
Article

Supercodes Reflected in Titles Battered Women Accord to Their Life Stories

Lea Kacen
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
Beersheba, Israel

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate a new method of analyzing life story interviews. According to this method, interviewees are asked to title their life story at the end of the main interview. These titles are analyzed as texts by the researcher, in order to identify the central storyline. Comparison of storylines enables us to define the supercode of the interviewee's life stories. In this article, the author uses titles that battered women give to their life stories to demonstrate the process of analyzing titles, and discusses the advantages as well as the limitations of this method.

Keywords: Life Story, Story Title, Battered Women

Over the past few years, life stories have gained increasing popularity as a means of studying social phenomena. The study of life stories is based on phenomenological philosophy that seeks to understand phenomena through the eyes of the people who experienced them (Van Manen, 1997), aiming at **narrative** truth rather than **objective** truth. The basic assumption is that the strategies people select to tell their life stories reflects the significance of the phenomena experienced, as does the manner in which stories are transmitted to the researcher (Rosenthal, 1993; Bar-On, 1994). Each such strategy constitutes a kind of "storyline", linking the various components comprising the respective life stories (Blauner, 1987). Defining the storyline of a life story can serve as a key to understanding the meaning that a narrator gives to his or her life (Yehekel, 1999).

Various data analysis methods have been developed to identify life story supercodes, usually combining holistic methods (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber, 1998) with those in which the researcher breaks down the story into smaller components (Rosenthal, 1993; Tutty, Rothery & Grinnell, 1996). In all such methods, it is the researcher who decides how to analyze the story and identifies or defines the storyline therein. There is some risk, however, that the identified storyline will not correspond with the ways in which the interviewees themselves understand, or meant to portray, their own stories. To minimize such risk, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended corroborating findings with interviewees once analysis is completed.

This study offers a new and relatively easy way that we can corroborate the ideas of the narrators in the analysis process of their life story at an earlier stage of the study. In order to find out the meaning they give to their life, we ask them to title the life story during the interview. The assumption is that the key (supercode) to understanding the story through their eyes is embedded in these titles.

The Title's Function In Literary Works And In Narrative Therapy

The few studies concerning the function of the title in works of literature claim that titles reflect the topics of the works they describe, and the principles from which the imagery is derived (Frederick & Farrel, 1983; Lerner, 1983; Parr, 1990). Parr (1990) perceives a title as a kind of pre-text, in which the author expresses an opinion about the text as a whole. Lerner (1983) claims that although the title is external to the work, it is perceived as a kind of reader's guide to text comprehension. He maintains that the title controls the reader by guiding them to the text's chief subject, and that it may constrain or expand the meaning of the text; furthermore, the title may render the text universal, declare it to be fiction or nonfiction, and designate its type or define it as a result or process.

Titling is also used in narrative therapy. White and Epston (1999) claim that "not only do the stories that persons have about their lives determine the meaning that they ascribe to experience, but these stories also determine which aspects of lived experience are selected out for the ascription of meaning" (p. 40). Asking the narrator to title his or her story is one way of selecting these aspects of the lived experience. In narrative therapy, titling is part of the process of defining and externalizing the problem, which is a crucial stage in solving it. According to their approach, titling gives the narrator the power to define the dominant story in the present and proceed to define the projected title he or she would like to attain — a process likely to prove efficacious in reshaping relationships.

Two major conclusions may be drawn from these studies: a) that the title of a work serves as a key to its comprehension; and b) that the titler has the power to guide the reader in understanding the text and its significance. These two conclusions serve as the foundation for the present study's premise that the titles that interviewees give their life stories serve as a key to understanding those stories' meanings. Analyzing the story keys will give us the supercodes of these stories.

Research Methods

Research Participants

Seven battered women treated at a Domestic Violence Prevention Center in a large city in Israel (hereafter called the "Center") were interviewed for their life story. These women ranged in age from 30 to 40 years. All married at a relatively young age (between 17 and 19 years old), and have from 9 to 12 years of education. The domestic violence they experienced began with marriage or their first pregnancy, and extended over periods ranging from 13 to 17 years. All interviewees were born in places whose culture includes a traditional view of sex roles in marriage (Morocco, the Caucasus, Georgia, India, and Turkey). Furthermore, when they were children, their families moved to a country (Israel) with a more liberal approach to equality between the sexes. All of these characteristics are relatively common among women seeking services from the Center.

