Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology
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Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology 2009 40: 953
DOI: 10.1177/0022022109346956

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://jcc.sagepub.com/content/40/6/953

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

On behalf of:
IACCP
International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology

Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology
Volume 40 Number 6
November 2009 953-968
© 2009 The Author(s)
10.1177/0022022109346956
http://jccp.sagepub.com

Between Trauma and Redemption

Story Form Differences in Immigrant Narratives of Successful and Nonsuccessful Immigration

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Many immigrants find immigration a stressful experience. Whereas some overcome the initial feeling of being overwhelmed, others are frustrated and disappointed years after their immigration. In this study, 22 people who emigrated from the former USSR to Israel in the early 1990s were interviewed regarding their immigration experiences and the resulting narratives analyzed. The immigrants chosen represented the extreme poles of the success experience—some felt that their immigration was very successful; others found it very unsuccessful. Analysis revealed differences in the form of the immigration stories. The narratives of the successful immigrants were coherent and well structured; narratives of the nonsuccessful immigrants were fragmented and lacked coherence. The results are discussed in terms of how people construct immigration stories and what these constructions stand for.

Keywords: *subjective adjustment; narrative psychology; immigrants' experience*

Introduction

The transition from one country to another involves far more than just a physical move and affects all areas of life. The experience of immigration is unsettling—in both a physical and an emotional sense, leading to estrangement from the familiar and the predictable and challenging immigrants with the unfamiliar and the unexpected. Clinical psychological literature has focused on negative experiences, such as cultural shock (Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Oberg, 1960), psychological distress (Mirsky, 1997; Slonim-Nevo, Sharage, Mirsky, Petrovsky, & Borodenko, 2006), experience of loss, and even bereavement (Grinberg & Grinberg, 1984, 1989; Lieblich, 1993; Parkes, 1979). As Grinberg and Grinberg (1989) argued, migration is a "potentially traumatic experience characterized by series of partially traumatic events" (p. 15). Some researchers note the positive aspects of immigration, however: For example, it can be an opportunity to develop psychological maturation and the attainment of autonomy in young people (Mirsky & Peretz, 2006) or to learn new social and cultural skills (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

Author's Note: I would like to thank Professor Suzanne Ouellette, Professor Michelle Fine, Professor Amia Lieblich, the two anonymous readers, and the editors for their helpful comments. This research was supported by the Harvey L. Silbert Center for Israel Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; the Cherrick Center, Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and the Shaine Center for Research in Social Science, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Few studies have examined how different experiences of immigration are reflected in immigrants' stories. To this end, the current study examined the stories of successful and unsuccessful immigrants, with the goal of understanding how people construct their immigration stories. Both successful and unsuccessful immigrants describe difficulties. However, the groups interpret these differently, and this difference in turn affects how they construct their narratives (Singer, 2001).

Immigration and Narrative Analysis

As mentioned previously, immigration is usually stressful. New arrivals face multiple problems and obstacles while trying to understand their new social and cultural environment. The qualitative methods of narrative psychology offer an opportunity to understand reality in the way it is constructed by the individual. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses on narrow quantifiable aspects, qualitative methods can explore and analyze the diverse, individualistic, constructive context of immigration. Oddly enough, most research in the cultural field uses quantitative rather than qualitative methods (Chirkov, 2006). This article represents an effort to take the literature in a new direction.

Narrative psychology focuses on the stories people tell about their lives. The storyteller is considered an author who writes his or her own life script. Events, memories, and feelings are woven into the life story, so that it comes to reflect the teller's identity. By hearing the story, we learn about the individual's psychological dynamics, inner conflicts, and social and cultural constructions (McAdams, 1993; Raggatt, 2007; Singer, 2001). In short, a life story is a product of life events and how they are interpreted (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001). It is a blend of historical truth and narrative truth (Spence, 1982). Although we can rarely gain access to the *historical* truth (because we usually do not know what really happened), the *narrative* truth is revealed to us through word choices (Singer, 2001), the repetition of some elements and omission of others, and narrative structure (Bar-On, 1995). Narratives open a window to the way people perceive and construct reality. By hearing immigrants' stories of success and nonsuccess, we can understand the subjective way people experience and construct their immigration.

