NARRATIVE SHOCK: HELPING NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS NARRATE THEIR LIVES FULLY IN SOUTH KOREA

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Doctor of Management Program at the Weatherhead School of Management

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NARRATIVE SHOCK: HELPING NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS NARRATE THEIR LIVES FULLY IN SOUTH KOREA

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ABSTRACT

A mixed methods study considers the co-creation of life story narrative by North Korean (NK) defectors in South Korea (SK) and those who hear their narratives. In an initial qualitative study, 30 North Korean defectors discover happy memories previously omitted from their life story narratives through reconsideration prompts from interviewers. Discovery prompts a “valence change” in which defectors re-evaluate their life as being essentially happy rather than sad. An experimental treatment of 122 North Korean defectors newly arriving in South Korea is undertaken in order to extend the concept of reconsideration prompts to entire narrative frameworks through a narrative intervention. Experimental group means for eight meaning-in-life measurements increase while means in the control group decrease across the same variables. The present platforms for North Korean defector life story narration, e.g., immigration interrogations and defector-as-political-symbol “objective” accounts, are critiqued. New platforms and strategies for listening and hearing are commended.

Key words: North Korean defector; meaning in life; life story; hero’s journey; narrative induction; refugee management.
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDIES THAT COMPRISE THE RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF MANAGEMENT

Agency and availability must be practiced by both participants in knowing together: for how one receives in storying directly affects what the other can give and how one gives directly affects what the other can receive. –Kevin Bradt, Story as a Way of Knowing

Shin Dong Hyuk changed his very public life story.

The life story Mr. Shin told with co-author Blaine Harden in the bestselling 2012 book, *Escape from Camp 14*, detailed a Gulag childhood filled with gruesome beatings, familial executions, and a harrowing escape from a North Korean concentration camp. Following the North Korean government’s 2014 release of video of Shin’s father repudiating his son’s account, however, Shin confessed to his co-author that their book did not accurately depict some of the details of his life story.

Shin told me that when he defected to South Korea in 2006, he made a panicky, shame-driven decision to conceal and reorder pivotal episodes of his life in the gulag. He hid his role in the execution of his mother and brother. He omitted a singularly painful session of torture that shattered his faith in himself. He did not mention that he lived most of his youth in a political prison that was not Camp 14. He told this version of his life to interrogators from South Korean intelligence and the U.S. Army. He then repeated the narrative for nearly nine years, rarely changing a single detail (Harden, 2015).

One newspaper paraphrased Mr. Shin’s complex admission about his narrative under the headline, “I lied” (Parry, 2015). A noted North Korea observer wrote that Shin had an “incentive to exaggerate… in order to win some attention in a rather crowded media market” (Lankov, 2015). A fellow North Korean autobiographer wrote that Shin’s alterations were understandable and justified, a function of growing up in the “highly propagandist and sensationalist” storytelling culture of North Korea where “[w]e have not seen much in the way of a true account of events or personal experiences” (Jang,
2014). One Asia commentator contended that Shin’s actions “raise questions about the credibility of thousands of North Koreans who’ve defected,” a population the commentator contends has “long been notorious for distorting their life stories, serving up details to please South Korean interrogators, possible employers and, of course, journalists and activists” (Kirk, 2015). One activist commented, “No man matters more than the truth itself” (Stanton, 2015).

Back of these comments is an epistemology of narrative in which life story is the creation and responsibility of the one who tells it (i.e., it is Mr. Shin’s life story) and that sharing it incurs the duty of accuracy (i.e., the listener/recipient is entitled to a true life story); the broader the sharing, the greater the duty incurred (e.g., Stanton suggests that Shin “the man” may be forgiven for telling an inaccurate life story but not Shin “the activist”). Little role is accorded listeners/recipients in the formation of the story other than as sources of possible distortion (i.e., a crowded media market, a propagandist and sensationalist storytelling culture) which may lead a teller to (mis)shape the story accordingly (i.e., exaggerating or distorting it for favor or attention).

The mixed methods studies that comprise this thesis observe a different epistemological relationship between those who tell life stories and those who hear them, drawing on 30 qualitative interviews with North Korean defectors and an experimental narrative intervention treatment involving 122 North Korean defectors at the Hanawon resettlement center. The thesis seeks to describe and explain this observed relationship and to record as comprehensively as possible its impact on the North Korean defector tellers and their life stories, past, present, and future.
The thesis suggests that life story hearers inherently create through their attendant listening an epistemological horizon for life story tellers, delimiting for tellers not only what they may feel inclined (or not) to share in their life story narrations but even more so what it is possible for them to know, remember, and share, as well as what emotions they associate with these memories. It contends that narrative frameworks provided to tellers for the organization of narrative data impact not only what they remember and the emotion they associate with these memories but also their evaluation of the overall meaningfulness of their lives.

As such, the thesis commends new responsibilities and opportunities for the hearers of life story. Hearers are revealed as more than recipients and arbiters; they are the necessary co-creators without whom life story cannot come into being for the teller. What hearers contribute, the thesis suggests, is more akin to relational and structural tools for the mining of story “ore” than editorial polish; in the words of Tennyson’s Ulysses, “I am a part of all that I have met.” The thesis concludes that what hearers contribute to the process of narrative co-creation, including the “ore” of their own nuanced identities, epistemologies, and life story narratives and frames, impacts the content, valence, and character of the teller’s narrative, as well as the teller’s assessment of the meaningfulness of life in light of the story narrated. In short, the co-creation of the life story of Shin the activist requires comparatively less attendance by hearers, the life story of Shin the man considerably more.

The thesis is entitled “narrative shock” in the recognition that North Korean defectors entering South Korea experience more than culture shock and physical, social, and vocational resource depletion and deprivation. Raised in a country of one story—the
story of Kim Il Sung—they are especially reliant on the narrative tools and prompts provided to them by their hearers for the conveyance and interpretation of their life stories. The first life story narration that they undertake is nearly always before a South Korean government interrogator tasked with determining whether or not they are spies and whether they have a legitimate and defensible claim to South Korean citizenship (Lee, 2013). It is difficult to imagine a lower grade of narrative tool. Yet once the defector life story narratives are established, as Harden notes in the case of Shin, they rarely change. If fundamental changes are made, as the case of Shin and the words of Kirk illustrate, they serve to validate the claim that North Koreans are prone to such distortions, narrating their lives in any manner that pleases others and benefits themselves. Almost never are changes the result of the provision of better narration tools from hearers willing to risk a co-creation of narrative that enables North Koreans to share their life stories as men and women rather than as political symbols. This study underscores both the ease and the potential of such an approach. Narrative shock is thus used to indicate both an initial state of deprivation as well as what this thesis ultimately contends is necessary to administer in order to counteract and overcome that deprivation.

PURPOSE, METHODS AND CONCLUSIONS

Theoretical Framework and Research Proposal

Our studies did not begin as reflections on life story narration by North Korean defectors but instead as inquiries into defectors’ happy memories. When we asked defectors to share their happy memories, however, they almost invariably countered with chronological life story narrations fraught with tragedy, offered in an effort to explain to us their lack of happy memories. As we asked for their reconsideration of this lack,
defectors initially assured us there were no happy memories to find; yet they went on in nearly every case to narrate one, and then a stream, of happy memories which, in many cases, prompted them to re-evaluate the overall valence of their life story narrative, i.e. they pronounced they had come to the realization that they actually experienced a “happy” life rather than a “sad” one. At the close of their interviews, respondents frequently expressed surprise at the number, type, and depth of happy memories they were ultimately able to recall with little prompting (Foley et al., 2012).

Neither forgetting, suppression, nor response bias theories satisfactorily described the pattern of discovery we were seeing, nor were we willing to accept the explanation that North Koreans by nature “serve up details to please” their interlocutors. This led us to refocus our study, developing grounded theory about life story narrative from the interviews of 30 North Korean defectors and testing the theory through an experimental narrative intervention treatment involving 122 defectors at the Hanawon resettlement center. The combined mixed methods study revealed that the present process of preparing newly-arriving North Korean defectors for productive entry into South Korean society actually weakens defectors’ positive adjustment due to the absence of attention and assistance given to help North Korean defectors narrate their lives fully in South Korea.

As detailed in the qualitative and quantitative studies that follow, we were drawn to theories of symbolic interactionism, social constructionism and their antecedents, especially Meade’s (1936) socially arising self and Bartlett’s (1995/1932) persistent frameworks for recall, to make sense of what we observed. We instantiated Linde’s (2000) theory of narrative induction in our experimental treatment. At root we considered life story narrative as what Linde refers to as a coherence system: “a system that claims to
provide a means for understanding, evaluating, and constructing accounts of experience” (Linde, 1993: 164). Life story narratives are social systems, not idiosyncratic self-talk (Linde, 1993: 175). As such, as Bruner suggests, tellers do not (and cannot) communicate strange new worlds to hearers except that they re-create those worlds from “other worlds, created by others…taken as given” (1986: 95-96). Hearers listen by making offers of attendance from their own worlds of meaning. This is something more and different than Lankov’s observation that Mr. Shin had incentive to exaggerate in a crowded media market. It is more akin to a phenomenon of attenuation: tellers, including Shin and his fellow North Korean defectors, must construct their shared narrative world from the epistemological materials provided by their hearers.

As Linde notes, coherence systems have two defining characteristics in a life story context: They are evaluative of the teller, not the environment (i.e., they describe the kind of person the teller is in a particular situation or setting), and they have extended reportability (i.e., they consist of the kind of events that are memorable enough to be told repeatedly; Linde, 1993: 21). Where lives intersect “landmark” events—both epochal public ones (e.g., natural disasters, social events that transform whole societies, the death of Kim Il Sung for North Koreans) and common personal milestones (e.g., marriage, childbirth, communist party induction rites for North Koreans), the life story must necessarily offer credible and coherent evaluative account of who the teller was in such moments (Linde, 1993: 23). In order to avoid devolution into idiosyncrasy, the account must make sense within the hearer’s framework, not only the teller’s.

This is why it is easier to narrate the life story of Shin the activist than Shin the man: In the former narration, Shin may make use of tropes, emotions, and reactions
common to human rights activists, consumers of refugee stories, and readers of concentration camp accounts in narrating his landmark life events. In the latter, Shin must give an evaluative and coherent self-account constructed out of the hearer’s attendant resources when he narrates, e.g., sending his mother and brother to death by reporting plans of their camp escape to a guard, all because “She never paid attention to my birthday” (Shin as cited in Harden, 2014). The likelihood of descending into idiosyncratic (i.e., non-coherent) narrative in such moments is high, especially in the absence of (and absence of the teller’s awareness of) resources of attending provided by the hearer, including a combination of familiarity with the teller’s world, prompts (discussed below), and what Bradt calls “epistemological attitudes” of “respect and reverence, wonder, awe, astonishment, devotion, honor, fidelity, adoration, worship, thanksgiving” (1997: 11).

Thus, it is possible to say something more meaningful about Shin’s narrative revisions than “Shin lied” or “Shin has exaggerated in order to win some attention in a rather crowded media market.” Within the psychoanalytic tradition Shin may be said to have at least four options for narrating through idiosyncrasy. Lying or exaggerating is certainly one. A second is that Shin “finds his own story intolerable” and descends into the silence of narrative failure, “when affect intensity prevents coherent narrative, so that total thought-blocking may ensue” (Cox & Theilgaard, 1994: 93). A third option is that Shin engages in narrative “smoothing,” in which, faced with “a discontinuity or a lack of closure or a failure to make sense,” he uses shared conventions and approximations from the hearer’s world to “smooth over” the idiosyncrasy in order to make understanding possible (Spence, 1982: 26). Smoothing differs from lying in that it is a grasping at aiding
the hearer in sense making, an effort to reveal rather than conceal, using whatever (limited) resources are available from the hearer.

A fourth option is that Shin receives additional resources for life story narration from the hearer, resources which rescue the narrative from idiosyncrasy and enable the telling in ways that move beyond conventions and tropes. Such resources, broadly termed “prompting” in the psychoanalytic tradition, amount to something considerably more than the hackneyed “go on” allegedly uttered by psychoanalysts to tongue-tied clients. Prompts are empathetic, part intuitive, part studied awareness of the “several intermediate stages in which there are hints and then definite indications” that narrative is beginning to wobble and wax into lies/exaggeration, silence, or smoothing as it navigates idiosyncrasy (Cox & Theilgaard, 1994: 89). Prompting implies familiarity with “the sub-text which is so intimately related to both cadence and content” of life story narratives (Cox & Theilgaard, 1994: 42).

Prompting of tellers by hearers in life story narration admits of a “chicken and egg dilemma” in that life story narrative comes into existence somewhere between teller and hearer, drawing from the experience of the teller and the narrative resources of the hearer, with neither completely certain of the proper combination of offering and receipt of materials that will result in the most authentic telling. Harden alludes to this difficulty when, reflecting on his co-authorship with Shin, he writes, “I worried about his capacity for truthfulness,” concluding “I should have done more to examine the psychological dimensions of his relation to truth” (Harden, 2015). It is why hearers often prefer listening in silence and skepticism to prompting: One may prompt into narrative existence something that ought not to be there, or prompt out of existence something fragile or vital or unique that has every right to be. One may shape what is misshapen just as easily as one may misshape what is shaped authentically, albeit in a way that is unsatisfying to either teller or hearer.

Still, narrative silence on the part of the hearer is no more likely to generate authenticity than the same on the part of the teller. In a co-creative model of life story
narrative, interaction is not tantamount to intervention: Life story does not originate with the teller but in the interaction with the hearer (Bradt, 1997: 12). The hearer, through acts of attendance, narrative offers, and prompting, exhibits considerable influence over whether the life story that is narrated is that of Shin the activist or Shin the man.

The two studies that comprise this thesis suggest that the prompts least likely to distort the authentic shape of life story narration may be those most likely to disrupt the telling of it. Whereas subtle prompting may shade in ways that distort without detection, disruptive prompting brings difference into dramatic relief in ways that may more easily be accepted or rejected by tellers. The effect is analogous to what Thomas Kuhn describes as a “Gestalt switch” (Kuhn, 1977: xiii). In 1947, in preparing a lecture involving Aristotle’s understanding of motion, Kuhn found himself struggling between his great respect for Aristotle as a scientist and his awareness that with regard to motion, Aristotle was “simply wrong”—not only wrong but guilty of errors of understanding that Kuhn could only describe as “blatant.” It was in that process that he experienced a “decisive” moment in which “all at once [I] perceived the connected rudiments of an alternative reading of the texts with which I had been struggling” (Kuhn, 1977: x-xi).

In the language of the present thesis, this is what is referred to as a “narrative shock”: prompting by the hearer toward an alternate reading of the texts of tellers’ life stories in a way that enables a “Gestalt switch” in which previously neglected, forgotten, or discarded elements of experience become constitutive of a new way of being that is, in fact, more authentic to the narrative whole. In the words of Bruner, “[W]e ask of a proposition not whether it is true or false, but in what kind of possible world it would be true” (1986: 45). The qualitative study asks North Korean defectors essentially, “Is it
possible that you actually have a considerable happy memories, and if so, what impact does that have on your self-identity and how you view the future?” The narrative induction treatment follows that by asking, “Is it possible that you are on a hero’s journey?” and then seeks to quantify the impact of that narrative shock on meaning of life measurements of the participants.

The Qualitative Study

In our interviews, NK defectors were asked to narrate through an imaginary photo album containing all of their happy memories—and only their happy memories—past, present, and future. In 19 of the 30 interviews, defectors initially insisted either that they had no happy memory “photos” in their album or, more commonly, that they had no happy memories in particular chapters of it, e.g., no happy memory photos from their time in NK. They offered plausible life story narration consistent with this premise, but when invited by us to reconsider the absence of happy memory photos (through a simple prompt, typically something like, “Yes, but is it possible that you also had some small happy memory during this period?”), most interviewees went on to narrate one, and then a stream, of happy memory “photos.” Of the 71 times defectors reported happiness “black holes,” on 70 occasions they responded to our reconsideration request with one or more happy memory photo narrations (Foley et al., 2012).

The case of one of our qualitative interviewees, Ms. Y, is illustrative. When we opened the interview by presenting the happy memory theme and the photo album heuristic, Ms. Y replied,

I understand that you conducted a lot of interviews dealing with the grief and hardship of NK defectors, and now in a very unique way, you want to conduct interviews on happiness. And it makes me a little uncomfortable.
Because up until the last moment of my time in NK, I hated my life. I always thought, I hated my life in NK (Foley et al., 2012).

She proceeded to narrate for us a series of vividly unhappy memories as proof, including the following:

So let me tell you how unhappy I was. I had three children out of spite. After returning from the exile [to the countryside], my husband’s personality had changed 360 degrees. Before...he was very hardworking and diligent and respected by party leaders, and he had what the SK people would call leadership. But after returning from exile, he had a grudge against society... So he was living on a knife-edge. At any rate, when he became drunk, he really caused a lot of trouble around the house. So I decided, “I will have three children.” I thought, “I am going to die, so after I’m gone, you try raising these three kids on your own” (Foley et al., 2012).