Life Story Interview

The Life Story Interview was conducted in two parts. In the first and principle part, interviewees were asked an open-ended question: "Please tell me the story of your life and the history of your family". As the women told their stories, I listened empathetically but asked no additional questions, seeking to avoid

biasing the interviewees' selected patterns and decisions regarding material to be told or withheld (Bar-On, 1994; Rosenthal, 1993). I informed the women, in advance, how this interview will be conducted, and that the research team would read the texts anonymously. The women signed a consent form before the interview and the whole process was recorded on tape.

As the interviews concluded, signalled by the women saying that they had nothing more to add to their story, they were asked to title their life stories: "Could you, please, give a title to your life story?" All did so without hesitation; some even explained their choice of title. No opportunities were given for reflection at this point in the study. The interviews, including the titling part, varied in duration from 30 minutes to three hours, and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Second interviews were conducted in a using a "window-opening" format interview. "Window-opening" is a phrase I use to describe a style of semi-structured interview that is based on themes that the interviewee mentions in the first (principle) interview. In order to conduct such an interview, I did thematic analysis of the principle interview before the second interview took place. Interviewees were asked to complete biographical details, expand on items mentioned only in passing or recall periods omitted from their life stories as depicted in the principal interview. As in the first interview, the questions were phrased to enable freedom of choice regarding material to be recounted, such as: "In the first interview, you mention your father just one time. Do you want to tell me more about him?" This interview strategy continues to allow

interviewees the option of deciding whether to talk about any specific topic and choose what to say or what not to say.

Locations for the interviews were selected by interviewees, with clear bias of the researcher against selecting the home for the locations for the interviews. My experience as shown that doing life story interviews with battered women in their homes is almost impossible due to the many interferences from children and household duties. In addition, it might be dangerous for the women due to the subject matter. Only one woman insisted on being interviewed at home; all other interviews were conducted during evening hours at the interviewer's university office or at the Center.

Title Analysis Process

In data analysis, the title has been addressed as a text for all intents and purposes. Title analysis was conducted in stages, as follows:

1. Analysis of titles as complete text: Attempting to discern whether the title embodies a story and/or meaning.
2. Isolating various themes in the title.
3. Identifying title structure.
4. Comparing conclusions drawn from analysis of the title and the life story, respectively.
5. Comparing conclusions from the titles given by all the interviewees.
6. Defining the "supercodes".

In order to overcome bias of the researcher who had conducted the interviews and analyzed the life stories, ten qualitative research scientists who were not familiar with the interviews conducted the first stage of analysis (as complete text). They were asked to indicate what they derived about each interviewee's life from the title as a text as well as the structure of the title. Themes that were indicated by most (85%) of the scientist were taken into account in Stage 4 of data analysis. The author of the study, alone, conducted analysis of the life story narratives, using a combination of the holistic approach

(Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998), thematic analysis (Tutty, Rothery, & Grinnell, 1996), and hermeneutic method (Rosenthal, 1993).

Findings

All seven battered women gave their life story a title, which were analyzed according to the steps outlined above. In this section, I will describe in detail the results of this analysis on four titles, and compare them to the results of the women's life story analysis in order to verify the findings. Of the seven titles, these four titles are the richest and serve as good examples for the analysis process; however, the study's conclusions are based on the analysis of all seven titles (see Table 1).

Table 1: Titles that battered women gave to their life story

Women	Life story title
H	<i>"The Name of a Woman ... A Distressed Woman ... Who ... Wants to Be Strong and Cannot Be"</i>
K	<i>"Life with My Partner as Hell"</i>
S	<i>"A Male Who Is Violent to a Battered and Patient Woman"</i>
P	<i>"War: All the Time like War— to be Against Someone"</i>
B	<i>"A Cruel Dream... the most Cruel Dream in the World"</i>
G	<i>"Muddle, Pain and Suffering"</i>
Y	<i>"Two Bouts of Bad Luck"</i>

1. "The Name of a Woman ... A Distressed Woman ... Who ... Wants to Be Strong and Cannot Be" — H's life story title.

H was born in Georgia. Her family moved to Israel when she was nine. She reported that her father beat her mother. At 17, she married a man of Sephardic origin against her parents' wishes. Her husband's violence towards her began immediately after the birth of their first child, a daughter. H claims it continued for about 15 years and was expressed through foul language, throwing of food and other objects, cursing, threats of aggression (including murder), kicking, beating, rape, and banishment from her home.