Analyzing Narratives: Form Analysis

Close listening to a story reveals two dimensions: what the interviewee says and how he or she says it. *Content* analysis focuses on the ideas, memories, events, and themes in the story; *form* analysis deals with the structure of the story, that is, the organization of the plot, the order of the events, the progress of the narrative in time, and other form characteristics such as word selection, metaphors, and so on (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Most narrative studies use content analysis (Tuval-Mashiach, 2006); only a few studies employ form analysis (e.g., Farrell, Rosenberg, & Rosenberg, 1993; Gergen & Gergen, 1986; Linde, 1993; Maruna, 1998; McAdams, 1993; Tuval-Mashiach, 2006).

Form analysis—on which this article focuses—differs from content analysis in two important ways. First, while narrators are usually highly aware of the content of their story, they may be less aware, and therefore less in control, of the story's form. Therefore, form analysis provides an opportunity to look at the deep and sometimes unconscious layers of

the narrator's story. Second, content analysis discusses the story at one point in time, whereas form analysis looks at it across time, thereby adding a developmental point of view (Tuval-Mashiach, 2000). However, there is not always a clear-cut distinction between content analysis and form analysis; the two are frequently interwoven. Thus, although this article will focus on form analysis, it will necessarily contain some content analysis.

The Connection Between Narrative and Well-Being, or What Is a Good Story?

The definition of "good story form" in form analysis has two elements. The first is the *story coherence* or how well the narrated events are connected and to what extent the story is comprehensible to the listener. The second is the *story form* or how the story develops, including the use of various storytelling genres (Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1996; Gergen & Gergen, 1986, 1988; Linde, 1993). Because a narrative reflects the teller's identity and psychological dynamics, a "good story form" reflects adjustment and well-being.

The coherence of the story[1] is manifested by meaningful connection between its parts. Lack of connection reflects a low level of coherence; a highly coherent narrative contains events that result from one another. A coherent narrative is detailed, clear, and easy to follow. An incoherent narrative, meanwhile, lacks details that are important for plot understanding or is disrupted by an overload of detail—intensely disjointed episodes prevent the story from progressing and developing.

A lack of words or details does not necessarily mean absence of experience. Rogers et al. (1999) defined the following four types of the "unsayable" that are found in the stories of children who speak about difficulties and/or disturbing relationships: language of negation, revision, smokescreen, and silence. For the current analysis I'll focus on the language of smokescreen, where what is being said covers and draws attention from what is not said. These unsayable narratives are common when difficult emotions are being dealt with, and they are common in stories of trauma (Rogers, 2006).

Gergen and Gergen (1988) divided story form into types or genres, providing a visual expression of their plots (this model's broad theoretical framework can be applied to many fields; for application in the context of illness narratives, see Frank, 1995, 1998). In their view, there are three basic narrative structures in which stories develop over time. In a progressive narrative, the story moves forward (see Figure 1); a regressive narrative has a pattern of decline or deterioration (see Figure 2); in a stable narrative, the plot is steady, and the graph does not change (see Figure 3). A "good story form" may contain regressive narrative but must also contain some progressive narrative.

Gergen and Gergen (1988) described complex story constructions (genres), including romance, comedy, and tragedy, which are built on the basis of these simple patterns. For example, the romance genre is characterized by a storyline that switches between progress and decline (see Figure 4); Romance protagonists overcome obstacles on the way to their goal. Comedy is defined by deterioration, ending in incline (see Figure 5). Tragedy moves from peak point to nadir point (see Figure 6). Two new patterns, not described by Gergen and Gergen but emerging from the data described in this article, are fracture and victimization. Fracture refers to a storyline that deteriorates (i.e., tragedy) but is also fragmented. In victimization, the storyline is circular and repetitive; the same events occur again and again. The protagonist lacks the ability to control them, and the storyline spirals downward.

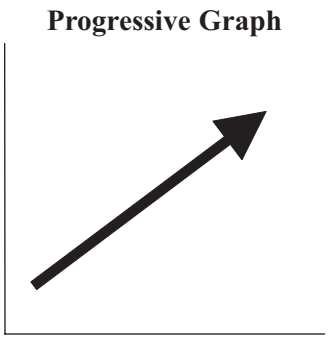
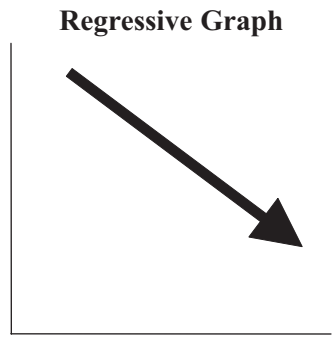


Figure 1.