After narrating a burst of memories like this she waited for our response. We asked her to consider whether in addition to the stories she shared she could in fact picture any happy memory photos from the time period she had just narrated. After a reflective pause, she indicated that she could indeed picture a happy memory from that period. She detailed how she escaped to China but realized she missed the children she originally had borne out of spite; contracting a contagious disease, she returned home, infecting her husband. She then shared the following:

So I went to the market after one week because no one was making any money at home. So even though I couldn’t use my legs, I dragged myself to the market so that I could sell off everything we had—clothing that I had—so I could buy rice and medication for myself and my husband. But when I bought the medication and rice and went home, my husband said, “No, you eat it; no, you eat it. Because you have to raise the kids after I die.” So it ended up we shared the medicine. [At this point Ms. Y paused her narration and began to cry. After a time, she then resumed her story.] So it turned out I really was happy, because I did love my husband very much (Foley et al., 2012).

At the close of our interview Ms. Y derived on her own the concept of life story as a co-creation of teller and hearer:
This interview…was the first time for me to think back: Did I ever have any happy moments in the past, or will I ever have happy experiences in the future? Because previous interviews I had were simply chronologically laying down the facts—like an interview I had with [name] who wanted to write a book about NKs. And no one wanted to say yes to that interview because they don’t want to relive the horror, the pain, and the suffering they experienced… I think we should have more sessions or occasions like this. So I can get to know myself better. To understand who I am better. And to make the effort to become happy.

This qualitative study raised the possibility that the narrative framework according to which North Korean defectors narrated their life stories (i.e., “my life had many happy memories” versus “my life is a definitively unhappy story”) could have a pronounced effect on how they viewed themselves as well as their prospects for the future. In other words, perhaps it is not (or not only) that certain people are more likely to view their life as meaningful due to personality and life experience but rather that the use of certain frameworks for life story narration may contribute to perceptions of meaningfulness on the part of the teller. This, we hypothesized, may be moderated by exposure to other cultures as a proxy of the recognition by defectors that their personal experiential data may be emplotted variously, according to a variety of overarching thematic concerns or organizing principles. For example, among the defectors we interviewed, their recall of hidden happinesses was influenced by the duration of time spent outside the NK and SK cultural master narratives, typically in China. We envisioned an experimental treatment in which North Korean defectors could be invited to narrate their life stories according to a framework from outside of their own culture but amenable to it, one that might draw more fully on their overall life experiences and allow them to do more with their personal identities and self-narrations than “relive the horror, the pain, and the suffering they experienced.”
The Quantitative Study

We selected Joseph Campbell’s (2008) “hero’s journey” as the narrative framework for our experimental treatment. The journey framework was judged by us to be novel but amenable to North Korean defectors, easily taught, and especially suitable for their narration purposes given their own recent, epic journeys from North Korea to South Korea. Further, it contained the “narrative shock” of placing lives fraught with tragedy in a wider context of heroism, one with many challenges and setbacks along the way. We created a series of four weekly self-study video segments and voluntary journaling activities designed to facilitate defectors writing out for themselves their own life story narrations according to the hero’s journey motif.

The location for the study was Hanawon, the South Korean government’s high security residential education facility for newly arriving NK defectors, in Anseong, South Korea. Defectors typically stay at Hanawon for three months, during which time they complete 420 hours of training in mental and physical health, job readiness, civics, and resettlement, in addition to going on field trips outside of the closed Hanawon campus.

Five sequential classes of defectors were given the opportunity to participate in the study on top of their regular Hanawon curriculum. They were then assigned randomly to the control (non-narrative intervention) or experimental (narrative intervention) group. The study sample consisted of 62 control group participants and 60 experimental group participants. Pre- and post- surveys were administered to both groups to measure eight meaning of life variables drawn from Frankl’s logotherapeutic framework: Awareness of Self-Limitation; Wish/Future Aspiration; Search for Goals; Love Experience; Self-Transcendence; Relation Experience; Self-Contentedness; and Commitment.
Results analysis showed that means for the control group decreased for all meaning of life measurements except Awareness of Self-Limitation. Meanwhile, means for the experimental group increased in all meaning of life measurements, with significance of difference observed in Self-Contentedness, Search for Goals, and Self-Transcendence.

Indications that the basic Hanawon curriculum was associated with meaning of life declines in newly arriving defectors interested us as much as the indications that the narrative intervention was able to stave off and even reverse some of those declines. We convened a focus group of North Korean defectors with at least one year of residency in South Korea to discuss the study’s findings and determine whether the findings resonated with their own experience. Defectors concurred that Hanawon was a place “where big dreams die” (Foley et al., 2015). The death of dreams is due to a dawning awareness for defectors who participate in Hanawon’s training that success in South Korea may be much harder to achieve than anticipated. “Then the more I learned about SK, the more I began to have worries,” one focus group participant told us. “I gathered my children together and said, ‘Don’t think you have a parent. I can’t do anything for you.’”

Learning how to narrate their life stories according to a hero’s journey framework appears to have aided defectors in allaying their worries, continuing to function as parents, and keeping their dreams alive.

**Discussion**

It should be noted that the effects observed in the experimental treatment do not derive from life story narration in general but from a particular type or framework of life story narration. All North Korean defectors engage by necessity in comprehensive life
story narration when they enter South Korea as part of the initial security interrogation (Lee, 2013). Thus, control group participants would have also had the experience of narrating their lives proximate to their entry into Hanawon. What is it about the hero’s journey framework that preserves a sense of meaning for defectors?

The qualitative study hypothesized an answer in terms of relationship contexts and their relative ability, through the co-labor of narrative, to generate or impair a sense of meaningfulness. The interviews with defectors demonstrated that one does not “have” a life story narrative; rather, a particular life narrative emerges in each encounter between teller and hearer. That narrative is significantly prompt-dependent, both at the level of content and at the level of valence, i.e., whether a life story is regarded by the teller as a happy one or a sad one is ultimately an open question in each telling, and one that is always open to reversal.

The quantitative study furthered this hypothesis in two ways: first, by demonstrating that telling has durable consequences, i.e., narrating one’s life story in a particular way produces at least a short-term change in one’s perception of meaning in life, and second, by demonstrating that such changes could be accrued outside of a direct relationship context, i.e., through self-study resources. The study an alternative to reformulated or increased vocational training in order to better equip North Korean defectors to approach their entry into South Korean life with hope and purpose, namely, reformulated narrative. Being trained how to contextualize setbacks, inadequacies, betrayals, and fears within a life story proves at least as important as being trained how to use an elevator, open a bank account, or fill out an employment application, at least when it comes to the perception that any of these activities are meaningful.
Taken together, the qualitative and quantitative studies indicate the value of resources of attending (e.g., relationships grounded in teller knowledge; prompts; and epistemological attitudes of listening) and narrative (framework) intervention in fostering meaning in life perception among North Korean defectors through life story narration. What is commended is the replacement of fear-, suspicion-, and politico-symbolic frameworks for narration and hearing with meaning-orientated frameworks attended to by empathetic and knowledgeable hearers, toward the maximization of narrative resources for successful resettlement.

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Perhaps, then, it is not what is fixed, permanent, or enduring in our world or knowledge that alone deserves the appellation “real.” Perhaps quantifiable, material substance and form, observed, measured, and recorded, is not the only way to arrive at truth. Perhaps rather in is in the mutually interactive personal relationship between the knower and the known, the observer and the observed, the storyteller and the storylistener, where we can find a different way to think, know, and relate to what we call truth and reality (Bradt, 1997: 19).

It is not only the usual modesties of sample size and significance of effects that deserve mention with regard to the limitations of the mixed method study discussed here. The difficulties attendant to quantifying and accurately (and meaningfully) describe relationships and the products of relationships must also be noted. If life story narration sits between teller and hearer, then the results detailed here ought not to be able to be replicated in principle (i.e., every act of narration will be unique), though the observable patterns between hearer, teller, and narrative framework ought still to hold. Still, what level of precision is possible when speaking of knowledgeable, empathetic hearing relationships or prompts to tellers that flow from attention to narrative subtexts and story cadence? These are qualitative and highly subjective assessments that are in some sense
not in the eye of the beholder/observer but in the reckoning of the participants, e.g., to what degree does the teller regard the hearer as knowledgeable and empathetic, and to what degree are the teller and the hearer consciously aware of this? Even given this broad variability, however, it is possible to agree that the narrative prompt “Is it possible that you could be a hero?” will produce a different life story than the narrative prompt “Is it possible that you could be a spy?”

It is also possible to object that not every defector’s life story is heroic. Some defections may be cowardly, brazenly self-seeking, or evasive of justice. In such cases, to provide a hero’s journey narrative framework may be to assist in self- and other-deception. Similarly, it could be said that many North Korean defectors do have fundamentally sad lives and, as such, prompts intended to elicit happy memories may elicit denial at least as much as resources for going on. Further, the sense of meaningfulness of life generated by a narrative framework like the hero’s journey may ultimately prove to be ephemeral or, worse, counterproductive toward survival and success of defectors in South Korea; it is quite possible that dreams need to be deflated and a steely-eyed pragmatism embraced. These are important questions that deserve thoughtful consideration and further study and analysis. The results of this study do not establish what works best, only a dynamic that deserves attention. What is asserted here is not that the hero’s journey should be adopted but that more attention should be given to the chronology-based interrogation of defectors by state investigators and whether supplemental or substitute narrative approaches could be more effective in achieving Hanawon’s stated purposes.
In a wider sense, there are questions here to consider with regard to research/participant interaction overall. All research, quantitative as well as qualitative, involves implied prompts, relationships, and frameworks. Thus study highlights the interaction between teller and hearer and rather than problematizing it (i.e., as a cause of distortion and bias) “possibilitizes” it (i.e., regards it as not only a legitimate but proper object of attention in every research study and also as a natural means of producing data that is of greatest usefulness to all participants in a study, hearer as well as teller as well as subsequent readers. If narration does indeed sit between tellers and hearers, than objectivity is de-privileged as simply one possible relationship among many; arguably it is problematized as a peculiar kind of epistemological and social relationship in which the teller must risk everything and the hearer, nothing.

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE**

I wanted to write a novel. But first of all I wanted to write my own autobiography, to tell people how I grew up. But in NK you can’t write on any subject you want—the party designates a theme you have to write on. At the time, I was convinced that I was in the middle class of the society, and I wanted to tell people how I became how I am—to inspire people. Most of the time, the party theme is like “Let’s give our lives for the sake of our Dear Leader Kim Il Sung”—that kind of thing. And if you are allowed to write an autobiography, it should be about the care and support you received from the party and the Dear Leader. Otherwise your autobiography will never be published. Regardless of the theme and the categories of literature, the type of literature, the main theme should be praise to the Dear Leader. — Mrs. F, North Korean defector (Foley et al., 2012).

This mixed methods study suggests that it is not only in North Korea that one cannot write on any subject one wants but rather anywhere one seeks to narrate one’s life story, in that life story narration is surprisingly dependent upon the hearer. This is not to say with Lankov (2015) that Mrs. F must narrate a certain kind of life story in order to rise above the din of the crowded marketplace but instead to say that since life story is
not idiosyncratic self-talk, it is actively co-constructed between teller and hearer, with the hearer supplying attending resources that delimit the narrative horizon of what may be known, narrated, and felt by the teller. Thus, censorship is not only a matter of constraints on the teller but also constraints on—and in—the hearer and in the relationship between hearer and teller. Mrs. F’s goal of being free to share how she became how she is requires more than governmental consent. It require knowledgeable and empathetic hearers whose narrative worlds are rich enough in empathy, knowledge, and narrative structures to enable Mrs. F ample resources to reconstruct her own world within them.

According to this thesis, Shin Dong Hyuk may only now be becoming useful as a human rights activist. (Over)hearing Mr. Shin’s life story narration, the North Korean government attended to his telling with knowledge (presumably without empathy), prompting Mr. Shin to re-narrate within this horizon. Mr. Shin’s original telling to non-North Koreans had been heard by non-North Koreans as an “objective” account—something unknown to North Korean culture and, perhaps, to Shin himself (Jang, 2015). As an objective account, it had been privileged by human rights activists for its usefulness in furthering a specific narrative about North Korea that activists wished to tell using the life stories of North Korean defectors, i.e., the utility value of Shin the activist exceeds the utility value of Shin the man, and so our ears are perked accordingly. Hearers, presumably with some degree of empathy for Mr. Shin and some degree of knowledge about North Korea, had nevertheless been unable to detect that his original telling had had its genesis in a “panicky, shame-driven decision to conceal and reorder” his experiences as part of an interrogation process and that this telling had remained essentially unchanged for nine years thereafter (Harden, 2015). Mr. Shin’s co-author
subsequently learned that consistent, coherent narratives from individuals subject to extreme trauma should not be heard as “objective” accounts but rather as symptoms of stress-survivor behavior, efforts to shield the self from narrative failure. As Harden heard from Dr. Stevan M. Weine, a specialist on political violence and trauma, “When someone goes through profound trauma and I don’t hear a disjointed story, I am suspicious” (Harden, 2015). Disjointed stories, paradoxically, may thus be a sign of hearing well.

The stinging question of Asia commentator Kirk (2015) to Mr. Shin, “Why, oh why, did you feel the compulsion to make up key details when clearly your own harrowing tale was already horrible enough?” is answered: Because in life story narrative, we get as good as we give. When we get a coherent, unchanging life story from a self-reported trauma survivor, we give not a publishing contract but attendance in the form of knowledge, empathy, prompts, and narrative frameworks designed to rescue the tale, the teller, and ourselves from our tropes and stock-and-trade emotions and reactions within which the teller must narrate. When we hear the cadence of coherence and confidence in the life story narration of the highly traumatized, we bear responsibility not to be silent in our skepticism but instead to provide prompts that act as “narrative shocks” designed to disrupt the telling, invite a “Gestalt switch,” and open up new possibilities for more authentic narrative co-creation.

Thus, the question is not whether we forgive Shin the man or Shin the activist. The question is, to what degree do we as hearers take responsibility for the narrative (and the activist) that we co-created, one fundamentally shaped by the horizons of our hearing and understanding? If Shin is guilty for the story he told, then we are also guilty for how we heard it, because the story is dependent upon both. When activist Stanton dismisses
the revised life story of Mr. Shin as discredited and says we should rely instead on “the
testimony of 80 [North Korean defector] witnesses and experts, and…240 confidential
interviews with [North Korean defector] victims and other witnesses” (Stanton, 2015),
the limited horizon of our hearing is once again revealed. The stories of these 320 are, of
necessity, as co-created as Mr. Shin’s and liable to the same limitations. As with Shin, the
narratives that appear the smoothest and most credible may ultimately prove to be the
most in need of re-narration—not for the sake of making them more objectively “true”
and thus useful for activism, but for the sake of prompting their tellers to co-create with
us life stories that are first of all personally meaningful to them, set free from the
lingering constraints of initial interrogations and the horizons of our political symbolism
and utility calculus.

Re-narration is only problematic to the degree that we (mis)construe it as
compromising credibility rather than reflecting a reality of healthy life story
development, especially in those who have experienced severe trauma. Seeking creative
ways to re-narrate, such as those reflected in this mixed method study, recognizes that
hearing and telling life story are skills subject to improvement through practice. Mr. Shin
is now finally useful as a human rights advocate because his story can prompt us to
understand, acknowledge, and accept this and thus fundamentally change the way we
hear, and write, and in every way act to co-create the life stories of North Korean
defectors. With Shin the activist exposed as a fiction, we can stop creating fiction by
genuinely hearing the stories of North Korean defectors as men and women. We can help
them co-create stories that first help foster their personal sense that life is still
meaningful; there are worse platforms for activism, and certainly less authentic ones.
More authentic life stories require more authentic relationships, more thorough knowledge of North Korea and North Korean narrative, more understanding of narrative structures and how they operate, more authentic ways of hearing (i.e., ones that replace panic and shame-shaped narratives with new hearings that do not demand continuity with past tellings), more empathy for North Korean defectors as sufferers of trauma, and a greater commitment to North Korean defectors as men and women than as political symbols. If as Stanton (2015) says there is no man who is above the truth, then neither is there a life story “truer” than the relationship that co-creates it.

