

A qualitative analysis of life script events in a Brazilian sample

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Abstract

Life scripts are shared cultural expectations about a selected group of events that occur during the life of a common individual in a certain culture. Life scripts are, therefore, normative expectations within a given culture regarding individual life patterns. We conducted a thematic analysis on 2,688 life script events indicated by 384 adults, mostly from the south and southeast regions of Brazil (70.3 women %). Following previous studies, we identified 74 events, or groups of events, common to other cultures; 30 events not mentioned by our participants; and 40 events specifically yielded by our analysis. Results show that first-time events play a special role on life scripts of Brazilians, as well as contents such as attending political events and post-graduate education. Methodological considerations on the qualitative analyses required to identify life events are discussed. Future studies may investigate prevalence, importance, valence, and gender and age differences with Brazilian participants.

Keywords: Life experiences; Autobiographical memory; Life-scripts.

Análise qualitativa de eventos de roteiros de vida em uma amostra brasileira

Resumo

Roteiros de vida são expectativas culturais acerca de um determinado grupo de eventos que ocorrem durante a vida de um indivíduo comum. Roteiros de vida são, portanto, expectativas normatizadas em uma determinada cultura com relação aos padrões de vida individuais. Foi conduzida uma análise temática em 2688 eventos de roteiros de vida relatados por 384 adultos, majoritariamente das regiões sul e sudeste do Brasil (70,3% mulheres). A partir de estudos prévios, foram identificadas 74 categorias de eventos comuns a diversas culturas; 30 não mencionadas pela amostra, e 40 emergentes da análise. Os resultados mostram que eventos relacionados à “primeira vez” tem papel especial nos roteiros de vida dos brasileiros, assim como conteúdos tais quais “comparecer a eventos políticos” e “pós-graduação”. Considerações metodológicas acerca da análise qualitativa são necessárias para identificar os eventos de vida discutidos. Estudos futuros podem investigar prevalência, importância, valência, e diferenças etárias e de gênero em brasileiros.

Palavras-chave: Experiências de vida; Memória autobiográfica; Roteiro de vida.

Un análisis cualitativo de eventos de guiones de vida en una muestra brasileña

Resumen

Guiones de vida son expectativas culturales compartidas sobre un grupo seleccionado de eventos que ocurren durante la vida de un individuo común. Guiones de vida son, por lo tanto, expectativas normativas dentro de una cultura dada con respecto a patrones de vida individuales. Llevamos a cabo un análisis temático de 2.688 eventos de guiones de vida indicados por 384 adultos, mayoritariamente de las regiones sur y sudeste de Brasil (70,3% mujeres). Siguiendo estudios previos, identificamos 74 eventos, o grupos de eventos, comunes a otras culturas; 30 eventos no mencionados por nuestros participantes; y 40 eventos específicamente producidos por medio del análisis. Los resultados muestran que los eventos de primera vez desempeñan un papel especial en los guiones de vida de brasileños, tales como la participación en eventos políticos y la educación de postgrado. Se discuten consideraciones metodológicas sobre los análisis cualitativos requeridos para identificar guiones de vida. Estudios futuros pueden investigar prevalencia, importancia, valencia, y diferencias de edad y de género en brasileños.

Palabras clave: Experiencias de vida; Memoria autobiográfica; Guiones de vida.

Developmental psychology research has been historically interested in critic, sensitive, or decisive moments in a person's life or cultural group. Erikson's (1980) theory is a known example. His theory of the psychosocial development of human identity posits eight biological-cultural turning-point moments in life, at least within a Western middle-class context. These moments signal important changes with ontogenetic and phylogenetic implications, integrating culture and biology as joint forces towards stability and change.

Rites of passage are a construct that also congregates universal as well as cultural aspects of human development (McCarthy, Souza, & Jafaar, 2010). In addition, contemporary researchers, such as Jeffrey Arnett, have been conducting studies on which events people choose to indicate the entrance into adulthood. They refer to biological events such as growing into full height, but also psychological events as making independent decisions, or even cultural ones as reaching legal age. Hence there are life events more biology-based, others more culture-based (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014).