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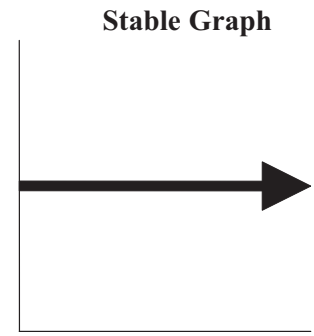

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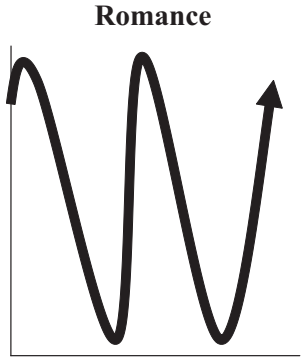

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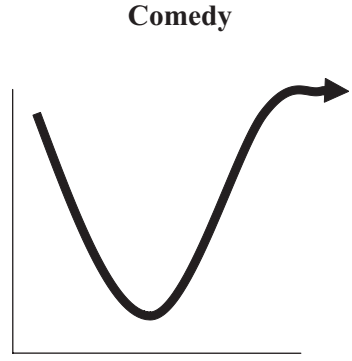

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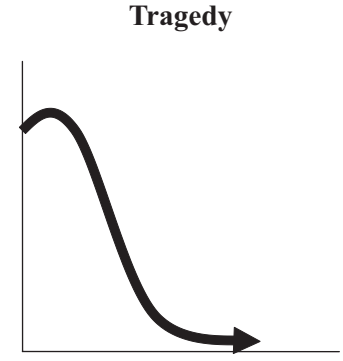


Figure 6.

The nature of the connection between the episodes of the story is another important narrative consideration. Here, we consider two narrative strategies: redemption and contamination (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). In a redemption sequence, the storyteller describes an episode of transformation, going from a bad, emotionally negative life event to a good, emotionally positive life event. Unsurprisingly, stories with many redemption episodes are associated with adjustment and well-being (McAdams et al., 2001). A contamination sequence moves in the opposite direction, going from a good state (physically and emotionally) to a bad one.

Immigration From the Former USSR

Following the political and economic crises in the former USSR after the collapse of the Soviet regime, there was a massive wave of immigration to Israel. This occurred mostly between 1990 and 1995, when approximately 600,000 people moved to Israel. This massive immigration has had a tremendous effect on Israeli society, with immigrants now constituting 12% of the general population and 14% of the Jewish population (Leshem &

Lissak, 2000). The immigrants from the former USSR have brought with them significant educational and occupational resources: 60% have a college diploma (and above), compared to 30% of the overall Israeli population (Leshem & Lissak, 2000).

Method

This article describes part of a larger mixed methods project designed to shed light on immigrant success and nonsuccess experiences.

Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select 22 participants from a larger sample of immigrants from Russia and the Ukraine. Participants were selected on the basis of their scores on a four-item "success of immigration" scale. Responses were recorded using a Likert scale format from 1 (*very unsuccessful immigration*) to 8 (*very successful immigration*). Those scoring very high (average score 5 or above) or very low (average score 2 or below) were selected to participate in the qualitative study. For the demographics of the sample, see Table 1. The larger sample was collected across Israel from different types of settlements: central and peripheral cities, urban settlements, and cooperative Israeli settlements. Potential participants were identified from lists maintained by Russian libraries, community centers, immigrants' associations, and municipalities and by snowball sampling, in which participants referred other potential participants. All participants in the qualitative study, except 1, were working in varied fields; most were salaried employees, and most did not hold the same occupation as in the former USSR.

Procedures

A personal in-depth interview was conducted by the author. The interview took place in the home or the workplace of the interviewees (or another secure and quiet place).