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**Note to the reader:** Each phase of the research resulted in a stand-alone document based on the specific requirements of the Case Western Reserve University Weatherhead School of Management Doctor of Management program guidelines. As such, some necessary background content is repeated in the opening sections of each document.
REFERENCES


THE HAPPY MEMORIES OF NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS: DISCOVERING PERSONAL NARRATIVES OF HIDDEN HAPPINESS THROUGH DISINTEGRATIVE INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Thirty North Korean defectors were interviewed and asked to share happy memories from across their lifetimes. A “disintegrative” photo-album technique was used to facilitate rich descriptions while reducing pressure for narrative consistency. Eight narrative voices were identified: four master cultural narratives and four personal narrative constructions. Nineteen respondents initially reported life segments devoid of happy memories but each discovered “hidden happinesses” in response to simple reconsideration prompts from the interviewer. Hidden happinesses were primarily narrated in personal voice, with positive correlation found between hidden happiness discovery and time interval between leaving North Korea and arriving in South Korea. A grounded theory is proposed that exposure to relationships outside the dominant master cultural narrative correlates positively with propensity for the discovery of durable “broaden and build” narrative resources (Fredrickson, 1998: 307) for respondents’ “going on” (Wittgenstein, 1953), and that such resources may be actuated through disintegrative narrative inquiry. A new framework for refugee management is discussed that replaces assimilative approaches with exposure to third culture perspectives and discovery of happy memories from all segments of a defector’s life. Proposal is made to redefine McAdam’s (2006) generativity as a predicate of relationships rather than individuals.

Key words: North Korean defector; happy memories; master narrative; life story; refugee management.
INTRODUCTION

On November 8, 2012, Kim Kwang Hyok and his wife, Ko Jang Nam, held a press conference in Pyongyang to announce their “re-defection” to North Korea after having fled to South Korea nearly four years before (Choi, 2012; Shin, 2012). They described the “miserable life” they had been forced to live after they had been “taken away to South Korea by dint of gimmicks, appeasement and manipulation of brokers and agents” (Shin, 2012). Mrs. Ko urged NK defectors1 in SK2 “to come to their senses and break with cursed south Korean society and come back to the DPRK without hesitation” (Herman, 2012).

The re-defection of the couple and their two-year-old son puzzled those who knew them because the young family was, by all appearances, “adjusting well” to life in SK (Herman, 2012). Mr. Kim had reportedly become a devout Catholic—a lifestyle most consider incompatible with public life and practice in NK (Cho, 2012). Mrs. Ko had successfully completed nursing education in SK (Herman, 2012). Media, friends, and NK defector advocates speculated that threats to family members still in NK may have forced the couple to return (Herman, 2012), though in re-defecting, the couple left Kim’s “absolutely astonished” NK defector mother and younger brother behind in SK (Cho, 2012). A Catholic source commented, “Our northern brothers and sisters are subjected from birth to intensive brain-washing that drives them to be loyal to their government till death” (Yun, 2012).

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1 The term “defector” is used in this paper by convention, though North Koreans in South Korea are also referred to as “refugees” and “new settlers” (in English and by equivalent, though hotly debated, terms in Korean). For the legal implications of this terminology, see Chan & Schloenhardt, 2007.

2 North Korea and South Korea are herein referred to as “NK” and “SK” following popular use, rather than by their official names, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the Republic of Korea (ROK).
Each year, 2,500 to 2,800 defectors like Ko and Kim risk their lives to flee from NK, a country regularly criticized in human-rights reports as “one of the world’s most oppressive, closed, and vicious dictatorships” (Buruma, 2008; Amnesty International, 2012). After journeys of thousands of miles across Asia, defectors arrive in SK, one of the most developed countries in the world—according to such quality of life measurements as health, education, and living standards (United Nations Development Programme, 2011). The SK government provides support in the form of citizenship, three months of orientation to SK life, and a resettlement package of housing and financial support totaling approximately 20 million won (US $18,000) per defector, with more assistance available through health, welfare, education, and job-training programs operated by SK’s government, churches, and NGOs (Chosun Ilbo, 2012; Lankov, 2006: 18). In response to the re-defection of Kim and Ko, an SK Unification Ministry spokesperson pledged, “We will make greater efforts and pay closer attention to help defectors better adjust to our society” (Shin, 2012).

Despite these efforts, a large number of NK defectors struggle in their resettlement. Suicide accounts for 16.3 percent of defector deaths (JoongAng Daily, 2010), nearly two and a half times the national rate of SK, itself a global suicide leader (Lee, 2010; Aviles, 2011). A third of defectors wish they could return to NK rather than continuing life in the South (Kang, 2005). In 2012 alone, nearly one hundred NK defectors may have “re-defected” to NK (Herman, 2012; Lee, 2012; Ings-Hodgson, 2012; Strother, 2012).

Kim’s friend recalled that Kim and Ko “looked happy” in a video call during Kim’s stay at a Catholic retreat center in SK in June 2011 (Cho, 2012). In contrast, NK’s Korean Central News Agency reported that a different video had brought happiness to the couple:
One day [in SK] they saw a video showing the dear respected Marshal Kim Jong Un providing field guidance to Kyongsang Kindergarten. The Marshal with a bright smile on his face had a photo taken with children at just their son’s age. Ko said she and her husband cried looking up to the Marshal who was so affectionate to children. Her husband said the Marshal reminded him of President Kim Il Sung and leader Kim Jong Il who loved children so much in their lifetime.

[Ko] continued: They repeatedly saw the video and renewed their determination to come to the care of the Marshal. But they suffered from uneasiness and fear as for the treatment they will receive upon their return. But the news of press conference of Pak Jong Sun who went back to the DPRK hardened their minds to return to the homeland. So they finally left south Korea with an excuse of visiting China and could come to the homeland (KCNA, 2012).

Which video represents the couple “coming to their senses”? Do Kim and Ko even know for themselves? What factors influence the happy memories of NK defectors living in SK? How might an understanding of these factors inform refugee resettlement strategies?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The shaping of the NK self has generated comparatively little attention in research. Rozman cautions against extrapolations about NK life predicated on the history of adjacent communist countries, Russia and China, contending that under Kim Il Sung, NK developed “an exclusive ideology and identity as well as a military posture that left little chance of foreign pressure or intervention, a legacy that has not receded since his death” (2012). S.Y. Kim contends NK’s ideology and identity intersect to create “a theatrical state par excellence” (2010: 14) in which “the ability to narrate national history and consolidate community has been monopolized by a singular subject” (2010: 8). Kim Il Sung is not only NK’s founder but also its “authoritative patriarch” exercising fatherly care over “his docile wife, sons, and daughters” (2010: 6). This “foundation myth” of the NK state—and, thus, the NK self—is expressed in every dimension of daily life through dramas, operas, films, posters, novels, and public celebrations. North Koreans are trained to imitate the sacrificial
and heroic lives of state-created literary and dramatic characters, through study guides and
discussion sessions at school and work (2010: 13).

Given this omnipresence of state-crafted mythology in daily life, it is surprising that
research into the experiences of NK defectors has been predominantly “critical-rational”
rather than “narrative-historical” (O’Dwyer, 2000: 10-11). In critical-rational inquiry,

Information is generated via quantitative and actuarial methods. Reality is
perceived as a single, fixed state which endures forever. The aim of this method
is to arrive at theoretical interpretations, and the formulation of general abstract
paradigms (2010: 10).

Critical-rational inquiry into the life of NK defectors has generally relied on models
that interpret the decision to leave NK as driven by deficiency (Kim & Lee, 2009: 87), e.g., a
lack of food or freedom, or concern for the future (Haggard & Noland, 2011). Other
deficiency-directed studies of NK defectors in SK have been conducted on depression (Jeon
et al., 2009); adaptation problems (Sung, 2008); post-traumatic stress disorder (Jeon et al.,
2005); and the psychological traumas of resettlement (Kim & Lee, 2009).

In contrast, narrative-historical method studies what O’Dwyer calls “the subjective
human experience of individually felt needs, wants, and goals.”

Reality is seen as being relative, context-based, and known through multiple
perspectives. McAdams, following Bruner, believes that the narrated word can
trigger varied meanings and presuppositions, and that stories are especially
effective because “they mean more than they can say” (O’Dwyer, 2000: 11).

The claim that “people create stories to make sense of their lives” is central to the
branch of social-science inquiry McAdams terms “the narrative study of lives” (2006: 14).
Central to this study, contend McLean et al., is the life story—“an extended but selected
autobiography of personal experiences and interpretations of those experiences that provides
unity and purpose to the person” (2007: 263). To say that a life story is selected is to
recognize that any narration of personal experience is “created within a specific situation, by particular individuals, for particular audiences, and to fulfill particular goals” (2007: 262). Among those goals are self-maintenance (2007: 262) and self-development (2007: 263), which alternate throughout an individual’s life as a part of the “larger cultural milieu that holds expectations of what makes a healthy narrative and a healthy self” (2007: 262).

What is not noted by McLean et al. is that the very concept of an integrated, linear life story within which life finds meaning and intelligibility is itself a "situated story" of sorts, an element of the Western cultural master narrative going back to Aristotle and reprised in the narrative ethics of Alisdair MacIntyre, among others:

In particular, MacIntyre draws on the Aristotelian concepts of the "narrative unity of human life and of a practice with goods internal to it" (228). Combining these concepts, he arrives at the idea that human actions are intelligible only within some temporally ordered, unified narrative sequence, and that rationality is always dependent on a set of specific practices growing out of a community's historical tradition (Nelson 2001: 54).

Nelson also identifies the assumption of the integrated, linear life story in back of John Rawls' "rational life plan" and Charles Taylor's concept of self-understanding (2001: 58). She cites Margaret Urban Walker's critique of the "career self"--a way of narrating one's life that is available to "respectable' people... whose life trajectory is plotted as a linear progression toward a goal" (2001: 62). The integrated, linear life story may thus be understood as the personal narrative form commended by the American cultural master narrative. As a narrative convention it poses little difficulty in use to those who are willing and able to narrate their lives within the narrative's moral framework.

The challenge comes for those whose experiences do not fit the unified life story convention, or whose lives contain elements considered problematic in the cultural master
narrative. Nelson has in mind those whose identity and moral agency are constrained by what she calls "abusive group relations" (2001: xi). An analogous circumstance is noted by McLean et al. in adolescents who do not learn to integrate the telling of negative experiences into their life narratives, potentially limiting their growth in self-esteem and the development of "elaborated, integrated life stories in adulthood" (2007: 266). Whereas McLean et al. observe that “Engaging in storytelling to any extent involves voicing and silencing some aspects of self in response to greater cultural norms, listener demands, or personal motivations” (2007: 273), Nelson posits a third option beyond voicing and silencing: adoption and narration of a "clinically correct story," revised to correspond to the cultural master narrative (2001: 125-128). In each of the three narrative options, the result is a life story that may omit "the features of our selves and our lives that matter most to us" (Nelson, 2001: 72). Thus, narrative may be linear and to all appearances integrated without being a servant of what McLean et al. call "a healthy narrative and a healthy self" (2007: 262).

How should Kim and Ko's press conference be understood? As a voicing and silencing that preserves identity or as a clinically correct narrative that injures it? Given the opposition of NK and SK cultural master narratives, is it possible for NK defectors and re-defectors to narrate a life story without leaving one full set of happy memories at the border?

Whereas McLean et al. note the long-term cost of un-narrated negative memories, the work of Fredrickson suggests the long-term cost of un-narrated happy memories. If the evolutionary value of negative emotions is, as Fredrickson (1998: 304) suggests, “to narrow a person’s momentary thought-action repertoire....in life-threatening situations that require quick and decisive action in order to survive”—a fair description of the defector experience—then the evolutionary value of positive emotions may be to “prompt individuals
to discard time-tested or automatic (everyday) behavioral scripts and to pursue novel, creative, and often unscripted paths of thought and action.”

Not only do the positive emotions of joy, interest, contentment, and love share the feature of broadening an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoire, but they also appear to share the feature of building the individual’s personal resources, ranging from physical resources to intellectual resources to social resources. Importantly, these are more durable than the transient emotional states that led to their acquisition. By consequence, then, the often incidental effect of experiencing a positive emotion is an increment in durable personal resources that can be drawn on later in other contexts and in other emotional states. I refer to this as the broaden-and-build model of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 1998: 307).

Such a theoretical framework suggests that studying the happy memories of NK defectors is not merely a pleasant alternative to studying their deficiencies but instead represents a yet under-researched focus on the “grounded strategies” (Jayawickrama, 2010: 1) by which refugees may rebuild the personal and social resources disrupted by dislocation.

METHODS

This study follows the grounded theory methodology of Glaser & Strauss’ *Awareness of Dying*, in which theory emerges not only from the lived experience of respondents but also for them. *Awareness of Dying* was offered by its authors as a “hand book of prescriptions to patients on how to cope with the hospital organization, the staff and the medical rigors of dying, in order to bring one’s life to a close in a more satisfying way” (2005/1965: 23). In the same way, this study sought to create an environment in which “the respondent becomes a kind of researcher in his or her own right” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995: 29) through individual interviews designed to be of intrinsic value to respondents. The goal was not rich data for research but development of an interview method enabling respondents to discover personal resources that might aid them to “go on” (Wittgenstein, 1953) in their own lives.
Sample

Interviews were conducted with NK men and women aged 22 to 77 who escaped from NK in the modern defection era (i.e., the 1994 famine onward) and were living in SK at the time of interview. Respondents were recruited via snowball method, with initial contacts drawn from my seven years of direct engagement with NK defectors as cofounder of an SK nongovernmental organization providing education programs to NK defectors. Individuals were invited to “share their happy memories with an American researcher.” No remuneration was offered. Thirty interviews were conducted to reach a level of theoretical saturation facilitating the delimitation and writing of new theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2011/1967: 111).

Data Collection

Semistructured individual interviews of around two hours in length were conducted with respondents between January 2012 and June 2012 in the office of my organization in Seoul, South Korea. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit the happy memories of respondents from across their life spans, as well as the happy memories they hope to have in the future. Respondents were requested to share a brief narrative of their defection from NK to SK before being asked to envision before them an imaginary album containing photos of every happy memory—and only the happy memories—from their lives. I then invited each respondent to close his or her eyes and take a few minutes to silently visualize the album and its contents before selecting a photo from anywhere in the album, describing it to me, and narrating the story from which it came. Respondents were encouraged to share about as many different imaginary photos from across their lifetimes as possible, within the time constraints of the interview. Interviews concluded with me asking respondents to reflect on their interview experience overall. The interview protocol is included in the appendix.
The imaginary photo-album technique was developed after test interviews revealed that respondents provided thin descriptions of happy memories in response to a simple prompt to “share a happy memory from each period of your life.” The technique was thus developed in an effort to foster visualization, leading to thicker descriptions in the actual study. The unanticipated benefits of the technique are considered in the Discussion section.

An SK interpreter actively participated in each interview, not only providing translation but also welcoming respondents and attending to their comfort. I encouraged the interpreter to pause during the interview when necessary to consult translation dictionaries or to share with me notable expressions used by respondents (Wong & Poon, 2010). Forward translation of interview questions and back translation of portions of interview recordings were made by an additional translator in order to verify accuracy (Liamputtong, 2010: 152).

Data Analysis: Cultural Master Narratives and Other Narrative Voices

A total of 305 happy memories were shared by respondents. Through application of Glaser & Strauss’ constant comparative method (2011: 101-115), it became apparent during the interview phase that though respondents frequently named similar happy memories, they often identified very different reasons for their happiness. Mr. G described the happiness of joining the Communist Party by saying, “I felt that now I am a good father to my children, rather than a good Communist Party member.” In contrast, Mrs. A described joining the party as “more thrilling than my experience of receiving Jesus as my Lord.” She added:

I received the member certificate with a trembling hand. As I made an oath to give everything for the sake of the party, I felt my heart would explode. I would sacrifice everything for the sake of Kim Jong Il and Kim Il Sung, and I would keep this oath until the last day of my life.

Figure 1 details an additional example of this diversity of voice.
Eight distinct narrative perspectives, or “voices,” were identified, into which all 305 happy memories could be distributed. Descriptions and examples of each voice follow.

1. South Korean master narrative (SM). These are happy memories involving praise of some aspects of SK ideology or policy, or of SK as a nation. Narratives are often brief and hyperbolic, with abstractions cited as happy memories.

   • “My happy memories in SK mostly involve unlimited spiritual love and support to us NK defectors by the SK government and its people.” (Mr. W)

   • “My happiest—happy happiest moment—was [date], when I arrived at Incheon Airport in SK. That was the happiest, happiest moment in my life. Because the SK government provides—they’re fulfilling my needs and my wants.” (Ms. AA)

2. South Korean Christian master narrative (SC). These are happy memories rooted in SK Christian ideology and customary practice. (Not all happy
memories referencing Christian faith are coded to this category; where the
narrative reflects a distinctly personal construction or novel experience,
categories 3 through 7 below represent a more accurate code.)

• “Before I believed in God, what I believed was Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong
Il. But now I know the existence of God, I know God is above Kim Il
Sung and Kim Jong Il. I know who to believe in—not idols.” (Ms. S)

• “Here in SK, even if I emptied my pockets, you wouldn’t find anything
but dust. And it’s very difficult to meet people in ordinary life. So for a
person like myself, it’s…like I couldn’t meet Kim Il Sung, say. But then
there is this such-greater being, and that he [God] would stoop down to
meet me without expecting anything in return? That’s the greatest
happiness ever.” (Ms. X)

3. Woven from distinctly South Korean fabric (SF). The SK master narrative
is present but exists as a backdrop or matrix in which happiness is constructed
rather than being foregrounded as the source of the happiness. Key elements
of the happiness are predominantly SK in culture, either absent from or
without equal resonance in NK culture.