A specific life trajectory is marked by events chosen by the person her/himself. This concerns individual life story events, leading to a more narrative account. Applying this principle into a group of people that share cultural experiences over time, we find the concept of *life script*. Life scripts are shared cultural expectations about the order of a selected group of events that take place during the life of a common individual of a certain culture, according to the members of the culture. Life scripts are, therefore, normative expectations within a given culture regarding individual life patterns (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002, 2004; Rubin & Berntsen, 2003). This paper relies on the concept of life scripts and describes a study conducted with Brazilian participants.

Evidence on life scripts has been increasing since Berntsen and Rubin (2002, 2004), and Rubin and Berntsen (2003). Since then, researchers have conducted studies comparing life script events and life story events according to prevalence, importance, valence, estimated age at the time of an event, gender differences, age differences, and country differences (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Berntsen, Rubin, & Siegler, 2011; Bohn, 2010; Coleman, 2014; Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, & Tekcan, 2008; Janssen, 2015; Janssen & Rubin, 2011; Rubin, Berntsen & Hutson, 2009; Tekcan, Kaya-Kızıloz & Odaman, 2012). In addition, protocols changed as new evidence shed light on, for instance, life events on autobiographical memory of participants from different stages of life, notably, young-adult college students and middle-aged adults

or senior citizens. One of the most often used protocols is to ask participants to list seven events that a typical child from their own culture and gender will live in their life course. Another widely used protocol is to ask for a list of seven events that a 100 year-old person would have lived on his/her life trajectory.

We do not intend to summarize the results described by this literature, as the aim of this study is to describe and discuss the life scripts' events themselves. In other words, we follow the literature and try to contribute with new data from a different cultural perspective. Our understanding is that, if life scripts have a profound universal direction, we will be able to find, in Brazilian participants, the events listed in previous studies. In this sense, the literature described as follows will center on the events themselves.

Berntsen and Rubin (2004) were the first to conduct a study on life scripts. Deriving from research on autobiographical memory, they noticed that people would remember more life events from between the ages of 15 and 30 years-old. As an alternative to a reminiscence bump concentrated in these years of life, the authors developed a cultural emphasis hypothesis, which could contribute to explain the bump. Gathering life scripts from 103 Danish university students, Berntsen and Rubin managed to provide evidence of shared cognitive structures that "favor positive events over negative and events from youth over events from other ages, consistent with findings about the bump" (p. 440). In other words, "from birth, it (the life course of a newborn) is already furnished with a series of culturally important transitional events that are expected to occur in a specific order and at highly circumscribed periods during the individual's life" (p. 440). The most cited events for the life of an imaginary newborn from the participants' culture, among the 36 most frequent, were having children, marriage, begin school, college, and fall in love. They also had a category named "other", which united infrequent events, such as growing old, loneliness, losing one's job, work life, own birth, unhappy love, and other 23 events cited only once (p. 436).

In a second paper, Rubin, Berntsen, and Hutson (2009) report two new studies on life scripts asking for seven life events that occurred in a prototypical life course of an infant from the participants' culture. Including American and Danish college students, the authors found 21 events occurring in both samples, as well as the occurrence of the reminiscence bump. Recently, Bohn, Koppel and Harris (2017) found the bump in research protocols with four, seven, 15 and 25 events, indicating that this phenomenon is not an artifact of the methodology used. However, the

location and duration of the bump can vary according to the recall method. Koppel and Rubin (2017) found that when the events are obtained in response to cue words, the bump is smaller and located earlier in the life span than when the participants are asked to recall important memories.

As the authors are, in order of citation, one American, one Danish, and a second American, they were able to explain the differences based on cultural features of young adult students. Begin driving, for example, only appeared in responses from U.S. students, while long trip belonged specifically to Danish answers. The five most cited life scripts' events in the Danish sample were having children, marriage, college, begin school, and fall in love – the exact same five most mentioned on Berntsen and Rubin (2004), which indicates that the life scripts of different populations have similarities.

Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, and Tekcan (2008) followed Berntsen and Rubin's (2004) study. They investigated events in the life script of an imaginary 90 year-old person, as well as of a newborn, from Turkey. Two hundred and twenty Turkish university students participated, indicating as the five most frequent events: marriage, begin school, having children, first job, and fall in love. The authors tried to remain as faithful as possible to the words used by the participants in naming the events, which exhibited subtle differences such as college and college entrance exam, or accident and traffic accident. Erdoğan et al. (2008) also observed an overlap of 17 events between the Turkish sample and the Danish sample from Berntsen and Rubin (2004). The authors highlighted two events specific to the Eastern culture investigated: college entrance exam, and circumcision of boys. In contrast with the Danish, the Turkish participants did not mention baptism and confirmation.

