to you, you just have to be morally good. Don't do reckless things, don't hurt people, don't steal from people, just do selfless things and treat people the way you want to be treated.

Commented [KF29]: C1L

Commented [KF30]: C2S

Commented [KF31]: C2A

Commented [KF32]: C1N

Commented [KF33]: C1P

Commented [KF34]: C2A

Interviewer: How do you approach political or social issues? Do you have a particular political point of view?

Participant: I think the whole political thing is all bullshit. Most of the politicians in office are out for themselves. I don't believe there's a right or a wrong I don't think the Republicans are always right I don't think the Democrats are always wrong they just need to take care of their people and their country

Commented [KF35]: C1N

Commented [KF36]: C1L

Commented [KF37]: C2A

Interviewer: Are there particular social issues or causes that you feel strongly about?

Participant: Sure I do! Like for seniors, for example, I see seniors spending hundreds and hundreds of dollars on medication because I work in a pharmacy and I see so many of these seniors not pick up their medication because they can't afford it and that should not be they worked their whole lives and now they can't afford to take their medication in their old age which I think is total bullshit. And there's like for housing there should not be homeless people in this country and there shouldn't be children starving there should be food for these kids places for these kids to go and everyone I believe should have an education they do cause there's public education but sometimes kids get lost.

Commented [KF38]: C1N

Interviewer: Tell the story of how your religious, moral, or political views and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways throughout your life?

Participant: Well I've always been a believer, I was raised a believer, and I am a believer, it hasn't changed, I just am not into all of the propaganda and all the formalities of the church but there is good, there are traditions that are some traditions that I love and some traditions which I think is just a money making racket

Commented [KF39]: C2S

Commented [KF40]: C1P

Commented [KF41]: C1N

Interviewer: Do you think your political views have changed at all throughout your life?

Participant: No, cause I've seen it time and time again it's the same story different face they make promises and never keep their promises

Commented [KF42]: C1N

Interviewer: Fair enough. What do you think is the most important value in human living?

Participant: Just be a good person just be good try your best and be good just keep moving forward.

Commented [KF43]: C2S

Interviewer: What do you mean by being good?

Participant: If you could look in the mirror and say okay I didn't hurt no one today I did my best to help whoever I can and be at peace look yourself in the mirror and say okay we did good today I try to give a compliment to a person once a day if not more I try to make people feel good.

Commented [KF44]: C2S

Interviewer: Is there anything else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world?

Participant: Okay, I believe you have to take one day at a time but you also have to plan for your future. I always say you have to do whatever you have to do today to get wherever you see yourself in five years- ten years- fifteen years.

Commented [KF45]: C1L

Interviewer: Great, is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?

Participant: I enjoy life because life is precious life can be taken away from you instantly. Tomorrow is never promised so you need to enjoy your life, but you have to be smart about it too.

Commented [KF46]: C2S

Interviewer: Great! So, 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 see a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story?

Participant: A major theme in my life... just enjoying it, enjoying life, having fun, enjoying, doing things you never done before with the people you love, watching their enjoyment, enjoy what you- enjoy seeing life through their eyes for the first time, a child picking up a to-like a leaf and examining it, *that* to me is pure joy.

Commented [KF47]: C2F

Commented [KF48]: C1P

Interviewer: 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?

Participant: What were my- it makes you start thinking deep of things that happened in the past and you look at things from a different perspective. When you talk about it, like some things weren't as bad as you really thought, it just made you who you are today.

Commented [KF49]: C2S

Interviewer: How do you think this interview has affected you?

Participant: I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it tremendously it was very nice

Interviewer: I'm happy to hear that, do you have any other comments about the interview process?

Participant: No, no, I hope it helped you

Interviewer: Thank you again for your time.

## Transcribed Interview – “Jeff”

*Participant is a 23-year-old Caucasian male of low socioeconomic status.*

**CONTENT WARNING:** *Suicide, Sexual Assault, Domestic Abuse and Violence, Animal Abuse.*

**Interviewer:** This is an interview about the story of your life. As a student in a seminar about the psychology of story, 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?

**Participant:** No

**Interviewer:** Okay, so with all of that being said, let’s get started. Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or a 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.

**Participant:** Okay let’s see. Chapter 1: Young and Daft, Chapter 2: Big Boy School, Chapter 3: Friends and Lost Love, Chapter 4: Grown Up-ish

Interviewer: Okay so it's Young and Daft, Big Boy School, Friends and Lost Love, and Grown Up-ish, correct?

Participant: Yeah

Interviewer: Love it. So these chapters represent different time frames in your life?

Participant: Yes

Interviewer: So, 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 a 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.

Participant: I was a fairly normal child, kinda. Albeit that I didn't know anything about the normal kind of stuff that – I was a very naïve child. I didn't know about sex or anything like that, I never got any of that growing up. I didn't know how anything worked or – I had this weird thing growing up where I would hear my dad peeing through the bathroom door and it would be really loud like a waterfall. And for me I felt like when I could be like that, I would be entering into manhood. That was my childhood brain thinking “when I can pee like that I can be a man.”

Anyway, that's not relevant. I can't really remember what age it was when it happened. I was somewhere around the age of 5-8. I can't remember anything from the day before it happened. I just remember my older cousin, who was a year older than me. I remember him staying over and us just – I do remember from the day before. We found a porn magazine in a bush – this was at my dad's house – and we've never seen anything like that before. Well, he'd seen and he knew but I had no idea what any of it was. Not a clue, I'd never even seen boobs before. I can't remember exactly what happened, I just remember that night, we must've fell asleep in the same bed, but we had no clothes on. And my dad came upstairs to check on us and, as you can imagine, at that point, there was really none of that gay pride or whatever and it was still a very – you have no idea – it was really bad back in the day where I lived people hated gays over there. So, he ripped me out of the bed, dragged me downstairs – where all my family were. My aunt Josephine who's my cousin's mom was there because my dad called her. Everyone was crying and my dad was screaming at me and he made me say that we were having sex. He made me say that in front of my whole family. I still remember my stepmom's face.

And she never let me live it down. I remember – it must’ve been a couple of years after this – I was at my dad’s house again, sitting on the bed with my little brother, and he was only about 4 or 5. And we were playing around on the bed with his toys and making him laugh and stuff and she said to me “You’re not allowed to be on the bed with him, remember what happened with Charlie?” and you have no idea how horrible that makes you feel. Somebody thinking you’re going to do shit like that to your little brother. I felt like a fucking deviant. I hated my stepmom.