• “In NK, a man and a woman won’t get married because they fell in love
with each other and that brought them happiness. It’s arranged marriage.
In NK, I was married and had kids. In SK, I got married again and had
kids. But the children I had in SK brought me greater joy than the children
in NK. The children in NK were my first born, so I should cherish them
more, but the children in SK give me greater happiness. And in SK I
married my wife because we fell in love. And I’m still quite happy.” (Mr.
M)

• “In NK, even if you are a NK citizen, 60-70 percent of the population
would never go to Pyongyang Station. It’s more difficult to go there than
other places because it’s the central place and there is surveillance there. I
went to Seoul Station… There was no special inspection or special thing
just because it was Seoul Station. It was the same as other stations in
SK… When you go to the Pyongyang Station, there’s a line there where
they check your identification with your special number. Your birth date,
your birth year, month, date; and there are numbers coded. And if it
doesn’t match with the ticket number—if one number is different—you
can get in trouble. But in SK there is no one there! And that is the
moment.” (Mr. DD)

4. Personal stories distinct from a master narrative (P). These are stories that
are not narrated primarily in relation to or explicable with simple reference to
stock elements of a cultural master narrative or cultural narrative fabric.
Stories are typically narrated in significant detail with greater explanatory
asides included.
• “I was completely bedridden… One day, 40 roosters or hens we raised back then all died—because my son failed to lock the door properly… You would think that anyone who had that experience would cry, but I laughed. I thought, This is happiness brought to my family. I have always had that positive mind-set. My son came home and said, ‘Well, this isn’t like a home with 40 dead chickens!’ This is before my son went to the army. I asked my son to massage my legs. He said no at first, but I said, ‘This may be the last chance to give a massage to your mother.’ All of a sudden, my son got serious, and he started to massage my legs. I asked him to sing a song, and so he started to sing… At that time I had two college students under my roof. I was willing to have them because I had such a helping heart. It was after midnight, and everyone there started to sing and dance, and we had fun until 3 a.m.” (Ms. F)

• “After breaking out of the jail, I went to [describes route across Asia, arriving in Thailand]. We had no guide—just eight of us with no guide telling us where to go. We were doing body language to show that we were hungry, or whatever we needed. Then at last we met a 14-year-old little girl, and she was the one who actually directed us from the border of Thailand to the bus station to go to Bangkok.” (Ms. AA)

5. Woven from distinctly North Korean fabric (NF). The NK master narrative is present but exists as a backdrop or matrix in which happiness is constructed rather than being foregrounded as the source of the happiness. Key elements of the happiness are predominantly NK in culture, either absent from or without equal resonance in SK culture.

• “After [my husband’s defection]—because my husband was kind of missing in action—he couldn’t be found anywhere. My son… should have had a disadvantage because his father was a lost person. But because of my job, he went to the army instead of the mines. He went to the proper army and ended up serving well, and after he got out, he took a good job instead of going somewhere worse. And that was good. And my husband was in SK; he didn’t say I should leave NK or that I should get out of NK. So he sent some money, and we were able to live on that. So it was great.” (Ms. S)

• “Since the Arduous March, I’ve witnessed many atrocities. People eating people. I decided if I were to avoid living such a miserable life, I should acquire some professional skills.” (Ms. X)

6. Counter-cultural to the North Korean master narrative (NC). These are happinesses derived from activities described by the narrator as conscious subversions of the NK master narrative.

• “If I continuously do what my mother did and complete those tasks, those missions that she was doing, I think I will feel this kind of happiness: the
happiness of being against the NK government. I will feel definitely happy, because I actually stood against them, those who had treated my innocent mother as a sinner, a criminal.” (Mr. P)

- “Whenever we talked about the deep issues, we never had a drink. We talked with cautiousness. Because there was the possibility that one person could shoot me at any moment. So I always tried to stay awake. So basically we had this kind of conversation at home. Whenever I talked about these deep issues related to the government and the outside world, I felt happiness with it. Drinking was not the matter. Eating was not the matter. The happiness was with the conversation.” (Mr. Z)

7. Trans-Korean master narrative (TK). These are stories rooted in common Korean (i.e., pre–Korean War) culture. They are often offered with little explanatory detail—on the narrative assumption that these are stock cultural images easily understood with little need for elaboration. Stories in this category could as easily be told by an SK as by an NK.

- “When I had a son, my mom even danced on the street.” (Ms. B)
- “It was when I was in 9th grade, autumn. We went on the so-called aid program—sort of like a picnic and work trip combination. I brought my lunch box with me, and then afterward we’d find these pieces of paper that directed us what to do, like ‘sing.’ So while I was singing, someone put a frog in my pocket. And then when I put my jacket on, the frog jumped out. Everyone—the 200 or so kids—laughed so hard. I was kind of high ranking, so they all thought it was so funny. It was a time of my life when I had innocent, positive thoughts and lots of dreams.” (Mr. V)

8. North Korean master narrative (NM). These are happy memories involving praise of some aspect of NK ideology or policy, or of NK as a nation. Narratives are often brief and hyperbolic, with abstractions cited as happy memories.

- “During the Kim Il Sung era, the food was rationed equitably to everyone who worked. And the schooling was free of charge. Even the school uniform was fairly distributed. Medical treatment was free. And no one in this era died of hunger.” (Ms. J)
- “I like to say, ‘I’m more happy in NK than SK.’ Yeah, SK is a very rich country that is dominated by materialism. But living in NK, there is no competition and there is no worry about the future, because government—they just provide everything… So it’s a fact—yeah, there are not unemployed people; 100 percent employment.” (Mr. BB)
The coding categories are ordered so that the four cultural master narratives (SM, SC, TK, and NM) are on the outside; the four categories indicating more personalized constructions are in the middle.

Two additional coders each independently coded 10 percent of the interviews according to the subject and voice categories used here, achieving an inter-reviewer reliability (IRR) of greater than 90 percent. The English translation text was utilized for all coding, with reference made to the Korean text where necessary for clarification.

**FINDINGS**

**Happy Memories by Subject and Narrative Voice**

Table 1 lists the 305 happy memories reported by respondents, categorized by subject and subcategorized by narrative voice. The final column on the chart lists the total number of distinct narrative voices observed in each subject category.
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Happy Memories By Category And Narrative Voice

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**Happiness “Black Holes”**

In 19 of the 30 interviews, respondents indicated either that they had no happy memories in their lives overall or, more commonly, that they had no happy memories during a particular segment of their lives, e.g., their time in North Korea. Representative is the
statement of Ms. D, who recounted five happy memories before announcing, “That’s the end of the story. My life in China was a living hell.” Similarly, after sharing a single happy memory to begin her interview, Ms. F said, “After that, only tragedy—no happiness for me in NK… The life itself even drove me to the point of committing suicide.”

Figure 2 shows the life segments for which respondents reported happiness “black holes.” In some cases, respondents reported multiple black holes.

**FIGURE 2**
Happiness Black Holes Reported By Life Segment (N=19)

When respondents reported a black hole, I expressed sympathy and then asked if perhaps there could have been “small happinesses” they experienced during that life segment. I asked Ms. D, “In the living hell, in China, can you remember any small moments of happiness?” I said to Ms. F, “The difficult times you went through are so important, but because today we’re focused on happy memories, I want to move forward to the next happy memory you remember after your difficult time. What would that memory be?”

Of the 71 times happiness black holes were encountered, on 70 occasions, respondents went on to share one or more “hidden happinesses”: happy memories that occurred during a life segment previously described as bereft of happy memories.
Respondents frequently expressed surprise at the number, type, or depth of happy memories they were able to recall by interview’s end. An illustration of this process follows.

**Figure 3**
Navigating Through A Happiness “Black Hole” To A “Hidden Happiness”

Ms. Y: “I understand that you conducted a lot of interviews dealing with the grief and hardship of NK defectors, and now in a very unique way, you want to conduct interviews on happiness. And it makes me a little uncomfortable. Because up until the last moment of my time in NK, I hated my life. I always thought, I hated my life in NK. I ran away from home. I worked in [location withheld]. Those five years were probably the happiest period I had in my life, if I had to choose a period.”

Me: “So in that five-year period, do you remember any moments of happiness? And they don’t have to be big moments—even fleeting moments of happiness.”

[Ms. Y proceeded to briefly recount five small moments of happiness from her young work life. Then she returned to her theme of hating her life.]

Ms. Y: “So let me tell you how unhappy I was. I had three children out of spite. After returning from the exile [to the countryside], my husband’s personality had changed 360 degrees. Before…he was very hardworking and diligent and respected by party leaders, and he had what the SK people would call leadership. But after returning from exile, he had a grudge against society… So he was living on a knife-edge. At any rate, when he became drunk, he really caused a lot of trouble around the house. So I decided, ‘I will have three children.’ I thought, ‘I am going to die, so after I’m gone, you try raising these three kids on your own.”

[Ms. Y then detailed how she escaped to China but realized she missed the children; contracting a contagious disease, she returned home, infecting her husband.]

Ms. Y: “So I went to the market after one week because no one was making any money at home. So even though I couldn’t use my legs, I dragged myself to the market so that I could sell off everything we had—clothing that I had—so I could buy rice and medication for myself and my husband. But when I bought the medication and rice and went home, my husband said, ‘No, you eat it; no, you eat it. Because you have to raise the kids after I die.’ So it ended up we shared the medicine.” [At this point Ms. Y paused her narration and began to cry. After a time, she then resumed her story.] “So it turned out I really was happy, because I did love my husband very much.”

At the close of our interview, Ms. Y shared the following:

This interview…was the first time for me to think back: Did I ever have any happy moments in the past, or will I ever have happy experiences in the future? Because previous interviews I had were simply chronologically laying down the facts—like an interview I had with [name] who wanted to write a book about
NKs. And no one wanted to say yes to that interview because they don’t want to relive the horror, the pain, and the suffering they experienced… I think we should have more sessions or occasions like this. So I can get to know myself better. To understand who I am better. And to make the effort to become happy.

Similarly, it was in the “living hell” of her China experience that Ms. D discovered the story of her “long dream” bowl of rice, excerpted in Figure 2. Ms. F found eight “hidden happinesses” in her life of “only tragedy,” including the story of celebration after the death of 40 hens, detailed above under point 4, “Personal stories distinct from a master narrative (P).”

The Happiness Composite

Figure 4 shows the distribution of happy memories by narrative voice, distinguishing between respondents’ happy memories shared without an immediately preceding “hidden happiness” dialogue (labeled “w/o HH”) and happy memories shared immediately following a “hidden happiness” dialogue (labeled “w/ HH”).

![Happiness Composite](image-url)

In 50 of the 71 cases following a hidden happiness dialogue, the happy memory shared was coded in the personal voice (P) category.
**Hidden Happiness**

Figure 5 shows the happy memories shared by the 11 respondents who did not report a happiness “black hole” and thus did not engage in a hidden happiness dialogue.

**FIGURE 5**

**Respondents Reporting No “Black Hole” (N=11)**

Here happy memories were shared in the personal voice (P) less often than every other voice narration category except NK counter-cultural voice (NC). There is significant representation of both the SK and NK cultural master narratives (SM and NM). The following SM excerpt from Ms. T is typical of the non-HH respondents:

> It’s a sort of a windfall here in SK. I’m so happy. The church gives us rice. The community center gives us rice. I wish I could take it on a cart and give it to the people in NK. In NK what happens is that we would collect handfuls of white rice and make white rice only for birthdays. But here in SK, every day is your birthday! So I am so happy. Every day is a happy day here. I can’t express my happiness enough.

In contrast, Figure 6 shows happy memories reported by respondents whose narratives included hidden happiness discoveries. Note that even without HH included, happy memory distribution is stronger in the NK fabric (NF) and trans-Korean (TK) voices.
than in the SK and NK master narrative voices (SM and NM). With HH included, personal voice narration (P) dominates.

**FIGURE 6**
Respondents Reporting Hidden Happineses (N=19)

Age

When respondents are viewed by age, the two younger groups are seen to have made less use of the cultural master narrative registers than the oldest segment of respondents. Younger respondents made more use of the SK narrative fabric (SF) and the NK countercultural voice (NC). Three respondents in the youngest group cited anticipated happy memories arising from careers focused on exposing abuses they experienced in NK.
FIGURE 7
Happinesses Reported By Respondents Aged 22-38 (N=5)

FIGURE 8
Happinesses Reported By Respondents Aged 45-57 (N=10)

FIGURE 9
Happinesses Reported By Respondents Aged 60-77 (N=15)
Gender

Narrative distribution by gender showed male respondents more likely than female respondents to utilize the NK voice registers. This was especially true of men who reported powerful positions in NK but humbler lives in SK. Mr. M, who shared happy memories about admission to a top NK university, executive-level membership in the NK Communist Party at a young age, and positional perks like nice cars and free gasoline, added:

It’s very difficult to adapt to every aspect of life as an NK defector. I am in many ways more competent than most SK people, but it’s difficult to adapt. But in NK, everything was just a phone call away. Even Kim Jong Il was a phone call away. He recognized my genius.

**FIGURE 10**
Happinesses Reported By Male Respondents (N=11)

![Graph showing happinesses reported by male respondents with and without HH.](image-url)
FIGURE 11
Happinesses Reported By Female Respondents (N=19)

Time in South Korea

Longer residence in SK did not correlate with greater use of the personal narrative voice (P) or decreased reliance on cultural master narratives. In fact, non-HH memories in the personal narrative voice (P) are proportionally lowest in respondents who have lived in SK the longest. This suggests that constructing narratives in the personal voice is not a matter of assimilation or adjustment to SK society.
FIGURE 12
Happinesses Reported By Respondents Living In SK 2 Years Or Less (N=8)

FIGURE 13
Happinesses Reported By Respondents Living In SK 3-6 Years (N=13)

FIGURE 14
Happinesses Reported By Respondents Living In SK 7-15 Years (N=9)
Time Interval between NK and SK during Defection

Respondents who spent less than a year in their defection journeys from NK to SK showed comparatively more reliance on especially the SK master narrative (SM) and NK narrative fabric (NF). Their hidden happinesses were as likely to be ideologically NK (NM) as personal (P). Interval of time between NK and SK appears positively correlated with articulation of hidden happinesses in the personal (P) voice. For example, Ms. D, the respondent with the longest interval between NK and SK, characterized her time in China as a “living hell.” In response to my reconsideration prompt, she articulated a hidden happiness in the personal (P) voice register from her time in a Chinese prison:

FIGURE 15
Hidden Happiness (HH) In the Personal (P) Register: Imprisonment in China

Me: “OK, so can I ask you a very crazy question? a difficult question? The things that happened to you in prison—I mean, those are so hard. So terrible. But is there such a thing as a tiny happy experience, a tiny happy memory that ever happens to you in prison?”
Ms. D: [Silent for one minute. Smiles. Remains silent. Looks down. Looks away.] “It was extremely painful and difficult for everyone there. However, fellow prisoners cared for one another. It was not every prisoner, but some fellow prisoners cared for one another. Even inside the prison cell, there were spies. So one of the spies caught me saying something that is not allowed, so all the things I had had were forfeited; however, there were some fellow prisoners who really cared for me, who I could trust. As I talked to them, I got comforted and they got comforted. So I think that is a happy moment.”
DISCUSSION

That happy memory black holes exist seems, on the face of it, axiomatic and even appropriate. What could be less surprising than that individuals who risked their lives to leave a country would report no happy memories from their time in that place?

The surprise comes from the hidden happinesses that respondents subsequently encountered in relation to simple reconsideration prompts—happy memories substantial enough to prompt their reassessment of the happiness of their lives overall. The surprise is compounded not by the number of happy memory black holes reported from time in NK (three times as many as any other life segment) but by the continued existence of happy memory black holes in subsequent life segments including present time in SK and anticipated future happinesses. This suggests a phenomenon that extends beyond the oft-studied critical-rational inquiry questions of memory, suppression, concealment, and happiness and into the realm of the narrative-historical: What are stories before they are told? What occludes the significant happy memory stores upon which respondents could be drawing but are not? How can happy memories be made self-reflexively available to respondents as durable “broaden and build” narrative resources (Fredrickson, 1998: 307) for “going on” (Wittgenstein, 1953)?