Janssen and Rubin (2011) conducted an online data collection on life scripts with 595 Dutch participants. Participants were asked to indicate seven life events to occur in the life of a prototypical Dutch child. The authors categorized each event in one of the 46 categories gathered based on Berntsen and Rubin (2004), Erdoğan et al. (2008), and Rubin et al. (2009). The top five events were having children, begin school, marriage, parents' death, and fall in love (Janssen & Rubin, 2011). The data allowed the construction of extra categories: "learning to swim, cycle or play a musical instrument; divorce of parents; moving in with somebody; and problems at work" (p. 295). Infrequent events belonged to the category other, with examples such as "first birthday, learning to read and write, menopause, and depression" (p. 295).

Bohn (2010) managed to involve the participation of 96 university students and 72 senior citizens, all Danish, in a life script data collection following Berntsen and Rubin's (2004) protocol and event categories. Examples of other categories are 50th wedding anniversary and buying a house. For both samples, the four most cited events were the same: children, begin school, marriage, and college. The older group, but not the younger one, mentioned serious disease, own divorce, and parents' divorce.

Tekcan, Kaya-Kızılöz, and Odaman (2012) collected data with Turkish participants of three different age groups: 98 adolescents, 51 young-adults, and 42 older adults. The most cited events were marriage, begin school, first job/payment, begin talking (not mentioned by older participants), having children, university, and death of a parent (only cited by older respondents). The groups shared nearly half of the 39 events. Authors identified a substantial overlap between the life script events from their study, and the previous studies by Erdoğan et al. (2008), Bohn (2010), Berntsen and Rubin (2004), and Rubin et al. (2009).

Recently, Scherman, Salgado, Shao, and Berntsen (2017) conducted a data collection in four different countries (Mexico, Greenland, China, and Denmark) and investigated the similarities of the life scripts generated by these samples. The authors found 11 categories that are common across all four samples: "having children", "marriage", "college", "begin school", "go to school", kindergarten/begin day care", "own birth", retirement", "old age/life after retirement and in old age", "having peers", and "(happy) childhood".

The aforementioned studies examine North-American, European, and Asian countries. Together, they show that having children, marriage, begin school, college/university, and fall in love are important life events to their cultures, and this knowledge is transmitted mostly through conversations with friends and relatives, movies, books and television programs (Janssen & Haque, 2017). Nonetheless, these studies vary in sample size, content analysis criteria, and how they create the category "other events". In order to contribute to the available body of evidence, an investigation with a South-American sample may confirm the event preferences, as well as indicate distinctions such as those indicated by Janssen and Rubin (2011) with a larger sample. It might also allow further exploration into the omniscient "other" category that is a potential source of important life scripts, as studies accumulates.

This qualitative study attempted to identify life script events according to Brazilian adults. In order to

conduct our investigation, we relied on a data-oriented thematic analysis. Nevertheless, we take into account data from previous studies. In doing this, we came across interesting dilemmas concerning the definition of a life script. For this reason, the analyses focus on the events themselves, regardless of frequency or percentages of citations, as done in previous studies.

Method

Sample

Three-hundred and eighty-four adults from different geographical, mostly urban, regions of Brazil participated in the study. The age range of the sample was 18 to 58 years with a mean-age of 23.6 ($SD=5.85$), mostly women (70.3%). Participants were from 19 of the 27 Brazilian states: 52.9% from Rio Grande do Sul (the southernmost state), 15.9% from Minas Gerais, and 7.6% from São Paulo (both states from the southeast region of the country). The majority of participants were university students (undergraduates and graduates) enrolled in courses from all areas of knowledge.

Instruments

Sociodemographic questionnaire. Participants provided information on gender, age, city/state of residence, marital status, number of children, approximate family income, type of university in which they were enrolled (public or private), occupation, and psychiatric history.

The Life Script Paradigm. Participants were asked to generate the seven main life events that might happen in the life of a newborn from the respondent's same culture (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Rubin, Berntsen & Hutson, 2009). The instructions presented to the participant in Portuguese read as follows: "This study deals with the expectations concerning the life of any individual from our culture. Your task is to decide which events are expected to occur during the life of any given person. You should not think about your own personal life, but about a typical life of a person from our culture. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your own opinion about these aspects. Imagine a newborn child, of the same sex as you. It should not be a child that you specifically know or whom you have met, but a generic child, with a regular life ahead of him/her. Your task is to write down the seven most important life events that would probably happen in the life of this regular child, from birth to death. Write the events in the same order that they come to your mind. Give each event you list a descriptive title." Participants also filled out questions regarding

prevalence, importance, valence, and expected age of occurrence for each event; these quantitative answers were not analyzed in this study.