And then the day after that happened, I remember going to [inaudible] my grandparents came and took me and Charlie to some sort of army festival with tents and stuff. They had the cockpit from a fighter jet, and you could go and sit in a tank and they had a big dark room walkthrough and you can go shoot targets with a paintball gun. Nothing was mentioned about it and they’re both really against that stuff. I just remember coming home and getting dropped off at my mom’s house and she just asked me “why did it happen?” and I said “I don’t know” and I just broke down in tears because she looked so, so, disappointed in me. And it totally, totally broke me. And for weeks and weeks and months afterward, I was so worried that my mom hated me. And my dad I didn’t go to his place for ages. It’s hard as a kid going through something like that. So there’s that cheery chapter.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that with me. Can you tell me a little bit about chapter 2? Big Boy School. What was a key event that happened to you in that chapter of your life?

Participant: I was never a liked person in High school. Never. It didn’t matter what I tried to do to fit in, nobody ever really liked me that much. I had a close-knit group of friends. I actually had a lot of friends in high school but none of the popular kids. It was all the weird ids. The emo kids and the metal heads and the nerds. And we all just sat at the one table. We used to go to the park a lot and just hang out. I also went to Cadets. It was my mom and Bob’s idea because they thought I lacked discipline or some bullshit like that. I didn’t really like it that much to be honest. I kinda got into it going away and making new friends and stuff but I always got nervous doing new stuff with them.

We used to go to this thing called [inaudible] and basically you would go away for the weekend to an army base and do training and stuff. You would sit out at night with rifles and stuff and just say “halt who goes there” and stuff like that training you for the army and stuff. I remember one weekend – the backstory to this was – there was this boy who hung himself. His name was Gary Gibbons and it was a massive thing because the Gibbons family was a huge family where I grew up everybody knew who they were. And he hung himself because there were people after him, like people trying to get to him and he just couldn’t take it anymore.

Interviewer: Were these people who were after him criminals?

Participant: Gang members, there were a lot of gangs where I grew up back in the day. (lists the gangs) they all used to fight and stuff. It was really bad at one point, people getting stabbed and shit it was crazy. But yeah, someone from another gang was after him and they were all saying they were going to kill him. So, he took his life before they could. Now, I didn't know about any of that. But, this specific weekend in cadets, we were messing with the newbies, because we did that whenever there were new recruits. You'd fuck with them and make them stay up all night and stuff cause that's just what you did. This night specifically, I was told that I had to put a bungee cord around my neck and pretend that I hung myself in the closet because that's what Gary Gibbons did. But I didn't know about any of that and thought we were just messing around. So I did that, and they got a newbie to come in and the kid started crying and stuff and we all were laughing.

Anyway, back to normal life, we went back to school. And there was a guy named Shane who was a total prick. He used to bully the fuck out of my in school but he used to act all buddy-buddy with me in cadets. So he was there and he was the one who told me to get into the closet and put the rope around my neck. So he went around to people who were Gary Gibbons' friends and told them that I did that. And, I got a lot of shit for it. Gary Gibbons' cousin came up to me one day and he's a really nice guy. But one day he came up to me and was raging, you could tell he wanted to kick the shit out of me. I explained it to him, that's not what happened. I had no idea about the whole, what had went on. I lied. I said no I was lying in bed pretending to be dead to scare the newbies. I wasn't going to tell him "yeah I hung myself in the closet for a laugh" and he just kind of left me off the hook and apologized to me. Just after he had let me go, at the end of a corridor, two boys came up from behind me and punched me as hard as they could at the back of the head and I did nothing. I hate that moment in my life. I wish I turned around and hit them back because those two boys always bullied me. I remember going to math class and crying my eyes out and telling my best friend at the time what happened. And he said I should have punched him back and I was so fucking humiliated. That's something that will always stay with me, the fact that I didn't do anything about it. [long pause]

Participant: Chapter 3 [smirk] Friends and Lost Love. What a fucking chapter. Get ready for a rollercoaster. Okay, so, I was 16 and she was 14 at the time. I met a girl named Gina O'Connell and for an entire year we spoke and stuff and we knew we liked each other but I always kind of put it off because I was two years older and it was kind of weird at the time and at that age. 16 and 14 it's a bit strange and at that time I had loads of friends, I had loads of friends at one point, man. We used to go out, going up to the park with a bottle of cider just hanging out looking at the stars because we were young and we could do that. It was fucking great we owned that park. That was our place. Best time of my life just sitting in the park hanging out with my friends. But anyway, back to her. A year goes by and eventually, I give in. Because to be honest, I really did like her. It was puppy love, it was really nothing serious. She was willing to give me everything and I just went for it. We fell head over heels for each other and we started secretly seeing each other

because her parents didn't approve. She would tell them she was going out with her friends but she was really coming to meet me and we would sit outside in the freezing cold outside a church just so we could see each other. And yeah when we first got together it was great because we were young and we were stupid and just having a good time. Eventually, her parents accepted this was happening but they didn't like me much. They just knew she wasn't going to listen to what they said. We spent every day and every night together. Every break in school we would spend together and we were constantly with each other every second of the day. I gave up all of my friends. I told Lily, my really close friend that I didn't need her anymore. I became a proper cunt. And then I started working at a pawn shop when I was 18 after we finished school and it was weird because then we couldn't be together all of the time and she was going out all of the time with her friends and stuff and I get a suspicious feeling that she already cheated on me before we moved in together just thinking back it makes sense to me.

Interviewer: When did you two move in together?

Participant: Oh – just before I get into that, when we first started going out, she was cheating on her then-boyfriend with me, and it was a secret. We were having an affair basically, sneaking kisses to each other when we walked past each other in school and stuff and that's why we were so because it was an intense romance at that point. We were like "oh this is like the movies" But yeah we moved in together when I was 20. When we first moved in together she – I kind of forced her into it. I mean I didn't because she did want to move in with me, but she wanted to move in on a kind of basis where she would stay with her parents a few nights and also stay with me on a few nights. But I was scared of being on my own in the apartment. Because I didn't know about anxiety and depression, I just didn't know it was a thing. But I knew I was really really scared of being alone and I didn't think I could be alone it scared the shit out of me. So I kind of ended up basically forcing her to stay with me. And before we even moved in we had been arguing quite a lot. There was a night, I can't remember exactly when it was but she used to get really nasty. Like any time we would get into an argument she would go to the jugular because that's what her mom and her dad used to do. They taught her to really go for the jugular and really hurt a person and so that's what she did. And it was all these things like she would make fun of the fact that my family didn't have as much money as her family and she'd call me pathetic and she'd call me a bitch because she knew that I fucking hated that. I couldn't stand it. I'd say nasty things back to her; I'd call her fat, I'd call her a cunt because I'm not going to sit there and take that. Fuck you, why should I? So yeah, we had been arguing quite a lot before we moved in together. I think I kind of knew this wasn't going to be a good idea but I thought fuck it maybe this will be the thing that saves us. [laughs] Gee, was I wrong. We moved in together and from the word go was just terrible because the apartment we were in was a total shit hole. And I could tell that she was like really? You want me to live here? And we never went out together as a couple. Any time I was out, I was out with my friends and any time she was out she went with her friends. We never went out together as a couple. And then we

ended up getting – well she got – cats. I never agreed to get the cats because I never liked cats because when I was younger my aunt's cat almost scratched my eyes out and so I was kind of scared of them. I'm not gonna lie I totally, totally fell in love with them. I loved those fucking cats. Especially Scotch. I still miss them. I really fucking miss them.