The 22 participants (11 of whom felt their immigration was successful and 11 of whom felt it was very unsuccessful) were asked the following question: "Imagine your immigration story as a book, please divide it to chapters and elaborate on every chapter" (McAdams, 1993). After the interviewee recounted his or her immigration story, he or she was asked questions regarding specific episodes in it. In responding, he or she recounted stories having a nadir episode (the most negative point in the immigration story), a peak episode (the most positive episode in the immigration story), or a turning point (an episode is followed by meaningful change; McAdams, 1993). This interview strategy enabled comparison between the two groups (success story and nonsuccess story immigrants; Benish-Weisman, 2007).

Results

Success Stories

Coherence. As previously mentioned, narrative coherence is marked by the well-connected and logical ordering of events. In this study, success stories usually contained well-organized

Table 1
Demographics

	Sex	Age	Number of Years in Israel
Average		52.6	14.7
SD		6.1	1.3
Minimum	11 men	43.0	11.0
Maximum	11 women	62.0	16.0

episodes describing a specific goal, such as finding a job or learning Hebrew. In the following passage, Elya[2] (43, engineer, 14 years in Israel), who struggled in his first months in Israel to find a job, describes how he succeeds:

> I saw an ad in the newspaper, so I send a cover letter because previous to that I tried to be hired to several jobs, but I failed since I did not understand what they want from me. So I learned from that, and send a cover letter attached to my resume . . . and I got it. They invited me to several interviews, and I was hired!

In the second example, Yana (50, teacher, 16 years in Israel), in answering my question about a pick point (the most positive point) in her story, tells me about her son's academics struggles:[3]

> He had some tests in order to get accepted to high school, and then we discovered that he can not be accepted to the best high school he intended to go to. It was very hard. A crisis. We talked with him, explained that there is a solution. We did another exam, and we discovered that he has a learning disability. So they gave him the opportunity to do the final exams in special conditions. It was in a special school that was right for him. We were afraid about the social aspect . . . , but he did great—he grew, just as a flower—he was blooming. It was such a change! It was amazing! He had the energy and the motivation. He succeeded!

In both narratives, events are described chronologically and are connected in meaningful way (usually a cause and result). The storyteller embeds the story in a context, while the elements in the narrative clarify the plot, and give the listener (or reader) a better understanding of the story.

Story form. Structural analysis of the success stories revealed one dominant story form,[4] the romance, in which the protagonist overcomes obstacles en route to a happy ending thanks to special qualities that he or she possesses (McAdams, 1993). These qualities may include boldness, resourcefulness, and wisdom. Tania (48, a financial consultant in the former USSR and therapist in Israel, 16 years in Israel) says the following of her early job hunting experiences in Israel:

> When I arrived at the interview I did not know how to fill in the form. It was written in Hebrew which I hardly knew. Somehow I managed to do it, and there were two exams which I passed, and then was an interview; and because my Hebrew wasn't good, I learned the sentences by heart. My willpower was so strong I decided that no matter what they asked me, I would tell them what I know.

Tania, an energetic redhead, describes the tremendous difficulties she faced as a result of not knowing Hebrew—she knew neither how to fill out the job application form nor how to introduce herself in the interview. But thanks to her extraordinary qualities—willpower and the ability to focus single-mindedly on a goal—she was hired. Her struggle did not end there, however, but continued when she started working:

> I had to travel to the settlements around Tel Aviv. On every trip I had to overcome something. Until I understood that Hevel Hasharon [an area in Israel] was not someone's name and surname. . . . You know, all those funny things . . . I saw others in my job [nonimmigrants]; it was so easy for them. They didn't need to overcome the difficulties I had. For them everything was familiar—the language and so on. For me everything was for the first time. But I overcame the challenges!

With hindsight, Tania can find humor in her situation during those early months in Israel, but at the time it was frustrating to face so many difficulties on so many levels. She found herself incapable of simple things (like knowing the difference between people's names and places' names); as she says elsewhere in the interview, in the beginning she "felt like a little child."

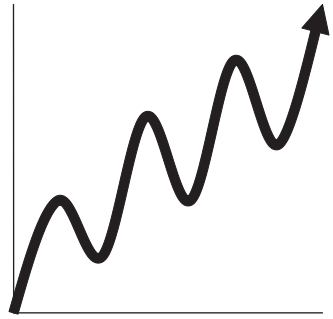
Nevertheless, the obstacles in Tania's way do not deplete her energy; on the contrary, her words reflect her strength and enthusiasm and the fact that she experienced obstacles as an advantage on her bumpy road. Graphically, the process might appear as presented in Figure 7.