The first time H left home of her own volition, together with one of her children, she returned three weeks later in response to her husband's pleas. The second time, her husband kicked her out after she filed a complaint with the police. This time as well, she returned after her husband pleaded with her. Five months before the interview, he beat her oldest daughter so severely that she needed to be hospitalized. This time, aided by a hospital social worker, she submitted another complaint and left home with her three daughters. Her son remained with his father. Her husband continued to beg her to come back. H admits that she "still loves her husband but is afraid of him."

H's title, "The Name of a Woman ... A Distressed Woman ... Who ... Wants to Be Strong and Cannot Be", is a story in itself, in which the woman is distressed because of the contrast between what she would like to do and her self-perceived inability to achieve it. In an almost surprising manner, H does not ascribe her distress to her being a battered woman, but rather to her inability to use her own powers and be strong. The desire to be strong and the question of whether or not it is possible comprise H's story line:

I don't know what got into me that makes me so strong ... Whatever he did didn't faze me. I don't know what I went through at those moments. Today, sitting here, away from home five months, I ask myself ... Did I have a heart of iron? ... Perhaps that's what saved me ... I'm a very apathetic woman — not nervous, not pressured, I don't get involved in all kinds of nonsense. It could be that this is what really helped me and enabled me to stay alive. It could be

H presents her submission to violence as a strategy she learned from her mother: "I came from a home with violence. I saw how Mama behaved when Papa beat her. Perhaps I adopted her character. I kept quiet. I didn't respond. I didn't provoke him ... and that's all." H understands that provoking her violent husband would make the situation worse. She keeps quiet, as she learned from her mother. Ostensibly, she appears weak, but her control of her behavior also points to strength. When things are truly precious to her, H. will not concede, although she realizes that her husband will seek revenge and she will pay the price:

Sometimes I would insist on things ... It could be that I loved my work so much that nothing could help him. I told him: 'You can hurt me any way you want, except where my work is concerned.' I got it through his head that I'm not leaving my job. I suffered a lot because of that job. He would take revenge on me.

Despite her husband's threats not to allow her into the house if she went to work, and despite the stomach aches caused by her apprehension on coming home from her job everyday, H would not stop working. In this respect, she is indeed strong.

Although the story of her life describes many situations in which H was, and remains, strong, she feels that she cannot be as strong as she would like. She claims that this is the result of her early marriage ("Perhaps I wasn't mature enough for such things ...") and her great love for her husband ("To this day, with all he did to me, I love that man. I really love him because he's a human being ... Perhaps I call it love because deep inside me, I can't just mark him with an X in one day. It will take more time").

Her inability to be as strong as she would like may also be due to her status as a *woman* — a word emphasized twice in the title of her story. In the Georgian culture from which she originates, and the Sephardic culture of the man she married, women are still perceived as inferior and dependent on their husbands. Consequently, as a woman, she perceives no chance of becoming as strong as she would like.

2. "*Life with My Partner as Hell*" — K's life story title.

K was born in Morocco in 1962 and came to Israel with her parents at the age of 7. When she was 12, her father left home. K moved in with her partner when she was 19 and he was 35. They never married, although they had three sons. Violence began with the birth of their oldest son and continued for about 15 years. The title of K's story comprises three elements: life, partner, and a metaphor — hell.

Life is the chief subject of K's life story. She is concerned with the question of whose life she is to lead — her own or her partner's: "And then I felt that I had to simply live a life that is not mine and essentially

live my own life clandestinely." At the same time, she understands that her partner lives his own life through her:

If we had any friends, it was thanks to me, because I sat and hosted them and laughed with them and talked to them. It all came from me. It's like surfing, like hitching a ride ... He took my air, my oxygen. If he could find a way to breathe the oxygen that I'm breathing, it would be perfect for him. Why should he bother breathing if I breathe for him?

By realizing that her partner depends on her, she feels that in some way she controls his life too.