But I got quite nasty with Fluffy because it was *her* cat. Every time my ex had a problem she took it out on me every time there was something going on at work or with her friends she'd come home and it was all offloaded onto me so it made me feel like shit constantly. And I become this person sometimes. This person is inside me and it's like I go away and it's like somebody else is at the forefront. Somebody else has took the wheel completely and I don't know what the fuck is happening. I was that person for about a year. I honestly, it's hard to remember parts of what happened when I was in that apartment. Our relationship got really bad to the point where we were hitting each other and screaming in each other's faces – threatening each other with knives and shit – it was *really* fucking bad. I did hit Fluffy. I hate myself for it. It fucking kills me so much that I can't say sorry to him. I hate myself for doing that to that poor innocent cat. He didn't do anything wrong. I remember the way he used to look at me as if to say "what have I done? Why are you doing this I've not done anything wrong?" [cries] There's reasons why I hate myself so much. I didn't just hit Fluffy, it wasn't just like a slap or a – I once put him in his harness thing, and spun him until he was so dizzy that he was screaming. Because she had came in and been nasty at me for no reason and I thought he's your cat I'm gonna – [silence]

Interviewer: What happened with your girlfriend?

Participant: It got worse and worse. She was going out more and coming home totally fucking smashed out of her face. And she'd come home and throw up on the floor and expect me to clean it up and she thought I didn't know but she would bring guys home when she thought I was asleep like I could hear them coming up the stairs together giggling. She thought I was stupid. She always said it to me "You're stupid, you're a stupid cunt, you don't know anything, and you bring this on yourself" and I know it was partly my fault as well because I did hit her. There were points where I hit her but she gave just as good as she got. She fucking walloped me. A fair few times. Kicked me in the face, not just a sidekick but with the sole of her foot booted me right in the face. And the only time she would have sex with me was when she came home pissed out of her face. That's the only time, any other time she had no interest whatsoever. And I know the only reason she wanted to have sex with me was because she had been with someone else but couldn't have sex with them. And then one night I was in bed lying next to her and I got it out of her that she had been cheating on me because she was having out with a guy named Ken or whatever the fuck his name was. And she told me that she had cheated on me. And then after seeing that she cheated on me she changed her story and said no, he raped her behind the club they went to. But she told me that I couldn't do anything about it. She was raped but I, her boyfriend,

couldn't do anything about it. Couldn't go to the police, couldn't tell anybody, couldn't say anything, couldn't do anything. And I felt like shit, as much as at that point as much as I did hate her, I still did really fucking love her. And the thought of her going through that and me not being able to do a thing about it fucking killed me. I didn't sleep for about a week because all I could think about was going and killing that prick. I Wanted to end his life.

And then a few weeks later I Came home from work and there was two glasses at either end of the couch, each with a bit of alcohol left in them. And I knew she had a guy up. I knew as soon as they came in. "why is there two glasses out?" "oh because I forgot I made that one up for myself and just made up another one" "no you didn't, why is there two glasses out" "Angie was up" "You're a fucking liar, you've had a guy up here, I know you've fucking had a guy up here don't treat me like an idiot" "No I've not I've not had a guy up here, Angie was up I promise you Angie was up" I messaged Angie and she said she wasn't. She was a fucking liar she had a guy up who she'd been talking to. Another one that I couldn't do anything about. I don't know whether she fucked him, but I know she did have sex with at least five guys in my bed, and then after she completely ripped my heart out and completely shit on it. Anyway, eventually, I lost my job, which ended up in me losing the apartment. And through that, we ended up seeing less of each other. Well, I still wanted to keep seeing her. She was always busy and was out doing stuff with her friends. I kept making excuses to my mom saying oh she's just busy. When I was fucking dying inside because I knew she was out cheating on me but I still loved her so much that I kept going back to her like two months solid she kept me hanging on at the end as her fallback. Just in case – because she started seeing another guy called Brett – just in case it didn't work out with him. We checked each other's phones so I saw her messages with him and she would tell me he was just a friend. We used to break up with each other all the time and get back together. And I think this time I broke up with her because I was so fed up but I just assumed it would be the same we would get back together and it would be fine. But she was adamant that that was the last time. We were done. But I couldn't. To be honest I did still love her. I think I did. I didn't love her. I loved her because I knew she used to be that girl I fell in love with back in high school I knew that girl was still in there somewhere. I just felt like I needed to find her and it would be fine. I don't know what happened. She kept me hanging on for two months. Saying maybe one day we would get back together but shes just not sure right now but she could see a future with us but not at this moment because she needs time to do herself while doing loads of other guys. Telling me she still loved me she just wasn't sure while fucking other guys behind my back. Messaging them knowing that I'm seeing it and saying oh no were just friends. While I'm still taking her out with all the money I had left because I lost my job. I spent all of my money on her and that was supposed to go towards me doing stuff for my life but I spent it on buying her food and drinks and presents to try and win her back. I think to be honest I was just afraid of being alone because we were together every second of the day and I just didn't know who I was anymore. I wasn't me if I Didn't have her. I didn't know what I liked I was with