Procedure

Data collection. Data were collected through an online platform. The first screen presented an informed consent, after which the participant should click on either "I agree" to continue, or "I do not agree" to read a thank you message. If they agreed to participate, the second screen presented the sociodemographic questionnaire, followed by the life script paradigm.

In order to reach a sample size of 400 participants, we followed a convenience protocol based on scientific contacts with academic professors nationwide. Three of the authors sent an email to hundreds of contacts asking them to forward a standard message, which asked them or their adult contacts to participate in the study by clicking on a link to access the online platform. We stopped the data collection at 422 respondents, and performed a data check exclude participants who: wrote in first person, referring to their own selves instead of a generic person; wrote more than two lines for any single event; produced at least three answers that were not event-related; wrote inadequate answers (for example, "drinking *cachaça*"); or did not list any event. The final sample size was 384.

Data analysis. The answers yielded 2,688 life events. All events were thematically analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006), taking into consideration (without following literally) a list of events gathered from the life scripts of the Danish, U.S./Danish, Dutch, and Turkish studies (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Bohn, 2010; Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, & Tekcan, 2008; Janssen & Rubin, 2011; Rubin, Berntsen & Hutson, 2009; Tekcan, Kaya-Kızılöz, & Odaman, 2012). Thematic analysis entails six phases: familiarizing with data; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; and producing the report. Importantly, in contrast to some studies, we included low-frequency events, which were often mentioned under the label of "other events". Additionally, the analyses allowed the identification of new events. One of the authors conducted the thematic analysis using the software NVivo version 10. Another author performed as a second rater and analyzed 28% of the resulting event categories. With the aid of the software SPSS version 23, a Kappa of .72 was obtained, indicating substantial agreement between raters (Viera & Garrett, 2005).

Results

The analyses yielded 74 categories of events, identified on Brazilian data and associated to the

previous literature (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Bohn, 2010; Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, & Tekcan, 2008; Janssen & Rubin, 2011; Rubin, Berntsen, & Hutson, 2009; Tekcan, Kaya-Kızılöz, & Odaman, 2012). In order to facilitate comparisons among studies, we kept the original writing of the events as published in previous papers. Similar events not translated were *bodas de ouro*, which means, precisely, the 50th wedding anniversary; and *quinze anos* – the 15th birthday of a girl.

The analyses to elaborate categories similar in content, but not identical. This was the case, for example, of the category “Develop mentally and physically across life” (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004). The following events helped to build this category: feed oneself, learn to brush the teeth and shower, sphincters control, stop being breastfed, loose first tooth, and crawling.

As shown in the previous literature, events can be further specified, such as the beginning of an experience, the experience itself, and its conclusion. It was the case, for example, of beginning university, attending university, and university graduation. As for the beginning, many first-time events were cited. Therefore we kept as many as possible with this latter wording, e.g., *having children* and *first child* as distinct life script events. There was also the learning of some skill, which implies the experience of doing it for the first time, such as learning how to drive. *Beginning university and work* means, as it suggests, start attending university and having a job at the same time.

The resulting event categories (hereafter referred to as *events*, for short) are listed on the **Appendix** (left column), next to the matching events reported in the literature (right column).

The Brazilian data did not contain 30 of the events mentioned in previous studies. These were: Arranged marriage; finding one’s path through life; following different paths after high-school; being assaulted; physical aggression; being bullied; child’s death; circumcision; confirmation; depression; events with one’s family; experiencing nature; family quarrels; first contact; first report card; getting into fights; high-school exam; infidelity; keep learning in adulthood; life changing event; loneliness; neglected by children; parents’ divorce; partner’s death; death spouse; problem with friends; psychological problems; traffic accident; war; and vacation (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Bohn, 2010; Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, & Tekcan, 2008; Janssen & Rubin, 2011; Rubin, Berntsen & Hutson, 2009; Tekcan, Kaya-Kızılöz & Odaman, 2012).