In Israel, and especially among the population who, like K, is of Moroccan origin, it is unusual to live together and to have children outside of marriage. As a rule, couples who do so try to hide it. K's insistence on emphasizing the status of the father of her children as **partner** rather than husband throughout her life story — and in its title as well — reveals that this distinction is very important to her. K is well aware that, to this day, she has *chosen* not to marry her partner. She surmises that she was motivated to find a life partner by loneliness and by a desire to distance herself from the home of her family. Considering the violence evident in the relationship, this status as partner as oppose to wife serves as a kind of escape hatch — if she is not married, then ostensibly, she has the option of getting out of the relationship at any time:

I knew from the outset that this is not the love of my life and that he won't ever be my husband. And ... it should be noted that I am not married to this man, but we have been living together for 15 years nonetheless ... So what are you doing with him for 15 years if you're not married to that man? Either you didn't realize the value of a wedding ... and if he loves you so much, why didn't he marry you? ... From this point of view, deep within me it appears that I always knew that I had to get out of it, that I had to break out of this circle ... and I said 'this man' intentionally because at present, 'this man' has no value or respect. He was my life partner for many years and he is the father of my children.

Hell is a mystical concept describing an evil, chaotic world, and the antithesis of Paradise. K. uses this concept as a metaphor for life with her partner. The first time she does so in her story, she feels that it is not strong enough to describe the intensity of her feelings. For this reason, she qualifies the metaphor as "the fjord of hell," a fjord being a body of water surrounded by high mountains that make escape very difficult. Elsewhere, she defines hell as follows: "I worked there for three years. Three years of hell. I'd arrive at work distressed, after quarrels. I'd get there late or sometimes not get there at all because he locked me in, took the key and left." Hell, in her opinion, "is a metaphor entirely different from what I was supposed to have been."

K relates to her life as a metaphor. Her story is peppered with metaphors, which is reflected in the title she gave to it, and portrayed throughout in phrases such "to breathe the oxygen that I'm breathing" in the excerpt above.

In summary, "Life with My Partner as Hell" is the central storyline of K's life story: A dual **life** ("live a life that is not mine and essentially live my own life clandestinely"), a **partner** of ambiguous status, and **hell** as the antithesis of her preferred metaphor.

3. "*A Male Who Is Violent to a Battered and Patient Woman*" — S's life story title.

S was born in the Caucasus region of Central Asia in 1965. At the age of 10, she came to Israel with her parents. When she was 16, she went to work to help support the family, and a year later, was married against her will in an arranged match with a man who would be her husband for the next 13 years. Violence began immediately after marriage and worsened markedly after the birth of their second daughter. Six months before the interview, they were divorced. She now lives alone with her children and is trying to rebuild her life.

S's title includes two "story heroes" — a violent man and a battered and patient woman. It is directly connected with the opening paragraph of her interview:

I am a battered woman. Nine years ago, I went out to work. He wouldn't let me work. He would always tell me: 'Don't go out to work. It's better for us that way.' When we got married, he was a soldier. It was an arranged match. In the early months of my pregnancy, the arguments began. It started with sex, that I wasn't getting along with him sexually. There's no shame in talking about sex, right?

There is some significance in S's use of the word "male" rather than "husband" or "man" in her title. The Hebrew word she chose, *gever*, connotes sex as well as gender. When a woman calls a man *agever*, one possible interpretation is that he is a successful lover. S begins her life story with the problems she and her husband experienced in their sexual relationship. Perhaps there is a contradiction here: If their sexual relationship was not good, why does she stress his masculinity? One explanation is evident in the juxtaposition of "violent" and "male." Her husband's violence focused on forced sexual relations and suspicion that she was cheating on him and her life story is replete with descriptions of jealousy and sex.

S explains the title of her story as follows:

For 13 years I ... not 13 years. There were several years that he stopped [drinking] and then started again. It wasn't always bad for me. When he didn't drink, he was one terrific guy. His drinking ruined him. He was terrific. He was terrific with the children. When he didn't drink, there was no one like him. Even though I didn't love him, he was a man with a head on his shoulders.

Were it not for the title, readers might not pay attention to the centrality of sex in the violence S suffered. As the title elucidates this point, the above citation hints that drinking ruined the husband's masculinity. When he did not drink, he was "one terrific guy."

S opens her life story by presenting herself as a battered woman. This is her identity at the moment of the interview. She also introduces herself this way at her first interview in a group for battered women:

Then I told them I'm a battered woman. That's what I am ... I told them everything that happened because they wanted to get to know me. We all know ourselves. I knew myself somewhat, but I don't want people to pity me.