her for five years of my life spent glued to her side it was terrifying the thought of being alone and not having a clue what to do anymore. There was nights where she would have me at her house. This was during that two months where we were broke up. She would have me down and say really nice things and be nice as ever and I would cry and she would tell me stop crying why are you crying I've told you stop crying and I would try and cuddle up to her and she would have to let me cuddle up to her. I was that pathetic at one point. I was a total shell of a man. What she said, went. If she said jump I said how high and where. She had me wrapped around her finger because she knew she broke me and she knew how easy it was at that point to do whatever the fuck she wanted with me and then one night I was out with some friends and she told me she was going to a friends birthday party and invited some guy instead of me because it would just be awkward if I went because we weren't together anymore. But she was still letting me pay for shit and letting me take her out but we weren't together anymore. She would say stuff to me like "Do you want a kiss?" and would give me a kiss and then she would be like "oh no we shouldn't have done that that was bad" like toying with me making sure that I was as broken as I could possibly be. And she knew she was doing it she manipulated me to fuck. So one night I was out with my friends, I remembered she invited him to that thing. They didn't go to that thing. They went back to her house. I took the bus to her house after when I was pretty drunk. This was about 12-1am. I knocked on the door, and I could hear her speaking from her room window. Her little brother answered the door and he said "sorry she's not here" but I was able to hear her. I felt like such a cunt for getting him involved and I begged him to go and get her and I could hear the guy laughing with her upstairs. So eventually she came to the door in nothing but a tank top and her underwear. She's sitting saying to me oh we're just friends, and that's why she's wearing that right? "that's just what friends do" she used to lie blatantly to my face knowing that I knew she was lying and she would just keep it up and wouldn't stop. All I said to her was "please just tell me the truth and if you just tell me the truth I promise if you just tell me the truth I'll leave you alone for the rest of my life all I need is some closure" "no we're just friends" and then she asked me if I wanted to meet Brett. What did she mean? She asked if I wanted to meet him so I can see he's a nice guy and then immediately said no that's not a good idea. I tried to barge my way into the house and at that point when I was nearly up the stairs her room was just around the corner to the right her and her brother, she was clawing at my face. I had scratches down my face and she was punching and kicking me and her brother was screaming get the fuck out. I was going to kill him that night. There was no doubt in my mind that I thought I was going to kill him that night and that scared the shit out of me. And that was the point that I changed. I went home that night I had to get the cable out of the apartment and the next day she messaged me and asked if I took care of it and I messaged her saying "Yeah I've done it not could you please just leave me the fuck alone" and that was the last time I ever messaged her. And that was how that ended. She really really really fucking broke me. She was my first everything. First kiss, first person I had sex with, first everything.

Interviewer: So what do you think this chapter in your life says about you as a person?

Participant: I don't really know. I still don't have any sort of closure. It still pops up in my mind every now and again. I still think of her every once in a while. I don't have feelings for her anymore she's a fucking cunt and I hate her but at the same time, I kinda would like to apologize to her because I was a proper asshole as well it wasn't just her. At that point, I was a real bastard. But towards the end, she was a manipulative asshole. She knew she had me exactly where she wanted me she had broken me down until I was nothing and she knew it she fucking reveled in it she loved it because she was all about having the power.

Interviewer: So tell me about your last chapter, Grown Up-ish.

Participant: Grown Up-ish would be after everything. I should probably just say I went against my mom and everything. I pretty much went against everyone I cared about for her. I was just gone. I was that person and there was no getting me back. And I still think that now, ME, that person died a long time ago. I am not in any way shape or form the person that I was back then. I completely changed. I feel like after meeting my current girlfriend I've got more emotions and stuff because for a long time I was just a brick wall. I was stone-faced nothing bothered me. I didn't give a fuck about anything.

Interviewer: Right, so what is a particular scene in the grown up-ish chapter that stood out to you?

Participant: This is going to be a happy chapter. Kinda-ish. So after all of that shit happened. I was single for a while. I made some pretty shit decisions. I had sex with a complete nutcase who threatened to kill herself. And I was miserable. I was at the lowest point in my life. I was looking through Tinder just trying to find women who would have sex with me because I thought that would cheer me up. I hate that I was like that. And then one day I Was browsing through tinder and up pops this girl. And I was like wow how is she on my tinder? Originally, I'm not going to lie, I thought, yeah she'd be good for a shag. Because that's just the mentality because I Was hanging out with Malcolm the guy I worked with because he was like that sleeping around and whatnot. I think to be honest he's kind of miserable inside too because he fucks loads of women and he seems content with that I guess. But I went, and I met this girl, even though I Was absolutely shitting my pants because of how badly that tinder shit went before. I met her just on the corner of one of my favorite bars. I gave her a hug when we first met and I think we were both kind of nervous but I think that helped loosen it up a bit. And then we were just chatting and I was like wow shes awesome. And then we went back to her apartment to drop my guitar off. I was such a douche what was I thinking bringing my guitar with me on a date? Oh yeah I'll impress her by playing my guitar I wasn't even good I was shit at it. So after that, we went to a café and she was wearing a colorful shirt and we both got lattes and I can't remember what we spoke about but we talked about a lot of bullshit. I must admit when we first met, I

Thought, she could be the one, she's really cool. After chatting for a while we had a laugh and we really hit it off from the word go and that's really rare in this day and age. And then we went to another bar and because we're both very awkward people we sit upstairs and she got a pot pie and I got a burger. I hated eating in front of people and burgers are so messy and I felt so weird but she made me feel better when she dropped pie on herself though. And then I went to go to the bathroom I said to her "can I kiss you I've really wanted to kiss you all night" and she said yes and we had a proper granny kiss across the table and then from there we had two pints and we were both a little tipsy so we went back to her apartment and went straight to her room because she didn't want to introduce me to her roommates because we had just met and we just chilled for a bit, had a joint, went back to the room and I'm pretty sure I made a move and I was feeling her legs and stuff and she said to me "if it's okay with you I'd rather not tonight because I'd like to see you again" and I breathed a fucking sigh of relief because I was shitting myself because I still didn't know how to have fucking sex [laughs]. And then from there, I integrated myself as a roommate and I met the best people that I've ever met in my entire life it was genuinely – nothing beats being in that apartment at that tiny little room just enjoying life because that's all we were doing was just enjoying every second of it. I miss it so much. It was really hard when everyone left.

Interviewer: Why did they leave?

Participant: They all graduated from college, went on to different graduate programs at different universities. Everyone went their separate ways. I felt like I fell down a big hole again and it was so hard I don't even know if I'm out of it. So many times I felt like I was about to reach the top and I just slipped back down. And that's worse than being at the fucking bottom. When you get so close to the top that you can smell the fresh air and then you just fucking fall. It kills man, it's fucking horrible. I miss my pals. I miss having everyone here. They became my family. All our little inside jokes and Vicky, poor Vicky had was so quiet and she was in the room next to my girlfriend's and she constantly had to listen to us banging. And Sandra always being sassy and talking about stuff and Felicia, and Jane and Carmela and Tara to an extent [laugh] I loved every single one of them. They made that apartment, it wouldn't have been the same if one of them wasn't there. I'm so gutted that I'm never going to get that back. I always felt like an outcast but within a week they all made me feel so welcome. And I felt part of something and I felt like I didn't need to be on my own. It was just the best, nothing beats it. Nothing beats those six months. I will cherish those memories until the day I die. It makes me so happy and so sad.