On a micro level, each difficulty leads to a temporary dip in the storyline, but on the macro level, each decline leads to a jump that propels the storyline forward.[5] In fact, most of the success stories employ this pattern, namely, a descent (bad event or problem) followed by a rise (a good event or solution to the problem). McAdams et al. (1997) called this *redemption*. The story of Luda (58, 14 years in Israel) is a good example:

> In short, I signed the contract. After that, I discovered that the man who rented the apartment before me had paid much less than me. This man tried to argue with the landlady [to persuade her to let Luda pay the same rent that he had paid] but she refused to budge. This man knew that the price was exaggerated, but I knew nothing. Later I learned that junkies were living next door. Day and night people came to buy drugs, they kept asking me for "change." It was horrible. Living so near them was scary. But something good came out of it—I never feared that my son would be on drugs—seeing them put him off forever. They were not people; they were a shadow of their former self. I lived with these neighbors for a year. The house owner was terrible also . . . I really don't want to recall it. It was a difficult year from all aspects. I started immediately working in cleaning. After that, I traveled to a convention in England. [laughed] It was in the holidays. I said to the boss—tomorrow I can't come I have international conference to attend. . . . After my return from the conference, I went to several ulpans [schools for intensive Hebrew study sponsored by the Israeli government] until I found a suitable place. I was very determined to learn Hebrew.

Luda's story has a romance form. It recounts her ability to rise above her poor circumstances: She was a history professor in Russia but her first months in Israel turn her into a house cleaner; she lives in terrible housing, fraudulently rented to her, and she has to bring her son up alone. However, she attends an important conference overseas entirely because of her sheer determination, and she later becomes a faculty member in an Israeli university.

Figure 7
Forward Romance



Moreover, Luda refers to her poor housing as an advantage: Although in the immediate term her son's safety is compromised, in the long term, it helps inure him to life's temptations.

Nonsuccess Stories

Coherence. The nonsuccess stories, unlike the success stories, lack coherence. This is revealed in two separate aspects of the stories: both absence of detail (Rogers et al., 1999) and excessive detail.

The first form of incoherence is absence of words. Consider, for example, how Lev (50, 16 years in Israel), a frustrated artist, answers my question regarding a nadir point in his immigration story:

> It was 8 or 9 years ago. It was difficult. Yes, very difficult. In my family. . . . Everything was horrible. [silence] But now it's better. [silence] What was difficult? It's hard to say, there were many problems with my daughter, with my health. . . . Your daughter . . . it was a difficult story, now it's better, she is studying.

At first he uses general phrases ("it was difficult," "everything was horrible") and consistently refuses to tell a detailed story. It seems that in some way he is trying to lessen his pain by twice repeating "now it's better." There are two omissions or reductions in Lev's story: First, he omits important details, thus spoiling the narrative coherence; second, he repeats "now it's better," seeming to erase his past ("everything was horrible") by referring only to the present ("now it's better").

Not talking about the past may help stave off painful feelings in the present, as Anastasia (62, physician, 15 years in Israel), whom I met in her depressing one-bedroom apartment, suggests:

> There were many things and to tell it all it's difficult. I don't want to talk about it because for me it is like experiencing it all again.

The other form of incoherence is of the opposite kind. Instead of an absence of words or the language of silence (Rogers et al., 1999), the narrator delivers a stream of associative

and unrelated detail. Piuter (45, electrician, 13 years in Israel), who was eager to meet me and to tell his story, starts to answer my question but soon drifts off into his private, associative world, losing track of my question and even of an organized storyline. Throughout his interview, it was very hard to keep track of his story. The following is Piuter's answer to my question regarding his early days in Israel:

> I was happy, I was happy, when I walked the first time in the old city in Jerusalem I almost cried. There was an airplane crash; it was I think in 1993. They opened a synagogue in our place. The rabbi was from Moscow. My grandfather who was officer in the army was from there too. I have nobody to ask in my family, but it was there. In Moscow, there is a river, it is half sad half not, I used to live there.

The coherence of the narrative is disrupted by an overload of detail and the intensely disjointed episodes prevent the story from progressing and developing.