There were 40 life events specific to Brazilian data, as follows:

1. Acquiring moral values;
2. At a certain point in life ask oneself if one met owns goals or check if one can rush in to them;
3. Attending a big event for the first time;
4. Attending political events;
5. Beginning university and work;
6. Being in a romantic relationship;
7. Being part of a family;
8. Being robbed;
9. Buying own car;
10. Difficulties and suffering;
11. Disappointment with owns life;
12. Doing Math;
13. Facing challenges and improving as a human being;
14. Financial independence;
15. First beat-up for misbehaving (primeira “surra” por “aprontar” algo);
16. First bruise;
17. First car;
18. First child;
19. First disappointment;
20. First job promotion;
21. First love;
22. First rock concert with your mother;
23. First romantic relationship;
24. First sexual frustration;
25. Happiness or frustration according to one’s achievements in life;
26. Having social relationships;
27. Language and arts courses, finding a hobby;
28. Loving and caring for oneself;
29. Mid-life crisis;
30. Parties and social events, graduation (any type);
31. Personal achievement, meeting goals;
32. Post-graduation courses;
33. Professional realization;
34. Religious experiences;
35. Using psychoactive substances;
36. Vaccination;
37. Voting;
38. Watching or practicing sports, being active, having a healthy and balanced life;
39. Witness an accident;
40. Witnessing children’s personal, professional, and interpersonal success, witnessing children evolve.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify which life script events Brazilian participants choose for the life of a

prototypical person from their own culture. Gathering 104 events from previous studies on the subject (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Bohn, 2010; Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, & Tekcan, 2008; Janssen & Rubin, 2011; Rubin, Berntsen, & Hutson, 2009; Tekcan, Kaya-Kızılöz, & Odaman, 2012), our sample spontaneously mentioned 74 of them. Additionally, the analyses generated 40 new life script events.

An overview of the events shows that they are in agreement with one of the first studies conducted on life scripts. Berntsen and Rubin (2004) reported that the majority of the events “can be associated with an educational, work, or family context” (p. 436). These areas are, indeed, a constant presence in developmental perspectives as classic as Erikson’s (1980), and as contemporary as Jeffrey Arnett’s (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014). Research on rites of passage also shows education, work, and family to be defining topics for many events that trigger transitions in life (McCarthy, Souza, & Jafaar, 2010). Nearly 40% of the events from the 74-items list belong to educational, work, or family contexts, and 25% to the ones suggested by the participants. A future quantitative study should support the preference for these groups of events, either for life scripts or life history.

From the Brazilian list of 40 events, 8 of them are clearly negative experiences; 12 events in the list of 74 events. Although valence analysis was not a goal of the present investigation, this somewhat low rate of negative events is consistent with valence analyses usually conducted in studies on life scripts. The most frequent events chosen to mark the life of a typical person are positive (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004; Janssen & Rubin, 2011; Tekcan et al., 2012).

We could discuss a variety of topics associated with the events analyzed. Authors from previous studies differ greatly on how to address the contents of events. Cultural idiosyncrasies or *Zeitgeist*-related events are the most discussed. For instance, Erdoğan et al. (2008) emphasized how circumcision and confirmation showed religious differences between Turkish and Danish participants. Rubin et al. (2009) highlighted the long trips before university underlined by Danish, but not American, students. We will now discuss cultural idiosyncrasies and *Zeitgeist*-related events (both related to the Brazilian sample), first-time events, and the decision not to create a category to include “others”.

First-time experiences for life scripts

It is noteworthy that the first occurrences of many events were pointed as important landmarks of a prototypical life of a Brazilian citizen. First-time

experience memories have, indeed, an important role in autobiographical memory. Conway (1990) posits that they “form the basis of more complex schematic knowledge structures which will eventually be constructed in memory as similar events are experienced” (pp. 91-92). First time memories are, consequently, highly accessible. Although the present study did not investigate personal life events, the ones chosen to mark the life of a typical person from the respondents’ culture do suggest the power of first-time events. The 74-item list includes eight clear first-time events and categories of events that include the first day of daycare, school or university, first grandchild, first word, first step, and learning something (consequently doing what was learned). In total, the literature, including the present study, share 16 first-time events in life scripts. Amongst the 40 Brazilian events, we identified 12 first-time events.