Interviewer: It's a beautiful chapter.

Participant: So that's my life story.

Interviewer: What would you say is the high point of your story?

- Participant: Definitely living in that apartment. I mean the rest of it was miserable [laughs]
- Interviewer: Thinking back over what we've talked about, what would you say is the low point, and turning point of your story? What does this say about you as a person?
- Participant: The low point probably the whole thing with my ex. I can actually say her name now. For a long time, I hated saying that name. I hated anyone else saying it. I just hated hearing it. And I think the turning point was without a shadow of a doubt meeting my current girlfriend. And that's why I'm such a miserable fucker now because she's away at grad school. I wish she'd just hurry up and get her butt here so I can be happy [laughs].
- Interviewer: 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?
- Participant: The first time I met up with my cousin Cal after about six years. It was my birthday and I went up to my aunt's place. And I hadn't seen her in ages, well- I hadn't seen anybody in ages because I was too busy with my ex and everyone was worried about me I think to be honest my mom and Bob – Bob was really worried I was going to kill myself – he said to my mom, it was a low point. I mean, anyway, it was my birthday, I went out to my aunt's place we were all drinking, smoking, and just having fun. And in walks this fucking total 90's child like parted hair, long, fuckin doc martins on, blue skinny jeans with a buttoned up shirt and he was like "holy fuck Matt, man, how've you fuckin been I haven't seen you in years, man!" and we were all so close when we were kids we were best friends back in the day and that night we were just drinking until reelly early and we were drinking and smoking, and we went to his friends house and we ended up taking a couple of E's and we took them and we went back to his place and we were just sitting in the living room, my aunt and uncle were in bed, the next room, and all I remember it hit me in the middle of me telling a story and I just jumped up and started saying with much more energy and then this happened and then that, I was so happy because it was just such an amazing night and we sat up until like 7 am just talking about stupid shit we used to do and our grandma and we were hoping if she is watching us we hope shes proud of us I really need to see more of him.
- Interviewer: So what do you think this memory says about your life?
- Participant: I enjoy taking drugs with my family [laughs] No, I'm really bad for not getting in touch with people, but when I do I always end up having the best time, so I don't know why I don't. It's just stupid.

Interviewer: So, we discussed your past. Now I'd like to talk about your future. What you think the next chapter will be. 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?

Participant: The next chapter in my life will be moving in with my girlfriend and starting a proper life together, we plan on working until we can save enough money to travel the world and see everything there is to see. I would also very much like to be playing my music to people around the world while on the road

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

Participant: At the moment I am looking to better myself by finding a full-time job, getting my anxiety and depression under control and hopefully getting my music out there for people to hear.

Interviewer: 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 or for other people.

Participant: To be perfectly honest as far as life goes, I'm pretty much just winging it and hoping for the best.

Interviewer: 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. 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?

Participant: My greatest challenge in life so far has been coming to terms with the fact that I have a mental illness and trying to deal with it on a daily basis. I can't pinpoint exactly why I suffer from anxiety and depression, I know there's probably quite a lot of reasons for it developing over the years but I don't know why really. I am still struggling with it today and every day, if I'm being truly honest recently I haven't really done a lot to help myself out, I haven't been very nice to myself and I've not done much to make myself feel better, I know I want to get better but

some times I feel like the more I try the worse it gets. It is something that I have struggled with for years but had only recently found out what it was and different ways in which to cope with it.

Interviewer: 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?

Participant: My biggest regret that is still happening now is that I don't put myself out there, I want nothing more in this life than to play music for people to listen to and hopefully enjoy but because of my anxiety I never do anything to further myself as a musician, I don't go to open mics because I'm fucking terrified of people not liking me, I don't post online for the same reason, I care way too much what people think and I hate that I'm like that. It makes me miserable because I'm not doing what I want to do, instead of being out there on the stage, playing music, I'm stuck in a shitty dead-end job and I'm losing my fucking mind.

Interviewer: 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. 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.

Participant: I do not and never have had any religious beliefs. I've always liked the thought of there being some sort of afterlife but not really sure if I actually believe that there is. My moral code for life is very simple, don't be a dick, that's is literally all you have to do in this life and so many people somehow manage to royally fuck that up.

Interviewer: 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.

Participant: I completely gave up on politics when I realized that it was all a bunch of bullshit, it's all rigged and it doesn't matter who the public votes for, the government are in charge and that's it.

Interviewer: 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.

Participant: They have stayed pretty much the same. I've learned a lot about myself through bad times and good times but overall, I'm the same person who believes it costs nothing to be nice in this world.

Interviewer: What would you consider to be the most important value in human living?

Participant: Be kind to others. If everyone was nice to one another there would be no wars, no hate, no killing, the world could be such a beautiful place if we'd all stop being such a fucking disgrace if we'd all just stop for a second or two, and think about all the shitty things we do.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you can 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?

Participant: Just be nice, it really is that simple, there's nothing else to it.

Interviewer: 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.

Participant: Learning who I am through my life experiences. It took me a fair while to finally figure out who I was because for a long time I used to just follow what everyone else was doing, then I got into a toxic relationship which didn't help because we spent every second of every day together and when it was over I wasn't me without her, so I basically had to start from scratch and figure myself out, I'm still learning new things about me all the time as everyone is and should be.

Interviewer: 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?

Participant: It was nice to be able to get things off of my chest that I had held in for a long long time, some of them I had never spoken with anyone about until this interview. I did cry during this interview because it brought up a lot of emotional things that I had buried for years and kept hidden away. I'm glad I did it because it's never good to keep things bottled up, you should always talk to someone about issues you may be having to do with your mental state.

### Transcribed Interview – “Gina”

*Participant is a 56-year-old Caucasian woman, of upper-middle socioeconomic status.*

**Interviewer:** This is an interview about the story of your life. As a student in a seminar about the psychology of story, 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?

**Participant:** No, I don’t, let’s begin

**Interviewer:** Please begin by thinking about your life as if it were a book or a 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.

**Participant:** Okay. \*silence\*

**Interviewer:** So, what are your chapters?

**Participant:** Oh, okay. So, let’s start. Where do we begin? Well, I have a long life I’m 56 years old so it might take a while. I came to America as a child to two deaf-mute parents. I came to America when I was 3 years old. Came on a boat, literally.