The same pattern is present in Igor's story. When I ask him about his life in the former USSR, he says:

> We could pick mushrooms . . . to catch frogs, to fish. We used to go there every year. The Fascists killed my grandparents in Russia. All my family is from there. He was the main Rabbi in Kiev, and wanted to run away from there, but he had been told that the Germans will not harm the Jewish people. They saw my family and killed them—all the Jews. But my grandfather . . . we used to go every summer to pray on his grave. Well, it was not us praying, it was the Rabbi [Jewish priest]. My father used to say, "We have to go!" I said: "Where to?" . . . I guess they shot my father from big gun. It was good then; they said nothing. . . . They were Communists. . . . There is more, but I would rather not talk about it.

In the beginning, Igor recounts his good memories—hiking, Russian nature. He then turns to family stories. By the end of the paragraph, however, his narrative has become very associative; events do not connect to each other, and it is not always clear to what or whom he refers.

Consider my research assistant's reaction to the interview. While she transcribed it, I noticed that she laughed many times. When I asked about her reaction, she said: "In many parts what he says doesn't make sense—it's so funny!" As Frank (1998) observed, the reaction the narrative creates in the listener is very important. What he characterized as "chaos narratives" are often hard to listen to and can create feelings of detachment, or even amusement.

Igor's comments end after an overflow of details that, paradoxically, derive from his desire not to speak. Although the absence narrative and the overload narrative appear at opposite extremes, they are both manifestation of the same phenomenon—a latent flurry of emotions. Either by avoiding their negative emotions (Ezzy, 2000) or by covering them with a bandage of words that serve as a smokescreen (Rogers et al., 1999), the narrators in the nonsuccess stories try to avoid revealing their feelings of disappointment and despair.

Story form. In the opening line of *Anna Karenina*, Tolstoy says: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Similarly, as opposed to the success stories, most of which fit one genre (romance), three story forms can be found in the nonsuccess stories: tragedy, fracture, and victimization.

Tragedy. In classic tragedies, *Oedipus* for example, the protagonist begins in a position of superiority and then experiences a dramatic fall (see Figure 6). This fall is often due to a tragic flaw in the narrator's personality, such as hubris, or excessive pride. Hubris does not often feature in this study, but the story of Lev, whom we have already met, is a good example:

> I immigrated to Israel from an empty studio. I had sold all of my pictures. I was quite rich. A year before I immigrated I had an exhibition in Israel and I felt that I could do all, that I'll win all.
>
> After the immigration I gave all my pictures to a gallery. After a while, the owner of the gallery disappeared. No gallery, no paintings, nothing.

Lev's experience of nonsuccess is intensified by the tension between his starting point (a lofty position as a famous and wealthy painter in the former USSR) and his endpoint (a poor and defeated artist in Israel).

Fracture. Anastasia's (62, 15 years in Israel, physician) narrative illustrates the fracture form:

> I have lived two different lives—one in Russia and one in Israel. They have nothing in common, and there was no continuity. Like moving from one world to a totally different world. It's like I fell from the sky and found myself here.

Her life before immigration (rich and fulfilling) contrasts dramatically with life afterwards (disappointing and hopeless). As in tragedy, the story talks of deterioration and a lack of continuity and reflects the storyteller's feelings of alienation and detachment (see Figure 8). Anastasia's metaphor of falling expresses her feeling of helplessness (as if immigration happened to her while she remained passive) and has a nightmarish quality.

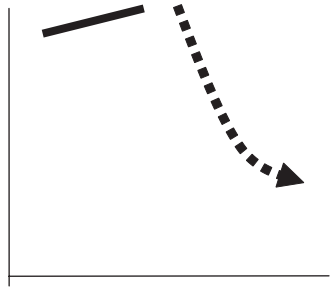
Vladimir (51, electrician, 14 years in Israel) also feels that immigration has interfered in the continuity of his life and this is reflected in his storyline:

> From the start I felt I had arrived on the moon, a different world. The mentality of the people here and the mentality of the people in Russia—it's totally different.

In both Anastasia's and Vladimir's stories, past and present are disconnected. Vladimir's moon metaphor expresses his sense of detachment—he experiences Israelis as unapproachable aliens. Like the incoherence mentioned previously, the fracture form contains two story parts that do not fit, but unlike the incoherent story element, which is narrowed to fit one specific place in the narrative, a fracture affects the whole story. Immigration functions as a splitting point in the story: The life before will never resemble the life after.