With these results at hand, it is possible to recommend that any future study on life events assess first-time experiences. One Brazilian study with approximately 600 participants investigated the occurrence of personal life events from a list of 53 provided by the author (Woyciekoski, 2012). Unfortunately, only two events from the list were specifically linked to its first occurrence: starting college and the beginning of a romantic relationship. Our results concur with previous studies on life scripts in terms of including first-time experiences as occurrences relevant to the life of a person from the respondent’s culture. Moreover, as indicated earlier, “beginning school” was among the five most cited events in life scripts from participants from Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, Turkey, and the US. Our sample clearly mentioned this event, and subsequent studies might confirm this preference with a frequency account.

Contributions from a Brazilian sample

“Attending political events” was probably mentioned because, during the time of the data collection, there were numerous political manifestations throughout Brazil in 2013, with thousands of citizens going to the streets to protest for political and economic improvements for the country. Entire families participated carrying flags and signs, wearing the countries colors (yellow, green, and blue) in a collective movement unseen since the early 1990’s when similar protests deposed a president. We hypothesize that “attending political events” might be related to the spirit of the year when data collection took place. The year of 2013 provided interesting events that could mark the life stories of many people, enough for respondents to indicate those as a life script event for the whole culture.

Another interesting life script event mentioned by Brazilians was “post-graduation courses”, i.e., *stricto sensu* and/or *lato sensu* courses, mostly paid, undertaken after finishing university, to acquire specialized knowledge, more experience for a activity (such as clinical psychology or neuropsychology), a better job or even a raise. In fact, for middle class citizens, a college degree is not enough anymore to ensure a good position in the job market. In this sense, in the same way as “college/university” is indicated in the previous literature frequently mentioned life script event, getting a “post-university degree” might be part of future lists of landmarks in the life of a common individual from this culture.

As for the 40 events to which we found no clear similarity with our data in the literature, some of them have been mentioned as culture-specific in previous life script studies. Thus is the case, for example, of “circumcision”, “confirmation”, and “war”. The Turkish studies by Erdoğan et al. (2008) and by Tekcan et al. (2012) reported the event of circumcision, not mentioned by neither by the Danish participants of Rubin et al. (2009) nor those of Bohn (2010), both of these, on the other hand, cited confirmation – an event absent in the Turkish (Erdoğan et al., 2008; Tekcan et al. 2012) and Dutch (Janssen & Rubin, 2011) data. It is worth pointing that war was only listed by the Erdoğan et al. (2008) study and linked to the life script of a 90 year-old person from Turkey. In this sense, the paradigm adopted in that study made it more likely for an elderly to evoke war to the script than for a newborn.

No other category

As mentioned earlier, we avoided to create a category named “other”, which would most probably be filled with events mentioned only once or events with rare contents, if we had adopted a quantitative approach as well. This procedure was a reasonable and necessary step taken by previous studies that engaged in quantitative analysis – a procedure to be undertaken in our next study on life scripts. It is, nonetheless, interesting to underline events that would probably be categorized as “others”, such as political involvement and acquiring a post-graduation degree.

Longer lists of events are a consequence of larger sampling, even when the analyst tries to be as concise as possible. Thematic analyses need to be consistent in homogeneity and heterogeneity. Moreover, as no quantitative analyses were undertaken, we decided not to limit the categories to three or four events, as done in previous studies. We are aware of the risk of some participants indicating events from their own lives instead of focusing on events for a typical life of

a cultural mate. Future quantitative studies will help to clarify this. For now, it is interesting, though unfortunate, that participants included in the life script events like “being robbed”, for this may represent how urban violence might have made its way into the expectations for the future of any given Brazilian newborn.

Methodological considerations

We are deeply aware of the methodological challenges of a qualitative study that provides a dataset of 2688 units. For such a large study as this, the thematic analysis carried out helped organizing data into 148 life script events, with a .72 Kappa interrater reliability. This value might not sound outstanding for other research designs, but is in fact solid and very adequate for our purpose.

In addition, we strove to grasp the meaning of many event descriptions and allocate them in the previously 104 listed events from the literature. We are not, consequently, immune to reconsiderations and to critiques and commentaries we expect from the scientific community. This will certainly help us move forward to better work with life events in life script paradigms.