From Italy. Lived in New York for a while then moved to New Jersey with my brother and my parents. And we lived with my grandparents on the third floor of a tenement building on top of- on a main street. The neighborhood was good at the time- but it- turned- into a ghetto. In the- few years- past, when I moved there- lived there [participant seemed hesitant to say last sentence, paused between each word while rest of this section was smooth.] So that, is the beginning. So, I went to Catholic school um I didn't know English and I only knew sign language at the time, so I had a rough time in school. They taught me how to speak English, they taught me how to read and right, they actually took me under their wing and it was a very nice school, nice private catholic school around the corner. Have lots of fond memories and some *bad* memories with the nuns \*laughs\* they were pretty strict. I used to talk a lot, so I used to get punished a lot in school. I used to like to wear makeup and in Catholic school, you weren't allowed so they used to make me wash my face and I kinda had a sarcastic attitude and the nuns did *not* like it, so I got *hit* a few times with the nuns [many upward inflections]. \*silence\* um let's see where do we go from there? Then I went to high school. Had a good group of friends, graduated high school, went to business school for a year, became a secretary, landed some pretty good jobs, actually. Some pretty good jobs. But I was not a career type woman. I enjoyed life, I loved to travel, I loved to go out to eat, I loved to shop, I loved to party at the time, so every paycheck went towards enjoyment. So, my friends and I would plan two to three big vacations every year and we would travel all over the world. We had a wonderful time and I'm still good friends with these girls ever since kindergarten. And we're still best of friends and we still get together every once in a while. It's a beautiful thing. \*pauses\* uh let's see. I started working at New Jersey Transit, that was my first *serious* job. I made a lot of money, had a lot of fun, and it was great, it was really a good time, that was my favorite job. And then on one of my vacations, I met my husband, my *current* husband, my *only* husband. We – I met him on vacation in Jamaica. It was my last night there and his *first* night there and we connected really well so when we got back to the states my friends and I said let's uh give him a call and we got together and we've been dating – we dated for about 7 years, we decided to finally tie the knot, we got married, and had 4 beautiful children – we raised them. You know it was tough in the beginning we lived with the in-laws in a 2x4 apartment, but we saved, we were frugal, and we are pretty comfortable now, actually. *We're not rich*, but we are comfortable. We own a few homes. We're actually considering consolidating everything right now for our retirement cause we have a few years to go for retirement time. So we're going to consolidate and buy a- nice- home someplace where it's warm, all year round, cause I can't stand this cold weather, hate the cold, can't stand it at all. Uh, my husband and I are both beach people, so we love the ocean, we love to relax by the ocean, we're just like- easy people. Very calm people, very easy people, we enjoy our family, we raised our kids to be the best that they could be, we worked hard to put them through college, and they all turned out pretty well. So far so good thank god. [participant signaled to indicate they were finished]

Interviewer: So, 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 a 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 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.

Participant: okay, I have to say that one of the- most important events in my life- was the day I got married. It was a beautiful occasion. It wa-we- my husband and I paid for it ourselves, we had no help from anyone, you know we got gifts from people but- I wanted a fairy-tale wedding and I did receive that. We um, we worked, we saved, we had about 350 people at our reception, we had multiple limousines, it was a beautiful event, beautiful event, but it was- what- looking back at it, it was nice that I was able to celebrate it with the people I love dearly, and most of those people are not here anymore, so when I watch the video it's actually- emotional \*tears up\*.

Interviewer: Do you feel comfortable sharing more about that?

Participant: Um, and some- [participant asks to pause and take a break]  
\*Break\*

Interviewer: Okay, we're all set. Did you want to talk a little more about your wedding or would you prefer to move on to another event?

Participant: No, we can talk more about the wedding. So, the wedding was such a- it was a stressful day, but it was a beautiful day in the same time. I had to come from New Jersey and drive to New York. I had to bring all my items, my wedding dress, and my shoes and all my friends came and the bridal party, and a funny event that happened that morning, everything was so smooth, till I couldn't find my wedding shoes. So, at that point, I lost it. I started screaming at everyone around me like I was a bridezilla because I was saying "how am I going to get married and I have no shoes?!" \*laughs\* so everybody went crazy looking for my wedding shoes and they ended up being in the trunk of my brother's car! Thank goodness that worked out well, but after that everything went smooth sailing, thank goodness. But that was like a funny event and the girls still talk about that! And also another funny event that happened, I had one of these big full princess dress with a big hoop underneath and I had to go to the bathroom and there was no way in the bathroom stall where I could see where I was peeing \*giggles\* so my girlfriend came into the toilet- into the stall with me and she was holding my big fluffy dress up over my shoulders, over my body, and she goes "go ahead start peeing I've got your

dress” \*giggles again\* and little did I know I wasn’t over the toilet bowl, I was peeing on my girlfriend’s foot! \*laughs\* and she was like “Gina stop! Stop! Would you please stop peeing! Back up a little bit!” and that was like *so* funny, so funny, that was hysterical. But was good about that though, it was funny-it was another funny event that happened at my wedding. But what was nice that night when we went back to the house we had um, my parents, my in-laws, and a couple of other relatives, we brought food back from the reception so it was like an all-night party back at the house and we all sat down and we opened up our envelopes, and I had plenty of them, and I never seen so much money in my life with all these envelopes and we were um we deposited the money the next morning, or actually we had someone deposit it for us, but we took a lot of that money and we took a three week honeymoon to Spain and we had the time of our life in Spain. We went from island to island, we stayed on the mainland, it was the most beautiful vacation my husband and I ever had. It was beautiful. It’s a nice memory.

Interviewer: Are there any other key events that you’d like to talk about?

Participant: Oh, key events? Well, the birth of each of my children were extremely special. I have four children and each one was very different. My first child was a caesarian, he was the longest labor, my second child, I had the most difficult time with and he turned out to be my high energetic child when he was young, my third child came out screaming like a wildcat and she turned out to be a wildcat as she grew older, and the youngest, she was the largest of all four so I had a difficult time with her but um she scared me a little bit when she was born because she didn’t come out breathing and I thought she was going to die but thank goodness they called in all of the specialists really quick and they got her going so that was a happy moment.

Interviewer: Okay, so was that all the key points in your life that you would like to go into depth about?

Participant: There’s so many key events, so many beautiful moments, my children’s graduations, every time they accomplished something!

Interviewer: Okay, so with that being said, do you want to talk about the high point of your story?

Participant: Yeah!

Interviewer: Great, so for this section 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.