Victimization. In the third form of the nonsuccess stories, victimization, the storyline is also obstructed, albeit differently. This story form is similar to tragedy in that there is a fall to a nadir. However, unlike tragedy, the starting point is not a peak but an ordinary juncture in life. This nonheroic beginning reflects the self-characterization of the narrator as a nonhero doomed to be victimized. As in the success stories, in victimization, the narrator encounters obstacles, but unlike romance, the obstacles are impossible to overcome, and the narrator is overwhelmed and defeated, as we can see in the following examples.

Figure 8
Fracture



Another feature of victimization is replication. Yuri (48, 15 years in Israel), a literary editor in the USSR, currently unemployed, met me in his apartment, which he shares with two roommates. His detailed narrative was packed with mininarratives that share the same characteristics. The following are just two examples of many. In the first, Yuri explains why he stopped speaking to his ex best friend, and in the second, he describes a fallout with his ex boss:

> We had to pay rent; we usually paid in the beginning of the month. At the end of February he came and said he didn't want to live with me anymore, he wanted to live with his girlfriend. So I said "What will we do tomorrow we have to pay." He said "I'm leaving." *I didn't know what to do or what I should tell him. I was shocked; I didn't know what to do*. Finally, I had to leave the apartment in 3 days. I had to search for a place to rest my head. I was homeless.

> When I started working, the chief editor, who was responsible for all the decisions: who to hire, how much salary to pay, told me: At present we don't know you, but if after 3 months you have proved yourself I'll raise your salary significantly. I was very happy. After 3 months he looked at me as though there was not a grain of truth in it and said: "I didn't tell you that I would raise your salary. No. No. I couldn't say that!" *I was shocked*. I was afraid that something had happened to my memory. Maybe I don't remember it? But I did remember. This man had the power to decide whom to advance and whom to reject. He decided that I should work without a raise. *It was humiliating*.

Yuri tells a story that repeats itself: He starts off hoping things will work out (a pleasant home with a friend as a roommate and a rise in salary), but soon he is deceived or betrayed. Each episodes ends with a similar response—shock, paralysis—he is helpless. The narrative seems stiff and inflexible. Yuri learns nothing from his experiences and appears doomed to have recurring difficulties. He does not seem able to influence or change his own narrative. Unlike the success story forms where each detour is a chance for further development and growth, the storyline of the victimization narrative fails to progress, each episode contributing to a downward spiral (see Figure 9).

Discussion

This article suggests that success and nonsuccess immigration stories have specific story forms. A well-structured or "good" narrative is characterized by events that are well

articulated and lead the story progressively to its goal. The narratives of the people in this study with successful immigration stories are consistent with this form, while the narratives of nonsuccess immigration stories lack coherence. In them, there is either a narrative of silence and an absence of important detail or there is a stream of associative and unrelated details. Both are manifestations of the same phenomenon: a latent flurry of emotions.

Success stories generally reflect a romance form. Because of their special qualities, romance protagonists overcome obstacles on the way to their goal. Problems and difficulties are perceived as the *cause* of their success. By overcoming obstacles, the protagonist can express his talent and make progress thanks to his ability to learn.

Nonsuccess stories are characterized by three story forms: tragedy, fracture, and victimization. In tragedy, the protagonist ends up in a position that is inferior to the position from which he started; in other words, there is a negative or downward movement. In fracture, the story takes a similar downward turn, but the narrative is fragmented; life before immigration is sharply distinct from the life after. Finally, the narrative of victimization is circular and repetitive; the same negative events (the same nadir points) occur again and again, and the protagonist cannot control them.

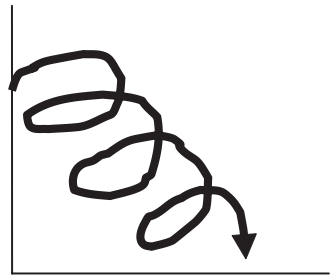
The ability to construct life events positively is related to well-being (King & Miner, 2000; McAdams et al., 2001; Taylor, 1989). Not surprisingly, optimistic or hopeful people have better mental health and experience more success in the process of immigration. However, I would argue that the immigrants in the success group see success as *deriving from* their problems. In other words, the success stories are stories of redemption (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). They portray past difficulties as the reason for present success. Moreover, their experience of the successful present is intensified by their difficulties in the past. Thus, we can compare the immigration process to the triumph of conquering a mountain peak: Aching muscles and tired limbs make the landscape more glorious.