The use by S of the term "patient" in her title is particularly interesting, as it has several interpretations within the life story: suffering, patience and passivity [all share a common Hebrew root]. S would suffer in silence even when threatened with murder: "I'd shut up. I was frightened. He'd threaten me all the time: 'I'll kill you! I'll kill myself, too!' I'd say: 'All right! Kill me! Then I'll be quiet!' I would always say that." Her patience is expressed in her readiness to take him back each time, even if it means suffering his drinking and the violence that comes with it. S. is also patient with her parents, especially her mother, who cannot understand the situation and never responded to her appeals for help. Furthermore, she must

withstand extensive pressure by others of her ethnic group, who pleaded with her to display understanding and be patient with her husband. Patience in this case, could be seen also as a positive trait and even strength, when comparing it to her hot tempered and violent husband.

4. "War: all the time like war- to be against someone" — F's life story title

F was 34 years old at the time of the interview. She grew up in a family where her father beat her mother and her big brother beat her. She married her husband when she was 20 because she wanted to escape this life and find peace and quiet. According to F, her husband suffered from a violent mother in his childhood and, therefore, suffered from mental disturbances. He was receiving help from the psychiatric services. The husband was working and making a good living. F was not working in spite of the fact that she had received professional training. The couple has two children. The violence began when F was pregnant with her second son.

The title that F gives her life story is "War". She adds two elements to this title — the element of time "*all the time like war*" and details of those in the battle "*to be against someone*." In the Oxford dictionary (Ruse, Reif & Levy, 1993), war is defined as "the use of weapons when fighting between countries or rival groups in a nation" (pp. 860). If we relate solely to this definition, it is understood that in order to define a situation as a "war", there need to be two groups of rivals that use weapons against one another. The analysis of the title of F's story does indeed point to the existence of two enemies "to be against someone", but it does not hint at the arms being used in this war. Therefore, the title makes it possible for us to hypothesize that in F's life story there is a war situation in which there are groups of enemies that use some type of weapons against one another and that this war continues "all the time."

When analyzing F's life story, concepts connected to war are conspicuous: enemy, defense, "ruling hero", terror, victory, control, threat, existence, forces, opposition, fear, murder, shock and danger.

I have this *war*. To fight him and *to fight* so he won't be violent against my children. *It's really hard to live with him in war*, when you have to *defend yourself* and to testify at the police and before all kinds of institutions when it's very difficult for me to turn to them. If I turn to the Rabbinate, it is hard for me to talk, I begin to cry. He exploits this. He says to me: You get there and break down.

But just who is the enemy in F's story? From the quote above, it is possible to identify two fronts that feed on one another — F against her husband and F against herself. She has an ongoing war with her husband against him being violent toward her and her children. She unsuccessfully tries to use external weapon against him, like the Rabbinate and the police.

Last year I had it really hard. He was arrested for four days and they released him on bail, because he threatened to kill me. And I won't forget the days that I went through. I don't wish *my enemy* ... he told me: 'You will never ever *beat* me.' Even when the police would come, even when I would come back from the Rabbinate. He says: 'You won't trample (me) and you won't *control* me and my life' and meanwhile he is *controlling me*.

When she estimates that this weapon is not strong enough, she tries to fight over her territory — the house:

So even if I will get up and get divorced, my husband wants the house. I have a *war* over the apartment. I'm not ready to give in... I was out of the house only when I needed to escape from home, because of all of the *terror* that I had at home, from the beatings that I

suffered. Today I am holding on with all my strength not to leave the house...that's it, I have the *war*.

In order for the husband not to take control of the house, F has put herself under house arrest. She only goes out if she needs to escape. The leaving and entering of the house take up a big part of her story, both in the description of the inner war and in the description of the external war, as can be seen in the following example:

I am really at war whether to leave him at home or not, not, to evict him from the house. It's as if I do, it's like a scale: if I leave him at home what is the danger if I evict him...so it's very difficult for me to be decisive, as it were, what will I do, what will be good for me? What will be good for my children? He supports me, he supports me financially.

This leaving and entering also has a sexual meaning: "He would often come, bother me at night for me to open up to him, he would want to sleep with me. I would have to extract him once again. So I had two *wars*: to evict him at eight — nine and once again at eleven — twelve." F brings her husband in for sexual relations but is strict in evicting him later on from the house. Their sexual relations also become a weapon, as pointed out at another place in the story where she says that, at times, she allows sexual relations only when he pays:

Many times when I asked him for money he didn't give, a few times I tried to force him. For example, once he gave me on condition as it were...because I would tell him: If you want to sleep with me, so give me money.