Participant: Wow, that's a tough one. Cause I've had so many *beautiful* moments, I had some *horrible* moments but, basically, my whole life is like actually pretty good looking back at things, I've had it pretty good, I've been lucky enough to have a family that I love and adore, I've had some bad moments with them, but they've really truly grown up to be good people. They – they're smart, they're caring, they're loving, they have manners, they're polite, I- enjoy watching my children succeed and do things that they love (pause) but there's so many- like – each one of my children.. they've had their moments but, I'm pretty proud of all of them.

Interviewer: Is there a specific memory you have that stands out to you that you'd like to share?

Participant: Oh, there's so many, there's not one in particular. Like when the boys got their black belts. when the kids got their driver's license when the kids came home with an A on a test, or they had a good project that they were proud of, so many moments.

Interviewer: Maybe you could choose one of the ones you just mentioned to go into detail about?

Participant: One. It's so Hard. It's so hard to pick just one, there's a lot of them, there's a lot of moments. Like funny stories – like I remember the special day that um when we went to the city, we went to the city. We – I played hooky from work, my daughter played hooky from school, we took a mental health day and we went to go see the um Christmas tree in New York City, that was a nice moment, that was a nice day.

Interviewer: What else did you guys do that day?

Participant: Oh we did a lot of things we took the train in from Long Island, we went to see the Christmas tree, we went to the American girl doll factory- or store- I forget – store! And she picked out a doll that she wanted, and it was really a nice day she was so proud of it carrying around that big red bag, that was funny! What other moments, what other moments, there was a lot of moments, a lot of moments in time, going to concerts... I remember one time me and my daughter went to a concert I thought we were going to get killed. it was in the basement called Webster Hall in Manhattan and they were um - that crazy mosh pit – here I am an old lady with a bunch of young kids doing a mosh pit, and I was like *pinned up against the wall*, watching all these kids kill each other and I'm like "oh my god we're gonna die here" \*laughs\*.

Interviewer: And that was one of the high points in your life?

Participant: It was actually a very high point! \*laughs\* it's a – it was a memorable moment, definitely, definitely a big memorable moment. Good times, good times \*laughs\*.

Interviewer: Thank you for sharing that moment with me. So, we've talked about some of the high points in your life, now I'd like to talk about a low point in your life story if you're comfortable with that. Again, you don't have to share anything you don't want to.

Participant: Okay, yes let's do it.

Interviewer: Great, so, this scene is the opposite of the one you just shared. Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not the low point of 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 it took place, 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 bad and what the scene may say about you or your life.

Participant: Okay, a low point in my life. I have to say when my husband got laid off from work. We had - We *have* four children, a household to run, and when my husband got laid off it was pretty tough, pretty tough. He only received X amount of dollars from unemployment, but our expenses are high. We had a mortgage, we had car payments, we had fees to pay for the kids' school and tae kwon do, and all these other things we had to pay for the kids to do when they were young. That was a tough time, that was a really tough time, but we worked through it, we managed, and we were pretty smart about things, we-we made it- he was out of work for a year, we ran out of money, we were down to zero in our accounts, that was a tough time.

Interviewer: What do you feel this moment says about you or your life?

Participant: What does it say about me? That you should always save for a rainy day, never be... that – if you have a job and you're relying on that job, they could get rid of you no matter how dedicated or hardworking you are, there's no loyalty there and you as a person must always save and have money set aside for emergencies and a rainy day because you never know what's gonna happen tomorrow financially so it's very important to have money put away.

Interviewer: Okay, I know we already went through the high point, but what do you think the scene you shared about going to the city with your daughter says about you as a person?

Participant: What it says about me as a person? That I enjoy seeing the joy in my children's eyes.

Interviewer: Beautiful. So, we went over both a high point and a low point in your life, now I'd like for you to tell me about a 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.

Participant: A turning point in my life... I have to say... when I decided to get married, because I was a free will kind of person, I never abided by any rules, I went and came as I pleased, I did what I wanted, but there comes a point in your life where you have to decide is this how you want to spend the rest of your life? Hanging out all the time, partying all the time, going out all the time, dating different types of people, like, there's, uh -- a point in your life where you have to decide, is this what you want? Or do you want to start a family, have a fam- have a family and just slow down a little bit? So that was a big point when I decided I wanted to get married.

Interviewer: What do you think this says about you as a person?

Participant: I always say there's a time and a place for everything. There's a time to be serious and a time to go crazy, so everything comes in stages, I believe, everything comes in stages. And you have to take one day at a time, but you have to realize what you- where you see yourself in five years what you want to be doing what do you want to say about yourself how do you want to live your life. I don't like surprises, so I like to know where my next meal is coming from or my next paycheck is coming from where I should be in one year from now I used to be extremely spontaneous- I like to be spontaneous sometimes with like silly things, but when it comes to serious items I like to know what's happening.

Interviewer: Perfect. So, now moving ahead into the more recent years of your life, 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?

Participant: Okay, um, I-I have to say a good memory was this past summer when my husband and I went to - we took a uh cruise by ourselves without anyone else, we went to Cuba, it was quite an experience, and we truly enjoyed each other, truly, true-we got reacquainted with each other after so many- you know with raising kids you could disconnect but then you reacquaint with each other as a couple.

Interviewer: What were some of the things you two did while on this vacation?

Participant: Just, walking hand in hand having coffee having dinner just exploring just having fun with no- nothing to worry about just having plain fun.

Interviewer: That's nice. What were you thinking and feeling at the time?

Participant: Joy! Freedom! Happiness!

Interviewer: \*laughs\* I bet! What does this memory say about you or your life?

Participant: I'm with who I'm supposed to be with.

Interviewer: Aw, cute. So, we've talked about the past, now I'd like for us to talk about the future.

Participant: Ooh, okay.

Interviewer: I'd like to talk about the next chapter in your life. 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. So, I want you to describe what you see as the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

Participant: Okay, I see a lot happening in my next chapter. I see travel, a lot of travel. I'd like to visit people who are moving abroad, I'd like to travel all over Europe and just travel a lot and we'll be able to do it since my husband will be retiring in three years so we're starting to plan for that.

Interviewer: That's nice. Is there anything, in particular, you both plan on doing after retirement?

Participant: Well, we're actually starting to look for a retirement home, so we're taking little trips here and there to see where we'd like to live when we actually retire it's definitely gonna be someplace that is warm constantly and someplace near the ocean.

Interviewer: What do you wish to accomplish?