As much as the stories of success tell a story of redemption and development, the nonsuccess stories tell of regression and defeat. Although in both groups the narrator encounters difficulties, the construction of these difficulties is different. We find no development in the nonsuccess story. Here, the clock has stopped ticking. The stories are either split and discontinuous (fracture) or they repeat similar episodes of mistrust and betrayal, leaving the immigrants no resources with which to move on (victimization). Despite the "frozen time" in the nonsuccess stories, emotions are not frozen. In fact, the latent, bubbling negative emotions destroy narrative coherency as the narrators try to avoid their own feelings.

Whereas the success stories resemble redemption narratives, the characteristics of the nonsuccess stories could be called trauma narratives. Although the clinical literature often refers to the immigration process as traumatic (e.g., Akhtar, 1995, 1999; Grinberg & Grinberg, 1984, 1989), I do not wish to argue that the participants in the study experienced trauma as defined in the *DSM-IV-TR* (Allen, Basilier, Vaage, & Hauff, 2006). Nevertheless, one can observe traumatic features in their stories (Heizner, 1994).

The fracture form, in which the person's life is split in two, is commonly found in traumatic stories, as a traumatic event changes the life story beyond recognition (Leydesdorff, Dawson, Burchards & Ashplant, 1999). In many traumatic stories, the internal clock stops ticking at the moment of trauma. In the "static time" (Brockmeier, 2000) that follows the trauma, the traumatized person is doomed to stay in the past, and the storyline does not progress. The "static time" of trauma also relates to the repetition found throughout the victimization

Figure 9
Victimization



narratives. Trauma changes a storyline and prevents its development; the story develops in a circular pattern, generating a feeling of hopelessness and helplessness instead of moving forward. This is what we see in the victimization narratives of the nonsuccessful immigrants. One cannot tell whether the immigration or events before or after it have led to the trauma detected in the nonsuccess stories.

Narratives open a window on subjective experience and thus present an ideal opportunity to study people's experiences. However, the converse is also true: Narratives can affect experiences (Widdershoven, 1993). Through retelling, the feeling or evaluation of an experience may change. By putting experiences into words and by creating the possibility of looking at experience from a distance, the storyteller is able to process memories, feelings, and thoughts; reevaluate what happened; or even have new insights. For the immigrants, naming amorphous and sometimes overwhelming experiences allows them to connect their stories to others (Frank, 2001), developing feelings of companionship and solidarity.

Mapping stories can assist in health care practice from both an institutional and a therapeutic perspective. By detecting elements of success and nonsuccess in immigrant stories, therapists can learn to listen to the unspoken parts of the nonsuccess stories (Frank, 2001). Furthermore, they can help their immigrant clients interpret their stories more effectively while maintaining the stories' facts. Providing new interpretations of past events, allowing different voices into the narrative (not just one ruling voice), or revealing repeated narratives (e.g., in the victimization form) allows the client and therapist to compose new endings to unhappy stories (Omer & Alon, 1997).

This brings us to questions for future research. First, are the defining features of the success and nonsuccess stories unique to immigration stories, or can we find them in other life-changing events? Second, can these features be generalized to other cultural groups? The present study indicates the appropriateness of a narrative analysis approach to understanding the experience of Russian immigrants to Israel. A number of interesting questions are raised by these results, some of which suggest new directions for future research. For example, more research is needed to understand whether the story features identified in this study are unique to Russian immigrants or may be identified in other immigrant groups. It will also be important to investigate whether narratives of other life-changing events, besides immigration, are characterized by the same features identified here.

Notes

1. See McAdams (2006) for an analysis.
2. The names and details of all the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy.
3. The following quotations are translated verbatim from Hebrew or Russian.
4. A few stories combined romance and comedy so that the happy ending was not the result of deliberate action by the protagonist but an accident or external force.
5. This genre resembles the "quest story" found by Frank (1995, 1998) in illness narratives. As noted earlier, the quest is commonly found in romance narratives.

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