Respondents rarely drew on the language of concealing and revealing or forgetting and recalling in describing hidden happinesses. Common were respondents’ expressions of post-narration surprise and pleasure at happy memories appearing where none had existed. Hidden happinesses were not recovered so much as discovered. Schank notes, “In order to remember an experience, then, we must tell it to someone.” In the absence of the telling, “the story itself does not exist as an entity in memory” (Schank, 1995: 115-116).
Hidden happinesses were narrated most frequently in the personal (P) narrative voice, not the voice of cultural master narrative. The greatest propensity for hidden happiness discovery was found among respondents with the longest interval of time between leaving NK and arriving in SK—a propensity not reflected in respondents with the longest periods of residence in SK. Whereas this might be potentially attributable to these latter respondents having already discovered/recovered their hidden happinesses prior to the interview due to their longer residence in SK, no correlation was detected between length of residence in SK and facility with the P voice. As noted in the Findings section, non-HH memories in the P voice were proportionally lowest among respondents who had lived in SK the longest. This indicates a natural narrative progression among defectors not from NM to P but from NM to the other cultural master narratives of SK, namely, SM, SC, and TK. P is correlated specifically to time in a third culture, not generally to time outside NK or inside SK.

What is it about the time interval between NK and SK that predicts propensity for discovery of hidden happinesses? The tenuous nature of respondents’ existence in these third country settings (most commonly China) should not be overlooked. Defectors live in third countries illegally, facing repatriation if caught. There is no official framework for their assimilation into the third culture, and, thus, no framework for their assimilation into the cultural master narrative or formal means for their acquiring facility with its use. Their interval time is experienced by them as being outside of cultural master narratives in which they are expected, enabled, or invited to operate. This is not to contend that they are not exposed to such narratives (often significantly, e.g., through encounters with the SC narrative through SK missionaries or the TK voice through Korean Chinese citizens); however, it is to contend that they encounter such narratives only tenuously and liminally. After Mr. Z
narrated several rich and happy memories from his time in China, he added, “I didn’t have
time to think about my emotions. I was only afraid that I would be caught.”

Experience outside of cultural master narratives does not mean facility with personal
voice but rather propensity for HH discoveries narrated in the P register. Time in a third
culture was helpful but not sufficient to prompt P narration of HHs. Even among respondents
with the longest time intervals between NK and SK, their happinesses often remained hidden
from themselves, not just others. As Berger observes in his seminal ethnographic work, *A
Fortunate Man: The Story of a Country Doctor*, “The culturally deprived have far fewer
ways of recognizing themselves. A great deal of their experience—especially emotional and
introspective experience—has to remain unnamed for them” (1967/1997:99).

In the context of this study, what Berger conceives as cultural deprivation may be
reframed to refer to experiences that occur either outside of a cultural master narrative or that
do not map readily onto one. Nelson defines master narratives as "the stories found lying
about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings" (2001: 6).
Socially shared understandings are the stock and trade of narration. Absent the practiced
ability to narrate in the P voice the memories that are not comprehended in the social stories
lying about in a culture, whole segments of respondents’ experience remain not only un-
narrated but undiscovered and thus un-available as durable resources for going on. Such
segments do not appear in life narratives as black holes but instead are reported in the way
they would be comprehended in the cultural master narrative: as sweeping statements like
Ms. F’s "My life in NK was only tragedy" or Ms. D’s "My life in China was a living hell."

Whereas McLean et al. link adolescent facility of narrating negative experiences with
increased integration of life narrative and greater self-esteem in adulthood (2007: 266), the
The present study suggests a possible cost of narrative integration: numerous positive, or broaden and build, resources—that is, un-narrated happy memories—lost to potentiality. The happy memory black hole is the unintended by-product of the integrated life narrative.

In other words, it is a wholly sensible narrative that Ms. F’s life in NK was only tragedy—so sensible that neither Ms. F nor those to whom she narrates her story in SK may consider alternative narrations that overturn or transform it. It is a wholly sensible narrative that Kim and Ko’s life in NK was only tragedy, yet when they re-defect to NK and announce that their life in SK was only tragedy while their prior life in NK was a sweet dream, the negativity of the memory is revealed as relative, not inherent. It is memory with a negative valence in comparison to the life story the narrator tells utilizing the resources of the current cultural master narrative. While McLean et al. describe this as a phenomenon of voicing and silencing in situated narratives tailored to the listener (2007:273), there is more going on than that. The hidden happinesses—past, present, and future—of this study indicate that narrators experience something more and other than the assembly of different pericopes to serve the needs of each situation, or the shading and shaping of narrative to foster what Bartlett calls “sympathetic weather” for their narrative constructions (Bruner, 1990: 59).

The revised conclusion, however, is not merely that individuals have multiple life stories that are like situated stories writ large and long, but that narrative—even life narrative—is not best understood as inhering with the individual at all. One does not “have” a life narrative. A life narrative emerges in each encounter between teller and listener. If it is more enduring for the teller than the listener (and that is an open question), it is no more in the control of the one than the other. It is born in the narrative moment between the two, with certain stories coming into being that did not previously exist and that neither party could
have anticipated. Even the valence of the story—whether it emerges as a happy memory or a sad one—is also ultimately an open question, and one that is always open to reversal, as the narratives of Kim and Ko and Ms. D and Ms. F illustrate. Stories are not only or even primarily voiced or silenced; they are born in the highly particular context of the listener and the teller at the moment of narration and hardly confined by the intentionality of either.

Life story narration is one particular listener/teller context, and, as the happiness black holes of the respondents in this study illustrate, it may not even be a particularly helpful one to defectors. This is especially true if the measurement of helpfulness is the discovery of new resources for respondents’ going on. This study rather inadvertently afforded an alternative narrative approach: the photo-album technique, an example of how narrative context can quickly repurpose structures and contents beyond the intentionality or imagination of their original authors. Originally designed simply for the purpose of fostering thicker descriptions of happy memories by respondents, the technique revealed itself as a natural mechanism for narrative disintegration. By inviting respondents to share an essentially disconnected series of narrative vignettes (i.e., individual imaginary photos) from across their lifetimes, the inherent need to produce a thematically coherent narrative (McAdams, 2006: 86) may have been temporarily alleviated. With the pressure for thematic coherence reduced, respondents may have been able to articulate a greater range of potentially contradictory happy memories. Further, hidden happinesses—deep, personal, and powerful enough to alter respondents’ life narrative valence overall—could be discovered and explored as the result of comparatively brief and simple prompts.

Schechtman doubts that non-linear narrative can be “identity-constituting” (Nelson, 2001: 75); however, Nelson points out that a cultural master narrative is itself non-linear, "a
tissue of incompatible stories and fragments of stories” (2001: 126). The identity-constituting function of narrative need not derive from its linearity or even its consistency, but rather the inductivity it generates in each new listener-teller encounter. After new contradictory happy memories were gathered into respondents’ inventories in this study, respondents seemed to sense an implicit challenge or invitation to engage in a revised “emplotment” (Mattingly, 1994: 812) of their lives. Statements like Ms. O’s “Through my life I didn’t have that much happiness” became “I think I now have lots of good memories and only a few sad memories.” Bruner calls this a new “coda”—“a retrospective evaluation of what it all might mean, a feature that also returns the hearer or reader from the there and then of the narrative to the here and now of the telling” (2002: 20).

**Writing the Theory**

In place of considering life narratives and their integration, we propose the consideration of relationship contexts and their relative ability, through the co-labor of narrative, to generate or impair the development and discovery of durable “broaden and build” narrative resources (Fredrickson, 1998: 307) for the respondent’s “going on” (Wittgenstein, 1953). In this framework it is possible to compare the impact on these resources of time in a third country to time in SK, or the interview process in this study to other interview processes or to assimilative processes in refugee management. Specifically, a positive correlation is theorized between exposure to relationships outside the dominant master cultural narrative and propensity for discovery of durable “broaden and build” resources for respondents’ “going on,” actuated through disintegrative narrative inquiry.

At present, naturalization strategies for NK defectors are designed to assist transition into SK life through assimilative mechanisms. Through job training, education, and health
and welfare promotion, programs facilitate the transition from NK to SK through progressive engagement in the SK master cultural framework. This grounded theory contends that such an approach leaves crucial resources undiscovered and untapped—specifically, the happy memories of NK defectors that are not readily comprehended within the cultural master narrative frameworks available in SK. Happy memories here refers both to those happy memories previously narrated and known to defectors themselves (including those at cross-valence with the SK cultural master narratives) as well as those that are yet un-narrated and undiscovered by defectors because they do not map to any of the master cultural narratives in which defectors have learned to story their lives.

Positive emotional resources do more than ease the pain of homesickness. They facilitate the pursuit of “novel, creative, and often unscripted [i.e., outside the cultural master narrative] paths of thought and action” (Fredrickson, 1998: 304). A host of resources for NK defectors to “go on” in SK, then, may necessarily come from relationship contexts and encounters outside of any of the Korean master cultural narratives.

**Delimiting the Theory**

Few refugee cases involve the combination of profound cultural continuity and stark cultural discontinuity inherent in the NK/SK scenario. It is a matter for future study to examine the applicability of the findings noted here to situations where cultural master narratives are not so diametrically opposed and narrative fabrics not so closely conjoined.

Also, only limited exploration was done with respondents on the circumstances that motivated the length of their time outside of NK and SK. It is possible that respondents with longer time intervals between NK and SK differ from respondents with shorter time intervals.
due to some factor beyond the narrative considerations noted here, e.g., educational, vocational, or survival skills enabling or motivating longer stays in a third country.

**Future Research**

The grounded theory proposed here invites the redefinition of a construct in the narrative study of lives which McAdams (2006), from Erickson, predicates of individuals but which, in light of the considerations noted in this study, may arguably be more appropriately predicated of relationships and relationship contexts. The construct is generativity:

> The most generative adults in a given society are those members most attuned to that society’s most cherished (and contested) ideas and practices, because they are the members most responsible for passing those ideas and practices on to the next generation. By saying that highly generative adults are attuned to society’s central ideas and practices, I do not mean to suggest that they always embrace or even agree with the dominant cultural ideals. Indeed, many highly generative adults work hard to defy conventions in order to promote agendas and viewpoints that they believe to be in the best interest of themselves, their families, and future generations (McAdams, 2006: 273).

If happy memories and life stories are not something narrators “have” but rather resources that are birthed in the context of narrative, then it is important to ask whether generativity—inherently a relational construct—is most accurately predicated of people or, instead, of the relationships and relationship contexts in which people find themselves. That is, it may be that people themselves are not more or less generative but that relationships and their contexts are more or less generative, and that people, as enduring products of relationship bear the residual traces of that generativity. To say, as in the case of the theory proposed here, that happy memories are durable resources is to recognize that they are more than ephemeral but less than indestructible. They are subject to strengthening or weakening by the ongoing generativity (or lack thereof) of one’s present relationships.
McAdams’ generativity measurements of individuals (2006: 55-57) may be utilized to explore possible correlation between exposure to extra-Korean relationships and generativity among NK defectors. A positive correlation could strengthen the argument that generativity may be more accurately predicated of relationships than individuals while also underscoring the value of cultivation of extra-Korean cultural exposure in defector resettlement.

**CONCLUSION**

Tennyson’s Ulysses observes, “I am a part of all that I have met” (1898/1992: 25). Indeed, the re-defection of Mr. Kim and Mrs. Ko is not best understood as a riddle about refugees coming to or losing their senses. Instead, it is best understood as the story of one refugee couple’s journey on a geographic and cultural scale dwarfing Ulysses’ own and about their encounter with master cultural narratives that conspire to prevent parts of all they have met from remaining in them. Kim and Ko’s resolution came in the form of a decision to repent of all but one of those narratives. The resolution of at least one SK official was to pledge the redoubling and deepening of efforts “to help defectors better adjust to our society” (Shin, 2012).

The present study commends an alternative approach: intentional exposure to relationships outside of familiar cultural master narratives, in disintegrative dialogues with active listeners. It posits that self-change arises not primarily from the process of telling different stories but instead from telling stories with those who listen differently.

That the way described in this study is not an automatic consequence of length of defector residence in SK but rather the result of a collaborative relationship between interviewer and respondent is an invitation to rethink the basic framework for refugee management. The broad outlines of a new framework begin to emerge here. That new
framework is focused on exposing defectors to other narrative voices and cultures to aid them in the discovery and development of happy memories from all segments of their lives. This means that resettlement and assimilation should not primarily be processes by which NK defectors are added into the SK cultural master narrative but rather processes by which defectors are enabled to integrate the SK cultural master narrative into their already rich narrative lives.
APPENDIX
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Warm-up: Can you please summarize for me briefly when you left North Korea, the route you took to come to South Korea, and how long you’ve been here in South Korea?

2. Introduction: I’d like you to pretend with me that on the table right here in front of us is a photo album that contains photographs of every happy memory in your life. You may not have any or many real photographs from your life, but that’s OK: this photo album is imaginary, so it contains a picture of every happy memory in your life, all in order—from your childhood onward. Some of the pictures were photographed by you; some of them were photographed by other people.

And this imaginary photo album is special because it contains photographs of all the happy memories you will have between now and the end of your life.

So, I want you to just relax and take a few minutes looking through this imaginary photo album. I want you to open it to any page you want, turn the page forward, turn it backward, start from the beginning, peek at the end—whatever you prefer.

Now remember—this photo album contains a photo of every happy memory in your life, but it contains no photos of sad memories.

So close your eyes for a few minutes and take a look through the pages of this imaginary photo album. Then I’m going to ask you to tell me about some of your favorite photos in there. [Allow 3-4 minutes for reflection.]

3. When you’re ready to begin, please pick any photograph from the album that you would like to share and tell me about it. (See potential probing/clarifying questions below.)

4. Now, how about opening the album toward the beginning? What photo do you see there that catches your attention that you’d like to tell me about?

5. Now, how about the last pages of the album? Remember that because this is a special photo album, it has photos from the future. Take a look at the last page or two of the photo album—the happy memories yet to come—and describe for me one of the pictures you see there.

6. Which section of the photo album is the longest? In other words, which part of your life has the largest number of happy photos?

7. Which section of the photo album is the shortest? In other words, which part of your life has the smallest number of happy photos?

8. Now think about that section that’s the shortest. Maybe there are only one or two photos in the album from that time. Maybe they’re only small happinesses. That’s OK. I’d like you to think about that time in your life and describe one of the photos from that section of the album.

9. What did it feel like today to discuss these happy memories today?
REFERENCES


HELPING NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS FIND MEANING IN SOUTH KOREA: INDUCING A HERO'S JOURNEY

By

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HELping north korean defectors find meaning in south korea:
Inducing a hero’s journey

abstract

North Korean (NK) defectors experience high rates of death due to suicide and dissatisfaction with life in South Korea (SK) despite comprehensive transitional aid and ongoing support. Drawing on narrative and symbolic interactionist understandings of the effect of serious social disruption on personal identity and meaning-making systems, this study uses a non-clinical experimental treatment to evaluate whether narrative induction of a transcultural “hero’s journey” schematic for personal life story narration can foster a sense of meaning in life in NK defectors newly arriving in SK. An experimental treatment of four weekly video segments and voluntary journaling activities centered on Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey yielded post-treatment increases for all eight meaning-in-life variables measured. Control group declines were reported for seven of the eight variables, with subsequent focus group research attributing deterioration to defectors’ growing sense that in South Korea they will be unsuccessful in helping their families. Narrative induction is commended as an important resource for aiding NK defectors in sustaining meaning amidst the setbacks of resettlement.

key words: North Korean defector; meaning in life; life story; hero’s journey; narrative induction; refugee management.
INTRODUCTION

Grim statistics greet North Korean (NK) defectors\(^3\) upon their arrival in South Korea (SK).\(^4\) Despite ongoing support provided by the SK government, NGOs, and churches, suicide accounts for 16.3 percent of NK defector deaths (JoongAng Daily, 2010), nearly two and a half times the national rate of SK, itself a global suicide leader (Aviles, 2011; Lee, 2010). A third of defectors wish they could return to NK (Kang, 2005). In 2012 alone, nearly one hundred NK defectors may have “re-defected” to NK (Herman, 2012; Ings-Hodgson, 2012; Lee, 2012; Strother, 2012).

Why do NK defectors risk their lives to flee from a homeland characterized by “systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights…that amount to crimes against humanity” (United Nations Commission of Inquiry Report, 2014: 5) and then, after journeys of thousands of miles across Asia, struggle to find happiness in one of the most developed countries in the world (United Nations Development Programme, 2011), and, in significant numbers, commit suicide or attempt to go back?

Efforts to answer this question often look for clues in the stories North Korean defectors tell about themselves and their experiences (cf. Kim & Lee, 2009). Such an approach is consistent with McAdams’ narrative study of lives, in which an individual’s life story, or narrative identity, is understood as a meaning-making strategy through which the individual’s personal dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations are united with life.

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\(^3\) The term “defector” is used in the study title by English language popular convention, though North Koreans in South Korea are also referred to in both English and Korean as “refugees” and “new settlers” (Chan & Schloenhardt, 2007). In the material given to participants and potential participants the term “new settlers,” more commonly used in the Korean language at the Hanawon refugee resettlement center and recommended by the North Korean defector committee advising this study and detailed below, is employed.

\(^4\) The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea are herein referred to as “NK” (or “North Korea”) and “SK” (or “South Korea”) respectively, following popular convention.
experience (McAdams, 1995). To know a person, McAdams contends, is to know a life story. Similarly, McAdams theorizes that dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations may be predictive of the kind of life story an individual narrates (McAdams, 2006b).