F's inner war is a constant struggle between power and weakness; between the wish for economic security and the fear of uncertainty; between the desire for removal of the threat and the fear that she will not succeed in managing the tasks needed to survive by herself. The weapon she uses against herself is the fear that she will not be able to support her children on her own:

A real world of a *threatened* woman, a woman *who is fighting for existence* to make a living...all of the time *the war* over a living that is hard for me to make a living on my own...to get up and get a divorce? I say: What am I going to do with two children? What will I do with two small children? I can't work.

Her internal war weakens her in her external war — and her husband exploits her weakness:

And I felt that I am really *falling*. Once again I feel that I am strong and once again I really *fall*...I want *strength* to emanate from me, so I will be able at least *to defend myself*, not to get divorced, *to defend* myself. Not so the children will *protect* me...I think that I don't want *to fall*.

F's expressions of war in this quote are very interesting. The concept of "falling" in Hebrew has the meaning of defeat or of falling into captivity. Defeat, from F's perspective, is to be sick: "Sometimes I think that I will catch some disease from fear, shock...I am really afraid for my health which is deteriorating." The meaning of falling into captivity is to continue living in the same home with a husband — "to continue to live (together), I am in life-threatening danger, really in danger, that any day some war is going to break out." It is conspicuous that F does not present her victory as a possible outcome of the war.

F has the feeling that the war goes on all of the time. It seems that the reason for this is that the inner war and the outer war alternate and they become intertwined in a way that never gives her a moment's peace.

In conclusion, F perceives her life story as an ongoing war in which she has two fronts: the external war in which she is the weak one since she is dependent financially on her husband, and the internal war in which she battles her desire to be strong and her fear that she will not be able to manage the outcomes of her victory. Thus, the "someone" of her title points to the fact that the war is not just with the known enemy (her husband), but also a less obvious enemy (herself). These two wars are taking place and are focused on a battle over territories, the battle over the house, and the battle over her body (sex).

Discussion

The examples outlined above show that the titles interviewees give their life stories may indeed embody themes that enable initial analysis of the stories themselves. The story line embodied in each of the titles noted can be used as a link among the themes of the story told in the interview. Comparing the story lines embodied in the titles that were demonstrated in this paper, we could hypothesize that the supercode for understanding the meaning of life of battered women is that, when confronting the violence of their husbands, battered women have a constant inner struggle between weakness and strength. This can be seen clearly in the titles given by H (The Name of a Woman ... A Distressed Woman ... Who ... Wants to Be Strong and Cannot Be) and F (War: all the time like war- to be against someone). This hypothesis is supported by the results of their life stories analysis as well as by other battered women research conclusions (Buchbinder, 2000; Dutton, 1996; Lempert, 1996, 1997). Buchbinder call this phenomenon "power entrapped in weakness and weakness entrapped in power" (p. 64).

This study gives strong evidence that the story titles reflect the main themes of the life story and that by asking the narrators to title their life story we are giving them the power to lead the story analysis. In this study, I asked the women to give a title to their life story, and did not discuss the title with them. The possible contributions for research of such discussion have yet to be further developed (Lerner, 1983).

So far, I have shown that the titles that narrators give their life stories serve as an appropriate tool for verifying story analysis. As one might be tempted to derive supercodes from title analysis alone, it is recommend weighing the advantages and drawbacks with all due caution.

The chief advantage of title analysis is its function as a kind of key to life story analysis. Analysis of the title and identification of its content and structural components define the themes we seek to identify within the story. There is some risk, however, that the researcher will employ this key exclusively, precluding identification of additional themes within the story that were not expressed in the title. For optimum results, it is recommended to employ this tool for different purposes at different junctures. Employing title analysis from the outset, could serve as a guide for story analysis and comprehension; employing title analysis only after analyzing the life story could serve as a triangulation tool (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In both cases, the title gives the narrator the power to determine how the story is to be analyzed and understood.

This constitutes a second advantage of the proposed method that also embodies a time element: Should interviewees be asked to title their life stories before or after composing them? In this study, titles were given at the end of the main interview in order to minimize the interviewer influence on the interviewee decision. There are two other possibilities that have to be tested in a future study: titling at the end of the entire interview process or, alternatively, at the outset of the principal interview. It may even be possible to have interviewees start with a working title that may be confirmed or altered at the end of the interview.

In conclusion, there appears to be a sound basis for identifying the storylines of life stories from the titles that the narrator gave, and for identifying the supercodes of understanding the meaning of their life. The timing of the titling process, to ensure optimum effectiveness of the proposed method, should be further studied. At this stage of development, it is recommend employing title analysis together with other analytical tools as demonstrated in this paper.

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