Participant: What do I wish to accomplish? Well I pretty much accomplished everything I wanted to what I hope to see in the future will be my family loving one another, that we're still connected with each other, that we don't drift apart, that our family will grow, spouses and grandchildren, that would be a beautiful thing, and also to see my children succeed in whatever they want to do, watching my children like- I like to watch my children like a movie, I like to see how their life will lead, what's the next step for them.

Interviewer: 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. This 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.

Participant: Actually, I'm working on a project now of uh, organizing my life. When I say organizing my life it means the drawers and drawers of paperwork that I've saved. Like I'm trying to organize all my photos all my documents. I'm actually trying to clean out my house downsize everything cause I think of the day that if I should drop dead tomorrow. Will all of my children- I want them to know where all of my important paperwork is, know what they are, like, important things to me, my children should know about them, they should cherish them like I cherish them but I don't want them to have to go through cleaning out all of my junk cause I could be considered a hoarder at times \*laughs\* so I have to organize myself.

Interviewer: 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.

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?

Participant: Okay let's see a challenge. I have to say it was childhood because I wouldn't say it was a normal childhood because I had to grow up very quickly I had to since both of my parents were handicapped I was I had to translate I actually had to make decisions as a child as to what my parents should be doing and that would be a simple thing as filling out paperwork to them as going to the doctors office for them-with them. I would have to be the one- the translator- and I had to learn things quickly, so I could advise my parents and tell them what to do. So, I really didn't have guidance I was the one guiding my parents.

Interviewer: So, your parents didn't speak English when they moved to the united states?

Participant: They didn't speak English and they had no education.

Interviewer: What do you feel was so significant about this challenge?

Participant: It was very challenging because I never had a childhood and my parents were poor so we always struggled for- we always had food on the table, but the next paycheck was always a problem even though my father worked, it was always a challenge because it was never enough money and they took advantage of him because he was handicapped and here he is he had children to feed and take care of- we never had any toys growing up, we never had new clothing, it was always hand me downs from other people, so we struggled growing up.

Interviewer: What year was this, approximately?

Participant: What year? Uh, we came to America in 66 so between 66 and 75?

Interviewer: Okay thanks, that's just so I could have some context.

Participant: Sure.

Interviewer: So, 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?

Participant: I have to say regrets, one of the regrets I have is not finishing my college education. That is a big regret because I believe my life could have turned a different life if I decided to have a career, but I was enjoying life too much to think about it and I didn't take it serious.

Interviewer: What do you think would be different for you?

Participant: Oh a lot of things could have been different, I could have had a career-a successful career, I had a career I made a lot of money I always made a lot of money it wasn't a title per se but I knew how to make money and things could have turned out differently, actually I'm happy with how things turned out they're what they're meant to be. But one of the regrets is I feel everyone should get an education and push themselves don't give up on themselves.

Interviewer: 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.

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

Participant: Okay, I do believe in god, I believe in Jesus, I was raised a Catholic but converted to orthodox. I believe there is a being out there greater than who I am, a greater being, and I believe everyone will be judged one day on how they live their life, so I try to lead a good life and be good to people, because I like to be good to people, but I feel you should be good to people, not that I'm gonna be judged, but I believe in doing good for people. Um but religious, like I don't believe in all the hoopla of going to church every Sunday doing the hail mary's, doing your confessions, you can talk to god anywhere you want if you believe in him and I believe in him and good things will come to you, you just have to be morally good. Don't do reckless things, don't hurt people, don't steal from people, just do selfless things and treat people the way you want to be treated.

Interviewer: How do you approach political or social issues? Do you have a particular political point of view?

Participant: I think the whole political thing is all bullshit. Most of the politicians in office are out for themselves I don't believe there's a right or a wrong I don't think the Republicans are always right I don't think the Democrats are always wrong they just need to take care of their people and their country

Interviewer: Are there particular social issues or causes that you feel strongly about?

Participant: Sure I do! Like for seniors, for example, I see seniors spending hundreds and hundreds of dollars on medication because I work in a pharmacy and I see so many of these seniors not pick up their medication because they can't afford it and that should not be they worked their whole lives and now they can't afford to take their medication in their old age which I think is total bullshit. And there's like for housing there should not be homeless people in this country and there shouldn't be children starving there should be food for these kids places for these kids to go and everyone I believe should have an education they do cause there's public education but sometimes kids get lost.

Interviewer: Tell the story of how your religious, moral, or political views and values have developed over time. Have they changed in any important ways throughout your life?

Participant: Well I've always been a believer, I was raised a believer, and I am a believer, it hasn't changed, I just am not into all of the propaganda and all the formalities of the church but there is good, there are traditions that are some traditions that I love and some traditions which I think is just a money making racket

Interviewer: Do you think your political views have changed at all throughout your life?

Participant: No, cause I've seen it time and time again it's the same story different face they make promises and never keep their promises

- Interviewer: Fair enough. What do you think is the most important value in human living?
- Participant: Just be a good person just be good try your best and be good just keep moving forward.
- Interviewer: What do you mean by being good?
- Participant: If you could look in the mirror and say okay I didn't hurt no one today I did my best to help whoever I can and be at peace look yourself in the mirror and say okay we did good today I try to give a compliment to a person once a day if not more I try to ae people feel good.
- Interviewer: Is there anything else can you tell me that would help me understand your most fundamental beliefs and values about life and the world?
- Participant: Okay, I believe you have to take one day at a time but you also have to plan for your future. I always say you have to do whatever you have to do today to get wherever you see yourself in five years- ten years- fifteen years.
- Interviewer: Great, is there anything else you can tell me that would help me understand your overall philosophy of life?
- Participant: I enjoy life because life is precious life can be taken away from you instantly. Tomorrow is never promised so you need to enjoy your life, but you have to be smart about it too.
- Interviewer: Great! So, 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 see a central theme, message, or idea that runs throughout the story? What is the major theme in your life story?
- Participant: A major theme in my life... just enjoying it, enjoying life, having fun, enjoying, doing things you never done before with the people you love, watching their enjoyment, enjoy what you- enjoy seeing life through their eyes for the first time, a child picking up a to-like a leaf and examining it, *that* to me is pure joy.
- Interviewer: 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?
- Participant: What were my- it makes you start thinking deep of things that happened in the past and you look at things from a different perspective. When you talk about it,

like some things weren't as bad as you really thought, it just made you who you are today.

Interviewer: How do you think this interview has affected you?

Participant: I enjoyed it, I enjoyed it tremendously it was very nice

Interviewer: I'm happy to hear that, do you have any other comments about the interview process?

Participant: No, no, I hope it helped you

Interviewer: Thank you again for your time.