But to what degree can the narrative schematic an individual uses to narrate a life story also impact dispositional traits and adaptations? Can inducing a more meaningful schematic for life story narration result in the storyteller perceiving his or her life as more meaningful, and if so, to what extent and for what duration?

Some related studies suggest reason for a positive answer. Mar et al. (2009) found a correlation between lifetime exposure to narrative fiction—and, thus, ostensibly, various narrative schematics—and social ability. Narrative medicine (Charon, 2001; Mattingly, 1994) and narrative psychiatry (Mehl-Madrona, 2010) are premised on the therapeutic reshaping of life narrative in a clinical context. Foley et al. (2012) discovered that the induction of even modest prompts from outside the prevailing NK defector life story narrative schematic could result in the recovery of large numbers of happy memories previously forgotten, omitted, or psychologically unavailable to the narrator. To date, however, little experimental research has been done measuring the effectiveness of narrative induction, defined by linguist Charlotte Linde as “the process by which people come to take on an existing set of stories as their own story” (Linde, 2000: 608; emphasis author).

The present study uses a non-clinical experimental treatment to evaluate whether induction of a transcultural “hero’s journey” schematic for personal life story narration can foster a sense of meaning in life in NK defectors newly arriving in SK.
LITERATURE REVIEW

McAdams’ narrative study of lives (2006b) and Linde’s narrative induction (2000) represent respectively two of the most prominent schools historically engaged in the study of life story narration: narrativism, which, drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, brought the concept of narrative identity to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s (Klepper, 2013: 1) and continues with McAdams’ work today; and symbolic interactionism, which, viewing personal identity and life story development as a product of social processes (Linde, 2000: 629), roots Linde’s work in the writings of Mead, Goffman, and Labov.

Back of McAdams’ approach is the work of Ricoeur and the narrativists, which arose in the wake of Lyotard’s announcement in *The Postmodern Condition* of the death of the metanarrative (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). In contrast to the idea of narrative as a fixed, closed noun, Ricoeur used narrative as an adjective to connote the provisional, process-oriented nature of identity creation and maintenance (Klepper, 2013: 1-2). The “self” became for Ricoeur and the narrativists the “figured self” (Ricoeur, 1991: 90), with “the question of identity…deliberately posed as the outcome of narration” (Ricoeur, 1991: 77) and narrative identity as a “constant, ultimately open-ended performance” (Büchel, 2013: 141). McAdams would develop this into a three-tiered theory of personality in which dispositional traits and characteristic adaptations are integrated into personal identity through life stories which are always developing (McAdams, 2006a) and which can act as a means of healing the storyteller (McAdams, 2006a: 392) through individual meaning-making which personalizes or even replaces “large truths” (McAdams, 2006a: 471).

The narrativist perspective of Ricoeur and McAdams is well reflected in *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*, the novel written by Dinaw Mengestu, who immigrated
to the United States during a time of great upheaval in Ethiopia. “Where is the grand narrative in my life?” cries Mengestu’s protagonist Sepha Stephanos, exiled from his country following the murder of his father by revolutionary soldiers. “The one I could spread out and read for signs and clues as to what to expect next. It seems to have run out, if such a thing is possible” (Mengestu, 2008: 147). His healing comes not from a new “large truth” bringing certainty and direction but from his ongoing provisional construction and reconstruction of his own life story as a means of making sense of his beliefs, desires, and displacement.

In the same way there is no “grand narrative” in McAdams’ theory of personality, but there is healing through the integrating performance of life story narrative. McAdams Josselson, and Lieblich (2006: 5) cite Erikson in regarding identity as “an integrative function in human lives,” with life story narration as the ongoing process by which traits and adaptations are woven and re-woven together with experience to create narrative identity. That narrative identity is provisional for McAdams does not mean that it is not progressive, as can be seen in the McAdams’ positive interest in Eriksonian life stages, particularly generativity. Likewise, though there are no grand narratives in McAdams, there are detectable patterns of meaning-making. These patterns make it possible to postulate correlations between traits, adaptations, and life story narrations. For example, McAdams Diamond, St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) contend that individuals scoring high in generativity measurements can be shown to narrate personal life stories according to a pattern that McAdams et al. call a “commitment story”:

The highly generative adults were more likely to reconstruct the past and anticipate the future as variations on a prototypical commitment story in which the protagonist (a) enjoys an early family blessing or advantage; (b) is sensitized to others’ suffering at an early age; (c) is guided by a clear and compelling personal ideology that remains stable over time; (d) transforms or redeems bad
scenes into good outcomes; and (e) sets goals for the future to benefit society (McAdams et al., 1997: 678).

In contrast, in symbolic interactionism and its theoretical antecedents narrative identity is a function of social systems. George Herbert Mead wrote, “A self can arise only where there is a social process within which this self has had its initiation. It arises within that process” (Mead, 1936: 385). Narrative identity takes shape “within forms supplied by historically and culturally contingent biography generators” (Klepper, 2013: 17). Ricoeur described such cultural contingencies as being “caught up, entangled in histories” (Ricoeur, 1992: 161). But symbolic interactionism sees cultural contingencies not as entanglement but as the only womb in which narrative identity may be born. Thus, symbolic interactionism speaks not of narrative identity but rather of “a narrative identity system” (Eakin, 2008: 24).

In Linde’s words, one does not so much acquire a story as one is acquired by it, via social processes of narrative development that occur as much outside of the individual as within (Linde, 2000: 629). Or as Wertsch, paraphrasing Mikhail Bakhtin, says, “narratives are always half someone else's” (2008: 122).

This is not to posit a process that is half social and half personal; as Klepper notes, “identity protocols are indeed never of one’s choosing; they originate in social institutions” (Klepper, 2013: 19). Those protocols define what Bartlett called “a persistent framework into which all detailed recall must fit, and it very powerfully influences both the manner and the matter of recall” (Bartlett, 1995: 296). That influence, however, is typically unnoticed. In Eakin’s words, “[A]fter years of practice, we operate on automatic pilot; we know the identity protocols by heart” (Eakin, 2008: 23).
When individuals move from one social institution to another, especially when the move is occasioned by significant social disruption as in the case of Mengestu’s Stephanos or North Koreans entering South Korea, the narrative framework and identity protocols shift dramatically and quickly, and personal identity is wrenched out of auto-pilot. In the words of Frankl, an “existential vacuum” is created in which individuals struggle with “a feeling of meaninglessness” (Frankl, 1963: 143). Ricoeur described this as a narrative identity failure via a loss of self-constancy (Ricoeur, 1992: 65).

But in symbolic interactionism and its theoretical antecedents, there is not only a vacuum or a loss but also the wholesale imposition of a new and often seemingly inaccessible or incomprehensible framework, complete with its own biography generators and narrative identity systems with which the individual must reckon (or in Goffman’s terms, re-align; Goffman, 1972: 542-543) in the ongoing process of identity construction. Bartlett contended that it was possible to “speak of every human cognitive reaction—perceiving, imagining, remembering, thinking, and reasoning—as an effort after meaning” (Bartlett, 1995: 44; emphasis author). Into each new framework an individual brings “tendencies” or “schemes” that “are utilized so as to make reaction the ‘easiest’, or the least disagreeable, or the quickest and least obstructed that is at the time possible” (Bartlett, 1995: 44).

One form of reckoning/re-alignment which may also be understood as a kind of scheme acquisition is what Linde calls narrative induction, “the process by which people come to take on an existing set of stories as their own story” (Linde, 2000: 608; emphasis author). Phrased bilaterally, narrative induction is “one central means by which institutions acquire new members, and new members acquire a new identity” (Linde, 2000: 608). The process is intentional, social, and narrative:
“Non-participant narratives (narratives told by speakers not present at the events narrated) are used to reproduce collective memory and induct new participants into this memory. The process has three parts: how a person comes to take on someone else’s story as centrally relevant to their own; how a person comes to tell their own story in a way shaped by the stories of others, and how a person’s story may come to be told and heard by others within an institution as an instance of a normative pattern” (Linde, 2000: 608).

Identity in narrative induction is acquired, not negotiated, with work required on the part of the institution “to make one person’s story everyone’s story—relevant to everyone and available to everyone as a real model” (Linde, 2000: 613). Linde notes that the process is by design not ethically neutral, comprehending everything from religious proselytism to state propaganda, but she contends that narrative induction, in greater or lesser degrees of intentionality, is endemic to all systems of socialization (Linde, 2000: 629).

Linde’s paradigmatic study is a three year ethnography of an insurance company (Linde, 2000). The study is descriptive rather than experimental, and to date few attempts have been made to operationalize the model for testing. The theory behind the actual transmission of collective memory—and even whether it is accurate to describe memory as being collectively transmitted at all—has been in question since Halbwachs’ initial identification and description (Werstch, 2008). Linde does not address these aspects of the discussion, concentrating instead on practical description of the media, means, and content of narrative induction. Werstch, addressing the overall phenomenon of collective memory rather than narrative induction particularly, draws on Propp’s (1968: 20) notion of “recurrent constants” in Russian folk tales and Bartlett’s (1995: 44) “schemalike knowledge structures”, in order to propose that transmission of collective memory occurs via “schematic narrative templates” which “do not deal with just one concrete episode from the past. Instead, each takes the form of a generalized schema that is in evidence when talking about any one of
several episodes” (Werstch, 2008: 123). This terminology, though not found in Linde’s work, is no imposition upon it and provides a useful nomenclature for the purposes of this study, as well as a more precise description of what is actually being induced in a narrative induction.

Symbolic interactionism, particularly via Linde’s concept of narrative induction, provides a helpful theoretical framework for thinking about the dramatic dislocation and re-socialization experienced by North Korean defectors. The cradle-to-grave intentionality with which North Korea utilizes paradigmatic stories to orient constituents to history, values, and ethics it considers essential to institutional life and success may be one of its most defining characteristic as a state (Kim, 2010). Kim and Kim (2005) contend that the stories from public biographies of NK founder Kim Il-Sung serve as the normative ethical framework into which NK residents are thoroughly inducted and re-aligned at each life stage, through compulsory training programs delivered through schools, factories, Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il research centers, and community meetings. Such stories tell not only about the Kim family but also constitute the normative schematic for the personal life story narration of all NKs (Kim, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2005). As one NK defector interviewee has said, “There is room for only one story in North Korea” (Foley et al., 2012).

NK refugees entering SK encounter new national stories and myths as well as schematics for the narration of personal experience which are often contradictory to the ones they learned in NK (Hwang, 2014; Mostow, 2003: 644-647). Though these SK schematics are dramatically different, both NK and SK narrative schematics evince disdain for and distrust of NK defectors. In NK schematics, defectors are betrayers of the state (Demick, 2010). In SK schematics there is suspicion that defectors have betrayed their families (Jeon, 2000: 366), the cardinal sin of Confucianism and Korea’s communitarian orientation. In
addition to narrative schematics of disdain and distrust there are also SK schematics regarding NK defectors as victims or objects of pity (Lurie, 2014). Few (if any) narrative schematics in NK or SK present NK defectors in a positive light.

In Foley et al. (2012), qualitative research with 30 NK defectors yielded the grounded theory that induction of even modest narrative prompts from outside defectors’ operative narrative schematic may aid in the narration and recall of happy memories previously omitted from defectors’ life story narration. NK defectors were asked to narrate through an imaginary photo album containing all of their happy memories from the past, present, and future. In 19 of the 30 interviews, respondents initially insisted either that there were no happy memory “photos” in their album at all or that they had no happy memories in particular chapters of it. They offered plausible life story schematics consistent with this premise—e.g., lives fraught with tragedy—but when invited to reconsider the absence of happy memory photos through a simple interjection, typically something like, “Yes, but is it possible that you also had some small happy memory during this period?” most interviewees went on to narrate one, and then a stream, of happy memory “photos” which, in the majority of cases, prompted them to re-evaluate the overall valence of their narrative, i.e. a “happy” life instead of a “sad” one. Respondents frequently expressed surprise at the close of the interview at the number, type, and depth of happy memories they were able to recall with little prompting. This raises the possibility that NK defectors’ “efforts after meaning” may be positively impacted by the induction of life narrative schematics that assist them in re-aligning their prior experiences to the narrative identity systems and social frameworks they experience outside of NK.
METHODS

The present study uses an experimental treatment to consider how narrative life story induction of one positive and transcultural narrative schematic, Joseph Campbell’s (2008) hero’s journey, impacts meaning of life measurements of NK defectors entering SK. Campbell, a mythologist, contended that hero stories in nearly every culture share a discernable common narrative schematic which could be summarized quite simply:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man (Campbell, 2008: 23).

Campbell detailed a progression of stages protagonists typically navigate on their way to becoming heroes: they begin in the ordinary world; they receive a call to adventure; they refuse the call; they meet the mentor who equips them to accept the call; they cross the first threshold and begin their adventure; they face tests, allies, and enemies; they approach the inmost cave of greatest opposition; they experience an inward ordeal; they receive a reward; they take the road back; they nearly die but experience resurrection; and they return with some “elixir” of value (Vogler, 2007). Campbell contended that not every myth in every culture included every stage but that the stages and their progression were common enough across cultures that a hero’s journey monomyth could be meaningfully discussed (Campbell, 2008: 23).

Following Campbell, therapists, writers, and commentators began to apply the hero’s journey framework to contemporary storytelling and personal life story narration (cf. Chisolm, 2000; Gilligan & Dilts, 2009; Vogler, 2007). It has been utilized as a personal life
narration teaching tool in non-western populations (Chisolm, 2000), among Sino-Koreans (Lee, 1993), and even applied to NK mythology (Alzo, 2011)

The theoretical rationale for selecting Campbell’s hero’s journey for narrative induction of NK defectors consists of five pragmatic considerations. First, the hero’s journey motif is intuitive enough to be able to be taught briefly and grasped easily so that hearers may draw on it with little individualized coaching as a schematic for personal life story narration. Second, the hero’s journey schematic is transcultural. Third, the narrator-as-hero identity stands in positive contrast to the identities of traitor, victim, and object of pity to which contemporary NK defectors are exposed. Fourth, the journey schematic is especially applicable to NK defectors arriving in SK after a journey of thousands of miles. Finally, it identifies a journey that is not yet completed, i.e., the defector has not yet returned home and may actually still be at a relatively early stage of the process. In this way the schematic will not “run out” for NK defectors as Stephanos’ grand narrative did.

In order to receive feedback on the comprehensibility of meaning-in-life-related survey items to NK defectors newly arriving in SK a focus group of 21 adult NK defectors was convened, all students enrolled in training programs at Seoul USA (SUSA), where one of the co-investigators is employed as Chief Executive Officer. SUSA is a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Korea and a 501(c)(3) public benefit nonprofit organization in the United States offering educational programs to NK defectors in SK. The focus group

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5 NK defector as Korean patriot arose briefly as an SK narrative schematic in the post-Korean War years but is rarely encountered today; ICG, 2011: 2.


7 SUSA received no funding of any kind from Hanawon, the South Korean government, Case Western Reserve University, or in relation to or as a result of this study.
participants, all NK defectors aged 30-81 with one or more years of residency in SK, voluntarily completed Lee, Shin, Choi, and Kim’s (2002) 8-factor, 49-question Meaning In Life (MIL) survey and then shared their feedback in a focus group moderated by one of the co-investigators. The MIL consists of Crumbaugh and Maholick’s 1964 Purpose In Life (PIL) survey and Crumbaugh’s (1977) Seeking Of Noetic Goals (SONG) survey, which Lee et al. translated, adapted, and validated for use among South Koreans. Rooted in Frankl’s logotherapy, the survey was selected because, in addition to its prior use among South Koreans, its variety and number of constructs (Awareness of Self-Limitation, Wish/Futuristic Aspiration, Search for Goals, Love Experience, Self-Transcendence, Relation Experience, Self-Contentedness, and Commitment) enables adequately broad construal of the concept of meaning in life in recognition of the reality that little research has been done into how NK defectors understand and make meaning, let alone how to measure it. Minor language adaptations into North Korean dialect were undertaken as according to the process described below and with the consent of Lee et al. (2002).

At the advice of the focus group, for the demographic portion of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate personally identifying items (e.g., age, number of years outside NK and SK, and numbers of family members and friends in NK and SK) by range rather than specific number in order to decrease concerns held especially by newly arriving NK defectors that revealing personal data might be dangerous to family members still in NK, thus depressing defectors’ willingness to participate in the study.

The location for the study was Hanawon, the SK government’s high security residential education facility for newly arriving NK defectors, in Anseong, South Korea. Opened in 1999, Hanawon’s stated mission is “to build trust and confidence of North Korean
refugees, narrow the cultural gap, and motivate them to achieve sustainable livelihoods in a new environment” (DeFrietas et al., 2013: 49). The 420 hour curriculum consists of four tracks: mental and physical health support (49 hours); vocational training and counseling (196 hours); instruction in SK principles of government and economics (124 hours); and resettlement preparations (51 hours). Voluntary field trips, religious activities, and elective classes (in, e.g., English, computers, driving instruction) are also available to residents (DeFrietas et al., 2013: 49). Unstructured free time is also scheduled daily (Lee, 2013).

As a closed campus, entry to the center and interaction with its residents is restricted to authorized officials with appropriate security clearance. Hanawon was selected for the study in order to achieve as controlled an environment as practicable for the study’s experimental framework. A Hanawon official known to one of the co-investigators through professional association agreed to serve as the study administrator inside of Hanawon.

NK defectors proceed through Hanawon in groups, or classes, each month with a typical class consisting of 50 to 100 men and women aged 18 and above; juveniles receive their orientation through a separate on-site school (Lee, 2013). Five sequential monthly classes of Hanawon residents were invited to participate in the study, from late spring through early fall in 2012.

This study utilized an experimental design to contrast pre- and post- treatment scores on a survey administered to control and experimental groups. Both control and experimental groups followed the Hanawon schedule noted above. In addition, experimental groups received an assisted self-study narrative induction treatment of four weekly video segments and related voluntary journaling activities centered on Joseph Campbell’s hero’s journey narrative framework as a free time activity.
Recruitment for the study occurred through packets distributed to residents in one of the regular daily meetings approximately one month after each class’ arrival at Hanawon. Each packet contained a recruitment cover letter and a two-section paper survey. Two versions of the packet, a control group version and an experimental group version, were distributed randomly in equal numbers in each Hanawon class. The two versions were identical except for the specification of additional time and participation requirements in the experimental group version. The recruitment materials stated that consent to participate in the study was to be indicated through the completion and submission of the survey accompanying the recruitment letter.

For participants in the control group, the following procedure was followed: Upon receiving a completed initial survey consisting of the MIL instrument (included in Appendix I) and demographic questionnaire, the Hanawon official numbered it and on a separate control group master tracking list he recorded the survey number alongside the name of the participant submitting it. All surveys were placed in a color-coded envelope, and these were stored in a separate file cabinet from the control group master tracking list in the Hanawon official’s office. At the end of the one week recruitment period for each class, the envelope containing all completed control group initial surveys was sealed by the Hanawon official. After four weeks, the Hanawon official numbered copies of the second survey as according to the control group master tracking list in order to enable the investigators to match responses of the initial survey to those of the second survey by participant without the use of personally identifying data. The second survey repeated the non-demographic section of the initial survey. The Hanawon official then utilized the control group master tracking list to individually and discretely distribute the surveys to each control group participant during
Hanawon’s daily free time period, with instructions to complete and return the survey within one week. When surveys were submitted back to him, he placed them in a second color-coded envelope, sealing the envelope at the end of the one week submission period. This process was repeated for the control group in each of the five classes included in the study.

For participants in the experimental group, the same procedure was utilized, with the following additions. When participants submitted their initial surveys the Hanawon official informed them of a time during the Hanawon free time period when they were to come to a specially-designated room to view a brief (5- to 10-minute long) video segment for each of the subsequent four weeks. In accordance with Hanawon’s general practice, its viewing equipment availability, and the technological limitations of some North Korean refugees unfamiliar with the operation of video equipment, one weekly viewing session was arranged for all of the members of each experimental group to view together.

On the first of the four viewing sessions the Hanawon official distributed a personal journal form to each participant (shown in Appendix B, translated into English from the North Korean dialect version used in the study). The official explained that the forms would not be collected; that the forms contained reflection questions in response to each week’s video segment; that completion of each week’s questions was recommended but not required for participation in the study; that completion of the questions could be done each week at a time and place of the participant’s own convenience; and that participants were neither required nor requested to disclose the contents of their forms to others as part of the study, though they were free to do so if they desired. The official also explained that full attendance at all four weekly viewing sessions was required for participation in the study and that
participants who missed any of the scheduled weekly viewing sessions for any reason would be removed from the study and would not be eligible to attend remaining viewing sessions.

The script for the first of the four DVD segments is included as a sample in Appendix C (translated into English from the North Korean dialect form in which it was presented to residents). The presenter in the video was Dr. Hyun Sook Foley, spouse of one of the co-investigators and President of SUSA. Dr. Foley’s professional capacity involves serving as a global advocate for North Korean defectors and teaching life skills to North Korean defectors in South Korea, which she has done for twelve years. She was selected as presenter for the video segments because of her experience in teaching and interacting with North Korean defectors, her geographical proximity to one of the co-investigators (facilitating script editing and video re-recording), and her ability to speak conversationally in NK. NK and SK dialect vary significantly enough that NK defectors report difficulty in understanding South Koreans, especially early in their acculturation process immediately following their arrival in SK (Kim, 1978; Lee, 1990; Lee, 2013; Voice of America, 2009). NK defectors indicate a general level of suspicion of other NK defectors (Jeon, Yu, Cho, & Eom, 2008; Kim & Lee, 2009), so upon the recommendation of the NK defector study advisory focus group Dr. Foley, recognizable by NK defectors as an SK by national origin yet speaking in the NK dialect, was selected for narration of the video segments. The focus group also pre-tested the video segments and the journal form, in a compressed half-day format. Script and wording changes were made and the videos subsequently re-recorded based upon their comments and recommendations.

Where post-surveys were missing (n=4 for control, n=6 for experimental), the corresponding pre-surveys were eliminated from tabulation.
FINDINGS

The study sample consisted of 62 control group participants and 60 experimental group participants. Demographically, both the control and the experimental groups mirrored the profile of the average NK defector in SK (cf. JoongAng Daily, 2010): median age 26-40 (median age of the NK defector population overall is 32); mostly female (77% in the control group, 95% in the experimental group, and approximately 70% in the NK defector population at large, due to economic factors drawing NK women to China in the first place; Kim, 2013); mostly Protestant Christian (91% in the control group, 96% in the experimental group, and an estimated 90-95% of those entering Hanawon, due to Christian missionaries serving as the most frequent sources of aid along the defection trail; cf. Lee, 2013). As with the NK defector population overall, the median control group and experimental group respondent reported living 3-5 years outside of the Koreas during their defection journey; graduating from high school; being married with children, with neither husband nor children residing in SK; and having immediate family members still in NK.

We examined descriptives in order to detect any insufficient variation in response values on the ordinal scale items (Weller, 2007: 359). No single response value exceeded 50% on any control or experimental group item. Levels of missing data were all within acceptable ranges; where data was missing, we did not impute due to the small sample size (Byrne, 2010: 357; Hair et al., 2010: 53). The only item on which missing data reached notable proportions was among control group respondents, where 8 out of 60 did not indicate how long they had lived in SK. Wording was likely to blame, since respondents may have left the question blank as an indication that they did not yet reside in SK. The question was included primarily to detect unengaged or malicious responses, and so the lack of response
did not materially impact results. We also checked for unengaged or malicious responses by examining standard deviation on all ordinal scale items. Minimum standard deviation was .50 with most well above, so no respondent records were flagged as problematic (Neafsey & Lang, 2011: 3). No continuous variables were utilized, so there was no need to check for outliers.

We tested all variables for kurtosis, making note of items with kurtosis values < -1 or > 1 or more than 3.3 times the standard error (Byrne, 2010: 103-105; Hair et al., 2010, 71-72). In the control group pre-treatment survey, kurtosis was evident in three of the six items in the Wish/Future Aspiration construct, as well as in one of the six items in the Search for Goals construct and one of the six items in the Self-Transcendence construct. In the post-treatment control survey, kurtosis was noted in two of the Wish/Future Aspiration items and one of the Love Experience items. In the experimental group, kurtosis was evident in one of the six items in the Wish/Future Aspiration construct in both pre- and post-treatment, and in the post-treatment on one of the six items in Love Experience and one of the six items in Relation Experience. No changes were made due to the small sample size.

We did an ANOVA to show that the pre-treatment results were different from the post treatment results, and that the differences between pre- and post- for the control group were different than for the experimental group.

Table 1 shows the average difference in each of the eight outcome variables (AL=Awareness of Self-Limitation; W=Wish/Future Aspiration; SG=Search for Goals; LE=Love Experience; ST=Self-Transcendence; RE=Relation Experience; SC=Self-Contentedness; C=Commitment) before and after treatment for the control and experimental groups (_B = “before”; _A = “after”). For the control group, means decreased for all
responses except AL. For the experimental group, means increased for all responses. A clear systematic difference was evident between outcome variables for control and experimental groups: The experimental group responded more positively after the narrative induction treatment, whereas the control group responded more negatively on the post-survey than to the same pre-survey they had taken four weeks earlier.

Table 2 shows the ANOVA, with the SIG column indicating the p-value for the significance of the difference between control and experimental groups in terms of the change observed before and after treatment. Significance of difference was observed in three outcome variables: Self-Contentedness, Search for Goals, and Self-Transcendence.
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<td>RE_A</td>
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<td>3.3039</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_B</td>
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<td>3.0742</td>
<td>0.0033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC_A</td>
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<td>SG_B</td>
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<td>ST_B</td>
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<td>W_B</td>
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<td>Valid N (listwise)</td>
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TABLE 2
ANOVA

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<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
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<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
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<tr>
<td>AL_DIFF</td>
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<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>12.815</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>Between Groups</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.098</td>
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<tr>
<td>RE_DIFF</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.098</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.098</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>7.471</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>.062</td>
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<td>121</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.025</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC_DIFF</td>
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<td>.245</td>
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<td>.245</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>7.999</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.096</td>
<td>121</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.245</td>
<td>5.467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SG_DIFF</td>
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<td>2.077</td>
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<td>2.077</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
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<td>2.077</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST_DIFF</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>1.215</td>
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<td>1.215</td>
<td>9.778</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>14.911</td>
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<td>16.126</td>
<td>121</td>
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</table>

DISCUSSION

Initially the results surprised us. We were pleased to see the narrative induction treatment making a statistically significant difference in multiple outcome variables, but we had anticipated that it would have accomplished this by advancing outcomes rather than by
staving off declines. We asked: Why would there be deterioration of existing “efforts after meaning” in the control group during their residency at Hanawon?

We convened a focus group of twelve NK defectors in September 2014 to receive their feedback about the meaning deterioration phenomenon we had detected. The focus group participants, eleven women and one man, aged 60 to 75 and residents of SK for at least one year, were students enrolled at one of SUSA’s training programs for NK defectors who had not participated in prior focus groups regarding this research. In the focus group session, moderated by one of the co-investigators, the research findings were presented simply as “research done by a researcher” in order to avoid response bias. Participants were asked to evaluate the validity of the research in light of their own experience.

Ten of the participants concurred that the findings closely matched their own experience. Ms. Lee’s response was typical:

I also felt myself depressed more when I left Hanawon. When I arrived there I felt happy. I just arrived in SK after difficult days in NK. But as I learned more and more about SK society, and the things I have to do in SK, I didn’t have any idea what should I start. Especially I came here with my children when they were teenagers, and I had to grow them and get them into university, but I didn’t know what to do. So I felt more depressed than when I was in NK. I felt quite old. Not a grandma, but I felt old. And SK has a totally different culture than NK. So I felt myself to be like someone who was blind (Foley, 2014).

Mr. Kim described the deterioration phenomenon at Hanawon as a kind of coming back down to reality:

When I entered into Hanawon, I had a big dream. It was like coming from jail, so my dream was really big. Then as I learned about SK society for three months, as I got job training and language [training], my big dream decreased a lot (Foley, 2014).

Perhaps most poignantly, Ms. Kim (no relation to Mr. Kim above) spoke of her time at Hanawon as an especially meaning-deflating experience:
I came to SK in my middle age. When I arrived first, I was really really happy, and I only had only experienced NK and China. I just experienced SK a little bit, and it seemed like heaven. Then the more I learned about SK, the more I began to have worries. Especially about my children, and my old age. I gathered my children together and said, “Don’t think you have a parent. I can’t do anything for you.” After I left Hanawon, I got more and more depressed. Especially when I heard that some people bought a house for their children, my heart was broken (Foley, 2014).

Through the insights of the focus group we came to see that we had incorrectly assumed that NKS entering Hanawon were despondent and worried. Our hope had been that the narrative intervention might counteract this forecasted despondency and anxiety. But the focus group participants helped us to see that NK defectors entering Hanawon are generally optimistic and hopeful about the future, as confirmed by the pre-test scores for both the control and experimental groups in the study. The focus group gave us insight as to why: After escaping from North Korea and traveling as fugitives for 3,000 miles across China before crossing illegally across the border again into a third country like Thailand or Cambodia, these NK defectors had at last arrived—successfully—at their intended destination. Their “big dreams” appeared to be on the verge of coming true. But after some time at Hanawon—in which they begin to learn about the cost of living in SK, the limited work options available to NK defectors, and the suspicion (and sometimes disdain and prejudice and pity) of SKs toward them, their big dreams become deferred. As Langston Hughes (1990) asks in his own poetic research question:
What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

It is not irresponsible to posit a line that extends, however jagged or gradual, from the downward trend of the control group, to Ms. Kim gathering her children together to announce to them that they should henceforth regard themselves as motherless, to the range of tragic outcomes NK defectors experience in SK, including the 16.3 percent rate of death due to suicide.

Two things are especially noteworthy here. First, this study suggests that resources to assist NK defectors in making the transition to SK can be sought not only in the common refugee policy solutions of improved job training, more substantial and comprehensive welfare packages, and better acculturation and assimilation processes, but also in inducting NK defectors into narrative schematics that assist them in finding or at least sustaining their sense of meaning-in-life in SK. No claims can be made on the basis of this study that privilege the hero’s journey in comparison to other narrative schematics, though it is worth noting that as part of SK security protocols, all NK defectors are required to write out their
life stories in detail and be questioned about them prior to their formal admission to Hanawon (Lee, 2013). This would suggest that the positive effects observed here are not simply attributable to the act of journaling, nor could they be achieved by life story narration according to defectors’ pre-existing narrative schematics and identity protocols. For the experimental group, narrative induction into this particular narrative schematic, the hero’s journey, and appropriating this particular identity protocol, the hero on a quest, appear to have assisted them in retaining their sense of meaning-in-life as they crossed over the discontinuous boundary between two largely incompatible and even antagonistic narrative frameworks with diametrically opposite identity protocols for life story narration. In addition, the induction acted as a not insignificant aid in increasing their sense of meaning-in-life in the areas of self-contentment (SC), goal searching (SG), and transcending self (ST). This occurred not as an alternative to more traditional forms of aid but in addition to it, perhaps enabling NK defectors to process the range of other new identity protocols they had no choice but to assume and maintain as new citizens of SK: laborers, bank account holders, renters, and even mothers.

Second, this study gives us new resources for answering the questions asked at the outset of this study: Why do NK defectors risk their lives to flee from their country of birth, travel thousands of miles, enter a comparatively supportive country, and, in significant numbers, commit suicide or attempt to go back? The answer may have much to do with narrative schematics. As the interviews of NK defectors by Foley et al. (2012) demonstrate, even without a narrative induction NK defectors narrate their life stories as journeys. Journeying is an obvious organizing principle for the life story of someone who has fled, traveled, and, ostensibly, arrived at a desired destination. Tragically however, in the absence
of induction into a narrative schematic that legitimizes setbacks, tolerates inadequacies, predicts betrayals, charts out that the greatest challenges are yet ahead, and yet assures the inductee that the heroic (and ultimately successful) journey often looks anything but while in process, then like Sepha Stephanos there is little left for them to do but to cry out, “Where is the grand narrative in my life?” The story seems to have run out, and the journey is often experienced by them as a failure, even a fool’s errand. Arriving in SK with big dreams, they assess that they do not have the resources to achieve their goal. Unlike Stephanos, however, they often do not have the cultural luxury of ongoing provisional construction and reconstruction of their life stories in order to make sense of their beliefs, desires, and displacement. That is because, as the interviews of Foley et al. (2012) show, they have undertaken the extraordinary feat of defection not in search of a better life or as an escape from tyranny or in the pursuit of happiness but in order to care for present and future generations. They are given resources of money, training, education, and housing, but in the absence of a narrative schematic that finds something heroic in enduring setbacks, inadequacies, betrayals, and a long road yet ahead, they fear that the things spoken of them in the narrative schematics and identity protocols that they do know from both North and South, may indeed be permanently, and fatally, true.

**CONCLUSION**

“Must we all be heroes?” asks Bayerl (2009) in her critical thesis on alternatives to the hero’s journey in young adult fiction. The results of this experimental study would indicate that at least at key points in the journey of the NK defector, the answer may be yes, or at least that it makes a significant difference for them to be able to be someone meaningful within a narrative schematic that accentuates their “effort after meaning.” To be
that at crucial moments may in some way open them up to resources for maintaining a sense of meaning as they journey across noncontiguous and contradictory social frameworks and incompatible identity protocols. A sense of the heroic nature of their journey can help them to sustain or even advance their experiences of self-contentment, goal orientation, and self-transcendence as they wonder and continually re-assess what stage of the journey they think they are in and whether they are actually heroes at all.

The results of the present study should thus be neither overstated nor understated. The margin of improvement in outcome variables, though significant, is comparatively slim, perhaps not the difference between subsequent life and death for the experimental group participants in this study. We can only hope. Further experimental research is needed in the comparative evaluation of different narrative frames and of administration and coaching modalities (e.g., facilitated small group, self-study, one-on-one training), as well as longitudinal studies that evaluate the durability of the effects of narrative induction observed here.

This kind of experimental research is clearly challenging to conduct on NK defectors, both in terms of maintaining a control environment for research amidst the reality that these are indeed dislocated, traumatized people undergoing a jarring psychological and physical readjustment, and also in terms of the challenge of isolating modest effects longitudinally given the reality that these are people whose relocation is statistically as fraught with dangers as their initial escape. Still, the further study is indicated because if comparatively little experimental work has been done on measuring the impact of narrative induction overall, even less has been done on measuring the impact of the narrative induction of NK defectors. Kim (2010) and Kim and Kim (2005) detail the degree to which
NKs in North Korea are narratively inducted across their life span; it is difficult to imagine that successful transition of NK defectors from NK to SK can happen without more attention being given to this aspect of their hero’s journey.
Instructions: Here are some statements about meaning in our lives. We all think about meaning differently. Please select the option that best represents your way of thinking about the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I think I have more virtues than drawbacks.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am not satisfied with what I am now.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am not so good at describing what I think and feel.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am needed by my family or others.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I do not like my personality.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am generally healthy.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am confident in front of others.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I am likely to be popular among people in my age group.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I think I can achieve well the tasks that are given to me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I am satisfied being born with the gender I have.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. The world is unfair to me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. My life has been a sequence of suffering.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. My existence is pitiful and powerless.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I think I would rather die than live with suffering.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. There is hope because there is always tomorrow.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. A lot of good things will happen in the future.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Life is self-made.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My basic attitude toward life is that we’re all going to die, anyway.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. I think suffering always has meaning.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I love the family who are around me now.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I have people with whom I can share my thoughts.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. My family loves me.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. I have a lot of happy memories.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I gain happiness from music or nature.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I am inclined to like people.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. I have a hobby I like to do.</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
29. This world has a lot of things that please me.  
30. I believe in the power of love.  
31. There are a lot of things that make my life difficult.  
32. I have been faithful to my work all the time.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>33. I think what I do now is important.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I have a goal in my life.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35. I feel what I am doing now is meaningful.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. I feel what I am doing now is helpful to the world (i.e., my family and society).</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37. I am the kind of person who looks for what I should do.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38. I am trying to achieve a goal in my life.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39. I am the kind of person who tries hard at any work I am given.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. I want to get out of my current situation as soon as possible.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. I am presently doing what I always wanted to do.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42. I regret my past life</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43. I know how to be thankful for even small things.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Every day is new to me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. I am kind of enjoying my life.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. I feel so thankful that I am alive.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47. In a normal day I am likely to laugh well.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48. I can help those who are poorer than me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49. Even if I die tomorrow, I think my life has been meaningful.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Title: Your “Hero’s Journey” Story

Instructions: Please follow the directions on the video to complete this form.

1. The first step of the journey is called the ordinary world. This is simply the world you grew up in—your home—what “normal” life was like before you entered the second step of your journey, which is called. Write in the space below about your ordinary world. [1/2 page provided]

2. The call to adventure. Somewhere, somehow, from someone or some thing or some series of events, you sense a call away from your ordinary world to somewhere new. Write in the space below about your call to adventure. [1/2 page provided]

3. The third step is called the refusal of the call. We may initially refuse to leave our ordinary world, or, if we do leave, we decide it was a mistake and instead turn back, or feel tempted to. Write in the space below about your refusal of the call. [1/2 page provided]

4. The fourth step is called meeting the mentor. Someone is put in our path who gives us guidance on how to go forward in the journey. Write in the space below about your meeting your mentor. [1/2 page provided]

5. The fifth step is called crossing the first threshold. “Threshold” is another word for the entrance to a house. In the case of the hero’s journey crossing the threshold doesn’t literally mean entering a house. It means the moment when we finally take the step where we know there can be no turning back. We have left the ordinary world behind and our adventure has begun. Write in the space below about your crossing the threshold. [1/2 page provided]

6. The sixth step is called tests, allies, and enemies. That means that along the way we will face tests that challenge us, allies who help us, and enemies who try to stop us. Write in the space below about your tests, allies, and enemies. [1/2 page provided]

7. The seventh step is called approach to the inmost cave. Once again, this isn’t usually a literal cave. It’s just another way of saying that this is the point in the hero’s journey where we face our biggest test. We have to fight a serious battle. It looks like we may not survive. Write in the space below about your approach to the inmost cave. [1/2 page provided]

8. The ordeal. The ordeal is the battle that we fight inside our own mind. The inmost cave is the external battle, and the ordeal is the inner battle. We may question ourselves. We may question everything we believe. We may lose our faith. We may lose hope. That is what the ordeal is all about. Write in the space below about your ordeal. [1/2 page provided]

9. The ninth step is called the reward. When we complete the internal and external battles of the two previous steps, we receive a reward. This is not always something material or financial, like a trophy or a prize or some money. Most of the time it comes in the form of new insight—about ourselves, or the world, or our purpose or calling. Write in the space below about your reward. [1/2 page provided]

10. The tenth step is called the road back. Having journeyed away from the ordinary world, we now turn in that direction once again, seeking to bring back the reward we have received. Write in the space below about your road back. [1/2 page provided]
11. The eleventh step is called the resurrection. Here we face another challenge—usually a completely unexpected challenge—that turns out to be the hardest challenge of all. It can be so great a challenge that it nearly kills us. This step is called the resurrection because ultimately by using the rewards you have received along your journey, you can survive. It will be almost like being resurrected from the dead. Write in the space below about your resurrection. [1/2 page provided]

12. The twelfth and final step is called return with the elixir. “Elixir” is a word that means a healing medicine. Once again, in real life the elixir is not usually a literal medicine. Instead, it is something that you learned along the journey that you can take back to the ordinary world to bring healing to others. Write in the space below about your return with the elixir. [1/2 page provided]
The estimated population of North Korea is between 20 and 25 million, but in many ways North Korea could be described as “the country of one story”—the story of Kim Il Sung.

As you grew up, you had to memorize more than one hundred stories about Kim Il Sung’s life. You had to memorize all of the dates and all of the events of his life. You had to give speeches about his life. Whenever you did something wrong—like not studying well—you were made to self-criticize and remind yourself that Kim Il Sung always studied well and that we have to study well to prepare to be revolutionaries for Kim Il Sung. So Kim Il Sung is the subject of every story, and Kim Il Sung is the hero of every story.

Now you have left North Korea, and you have entered a world where there are millions and millions of stories. In North Korea, Kim Il Sung’s story is the most important, but here in South Korea your story is considered just as important as everyone else’s!

But only you can tell your story. No one else can tell it for you. And it is very important for you to tell it, because if you don’t tell it, then you will end up living in someone else’s story, just like in North Korea, where everyone lives inside the story of Kim Il Sung.

Storytelling isn’t something that we know how to do automatically. We have to learn how to tell our stories. If we don’t practice, we will come to tell stories about ourselves that lead to unhappy endings. We call these “victim” stories. A “victim” story is when you tell a story about all the pain and suffering you have experienced. When you have been hurt in life, it is very natural to want to tell a victim story, because you want everyone to know how badly you have been hurt.

But if you tell your life story as a victim story, it is not really your story. Other people (the people who hurt you) become the main characters, and it is really a story about them, not about you. That kind of story will always lead to an unhappy ending. When you tell a victim story, other people will thinking, “This is a weak person. I can take advantage of them also.”

There is another story about yourself that you can learn to tell: a hero story. You may not think of yourself as a hero. In North Korea there can only be one hero: Kim Il Sung. But in the world outside of North Korea, in almost every other country and culture and religion, anyone who faces difficulty in their lives and overcomes it is a hero. I myself am a Christian, and Christians believe that God designed the world so that while each of us may face great difficulties in the world, he will also give us the strength and the tools and the mentors and the allies to overcome those difficulties. But you don’t have to be a Christian to be on a hero’s journey. Buddha went on a hero’s journey, too.

Even though each person’s story is unique, each person’s story has common characteristics. Each person’s story follows the same outline. It does not matter if a person comes from North Korea or South Korea or even North America and South America; and it does not matter what religion you study. You will find out that each person has a “hero’s journey” to take. In other words, each one of our lives is actually a “hero’s journey.” Each one of us will be called out of our ordinary world, face difficulties, meet allies, mentors, and enemies, enter dangerous places, receive rewards, and ultimately be called to share what we have learned with others from the ordinary world where we grew up.

In North Korea, only Kim Il Sung’s “hero’s journey” story is told. And here in South Korea no one will help you learn how to tell your hero’s journey story because all the people here will be too busy living their own stories. So for the next four weeks I would like to help you learn to tell your “hero’s journey” so that you will not lose your way and end up living someone else’s story.

My name is Mrs. Foley, and over the next four weeks I will be telling you my “hero’s journey” story as a way of helping you to identify and learn to tell your own “hero’s journey” story. I am the president of an organization called Seoul USA, which helps people around the world—and particularly North Koreans—learn the story of Jesus. Jesus went on a “hero’s journey,” and in my life I learned a lot about my hero’s journey by studying his. But today, instead of talking to you about Jesus
or about me, I want to talk to you about the twelve steps of the “hero’s journey.” Every person who has ever lived or will live is called to go on these twelve steps, too—including you.

Today—and for the next three weeks—I am going to help you learn to identify and tell your own “hero’s journey.” My hope is that you can see how you are already in the middle of your own hero’s journey, and by coming to see this, you can better understand how everything you’ve gone through and everything you will go through has a purpose.

You may not see yourself as a hero, and right now the painful parts of your story may be the only ones you can remember. But let me tell you what a man named Victor Frankl once said. Victor Frankl was a Jewish man who survived life in a concentration camp under the Nazis during World War II. He went on to become one of the most famous authors and psychiatrists in the world. He said, “Those who have a ‘why’ to live, can bear with almost any ‘how.’” What Victor Frankl meant was that no matter how much pain we go through, we can survive it if we have a reason to live.

And that is the amazing secret about the “hero’s journey”: It turns out that those who experience the most pain and suffering are those who go on to do the greatest things and have the best lives—if they learn to see, understand, and tell their own “hero’s journey” story. If they only learn to tell a “victim story,” then they will always be sad. So that is why I am hoping you will let me share with you how to see, understand, and tell your own “hero’s journey” story.

Over the next three weeks I am going to describe for you the twelve steps of the “hero’s journey” that each person goes through in their life. I will illustrate each step for you using my own life story—my own “hero’s journey”—so that you can see how it is done. Then I will ask you to take a few minutes to briefly write out the corresponding steps in your own “hero’s journey.” It will not be hard to do this—you will not be writing a book! In fact, it is important to keep your story short so that you can remember it and tell it easily to others. One paragraph per step is the right length, as you’ll see in the example of my story that I will give you in each step. In fact, we’ll write the first step together today, at the end of this video, and you will see how easy it is.

But before we write anything, let me walk you through the “hero’s journey” step by step, describing each of the twelve steps of the journey so that you can begin to think about how they fit your own life.

• The first step of the journey is called the ordinary world. This is simply the world you grew up in—your home—what “normal” life was like before you entered the second step of your journey, which is called.

• The call to adventure. Somewhere, somehow, from someone or some thing or some series of events, you sense a call away from your ordinary world to somewhere new.

• The third step is called the refusal of the call. We may initially refuse to leave our ordinary world, or, if we do leave, we decide it was a mistake and instead turn back, or feel tempted to.

• The fourth step is called meeting the mentor. Someone is put in our path who gives us guidance on how to go forward in the journey.

• The fifth step is called crossing the first threshold. “Threshold” is another word for the entrance to a house. In the case of the hero’s journey crossing the threshold doesn’t literally mean entering a house. It means the moment when we finally take the step where we know there can be no turning back. We have left the ordinary world behind and our adventure has begun.

• The sixth step is called tests, allies, and enemies. That means that along the way we will face tests that challenge us, allies who help us, and enemies who try to stop us.

• The seventh step is called approach to the inmost cave. Once again, this isn’t usually a literal cave. It’s just another way of saying that this is the point in the hero’s journey where we face our biggest test. We have to fight a serious battle. It looks like we may not survive. All of this leads to the eighth step, which is called

• The ordeal. The ordeal is the battle that we fight inside our own mind. The inmost cave is the external battle, and the ordeal is the inner battle. We may question ourselves. We may question everything we believe. We may lost our faith. We may lose hope. That is what the ordeal is all about.
The ninth step is called the reward. When we complete the internal and external battles of the two previous steps, we receive a reward. This is not always something material or financial, like a trophy or a prize or some money. Most of the time it comes in the form of new insight—about ourselves, or the world, or our purpose or calling.

The tenth step is called the road back. Having journeyed away from the ordinary world, we now turn in that direction once again, seeking to bring back the reward we have received. This step may not have happened for you yet, but it is important to know that it is ahead on your journey, and you can begin to think about what that step will be like when it happens.

The eleventh step is called the resurrection. Here we face another challenge—usually a completely unexpected challenge—that turns out to be the hardest challenge of all. It can be so great a challenge that it nearly kills us. Sometimes North Koreans coming to South Korea think, “Oh, my challenges are over,” and then when they enter South Korea they are surprised to face some kind of a greater challenge than they have ever faced before, and it is totally unexpected for them. Sadly, this is why some North Koreans commit suicide in South Korea. That’s why it is important to anticipate this challenge and also to remember that this step is called the resurrection because ultimately by using the rewards you have received along your journey, you can survive. It will be almost like being resurrected from the dead.

The twelfth and final step is called return with the elixir. “Elixir” is a word that means a healing medicine. Once again, in real life the elixir is not usually a literal medicine. Instead, it is something that you learned along the journey that you can take back to the ordinary world to bring healing to others. Later on I’ll share with you the “elixir” I received, and how I am seeking to use it even to bring healing to you through this video training series.

So these are the twelve steps of the hero’s journey. As I shared them, you may have thought, “Yes, I have completed all twelve steps.” Wonderful! I will help you write them out so that you can easily tell your story to others, and so you can easily remember it and recall it to give you strength whenever you face difficult times in the future. Or as I shared the steps, you may have thought, “I have completed some of these steps, but not all.” That is wonderful, too! You have begun the journey. Your story is in progress. By understanding your “hero’s journey” story and knowing the steps that are ahead, you can be well prepared for the future. You can anticipate the challenges you will face and have hope and confidence knowing that every step you take brings you closer to the successful completion of your own unique “hero’s journey.”

Please know that everything you write will be yours to keep. No one else will ever see it except for you, unless you choose to share it. At the end of our time together I’ll be inviting anyone who wants to to share their “hero’s journey” writings with me personally. But this will only be if you want to. The main purpose is for you to know your story, not me. So you can write freely, without any worry that anything you write will be read by others.

I’ve provided your paper to write on, and you’ll notice that there’s not a lot of space in each section for you to write. That’s on purpose! For this exercise you should write a summary of each step, not your whole life story. It will be very important for you once you enter South Korea for you to be able to know your story in summary form and to be able to share it with others that way. It will be rare for anyone to be able to listen to you tell your whole story, but everyone you meet will want to know something about you. If you can learn to summarize your story well, you will be able to help others know the important journey you are on. They will be able to see that you are not just a defector or an economic migrant or a new settler. You are a hero.

So with all these thoughts in mind, let’s begin to write the summary of our “hero’s journey” story. Don’t feel pressure to be a great writer. You are not writing a novel. You are just learning to tell your story. And step one is easy. Do you remember it?

• The first step of the journey is called the ordinary world. This is simply the world you grew up in—your home—what “normal” life was like before you entered the second step of your journey, which is called.

Let me tell you my story first as an example, and then you can write your own.
1. Ordinary World

In my story, the “ordinary world” is that I was born from rich family in South Korea and grew up well until college.

I was born in South Korea as the youngest of seven daughters. My parents had already had six daughters as a result of a desperate desire to have a boy. “Seventh daughter” meant “seventh failure.” My mother said that she wanted to try putting me back into her stomach in an effort to have me come out male. Instead, she just put me by the window in the coldest part of the room as a sign of my expendability.

The issue really was life-or-death for my mother: Failure to bear a male heir meant expulsion from her marriage and family. Fortunately, she finally bore a son two years after me.

Because my father was a great businessman who succeeded on his own from nothing, I grew up in a rich family and was even supported beyond my undergraduate degree.

OK, are you ready? Now in the empty space provided on the form I gave you, please summarize step one of your “hero’s journey.”
REFERENCES


http://www.scottishtimes.com/phenomenon_north_korean_double_defectors_shows_deepening_divide.