Concluding remarks

Research on life scripts is a relatively novel subject in terms of thorough empirical investigations. There has been just over a decade of studies trying to build knowledge on the psychological process underlying life scripts and its role in people’s lives. There is great potential for contributions to personality development, identity formation, and to the understanding of the cultural idiosyncrasies that give color to humanity. The importance of autobiographical memories to the construction of identity and sense of self is long assumed (Prebble, Addis, & Tippett, 2013) as well as its functions of creating social connections and directing future behavior (Waters, 2014). Information about the life expectations of a given culture is essential to understanding how we build our story.

We aimed to contribute with data from a South-American sample, and found evidence for the importance of first experiences, of positive events, and of methodological care in analyzing life script events. Future studies will allow the investigation of prevalence, importance, valence, estimated age at the time of the event, gender differences, and age differences with Brazilian participants. Additionally, with the recent increase in the number of immigrants in our society, awareness of the specificities of a Brazilian life script and that of the new coming culture is as relevant to science it is to public policies.

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APPENDIX

Correspondence between events reported in the Brazilian sample and in the literature

<i>Events Reported in the Brazilian Sample</i>	<i>Events Reported in Literature</i>
"Bodas de ouro"	50th wedding anniversary
"15 anos", 18 years-old, "acquiring legal age"	Special birthdays
9 th grade graduation (or graduation ceremony), finish school	Finish 9th grade
Accident, injury	Accident, injury
Acquiring property, material conquests	Acquiring property
Adolescence, puberty, menarche	Adolescence, puberty, menarche
Adulthood	Adulthood, enter adulthood
Attending high-school	High-school
Attending school, studying	Go to school, continuing school
Baptism	Baptism
Beginning daycare, attending daycare	Begin daycare, daycare
Beginning high-school	Begin high-school, begin senior high-school
Beginning school	Beginning school
Beginning to talk	Begin talking, learning to talk
Beginning university, attend university	Attending college, college, university
Being able to reflect/think	Being able to reflect
Being breastfed	Being nursed
Being fired	Failure in career, losing one's job, problems at work
Buying a house	Buying a house
Child's marriage	Child's marriage
Child's university graduation	Child's college graduation
Childhood, playing, playing in childhood	Fun/games
Choosing a career	Decide on career
Conquering a life's dream	Fulfilling a life's dream
Death of a close person	Other's death, death of a friend
Developing mentally/physically across life	Developing mentally/physically across life, sitting, standing by oneself, learning to swim
Divorce, separation	Divorce, own divorce
Dying, death	Own death
Establishing in life	Getting settled
Financial hardship	Financial hardship
First birthday	First birthday
First friends	First play friend, first friend
First Holy Communion	First Holy Communion
First kiss	First kiss
First love rejection	First rejection
First payment/job	First job/payment/fulltime job/part-time job, earn first money
First sexual relation, having sex	First sex, first sexual experience
Good work promotion	Important promotion
Happiness	Happiness
Hating someone, opposite feelings	Having strong emotions
Having children, raising children, building own family	Children, having children
Having friends, good friends	Group of friends, having peers
Having grandchildren	Grandchildren
High-school graduation (or ceremony)	Finish senior high-school, high-school graduation
Illness	Illness, own illness
Independence	Independence

continue

Appendix (conclusion)

<i>Events Reported in the Brazilian Sample</i>	<i>Events Reported in Literature</i>
Learning first steps, walking, first steps	Begin walking, learning to walk
Learning how to drive (a car)	Begin driving, driver's license
Learning to read, reading, learning to write	Learning to read and write, reading
Leaving home	Children leave home, empty nest
Loss in family	Loss in family, grandparents' death
Love, being in love, falling in love	Falling in love
Major achievement	Major achievement
Marriage (also marriage proposal)	marriage, meeting spouse
Military service	Military service
Moving (address)	Moving
Old age, ageing, first ageing symptoms	Getting/growing old, old age, menopause
Owning a pet	Owning a pet
Own birth	Own birth
Parents' death	Parents' death
Questioning the meaning of life	Asking questions about one's own life
Retirement	Retirement
Riding a bicycle	Learning to cycle
Self-knowledge	Discovering self
Serious illness, hospital admittance	Serious disease/illness, operation
Settling on career, financial stability	Settle on career
Sibling birth	Sibling birth, siblings
Stable/serious romantic relationship	Moving in with somebody
The "right" job	Find the right job, the "right" job
Traveling, travel without the parents	Going abroad, long trip/journey
Unhappy love	Unhappy love
University entrance exam (or exam approval)	College entrance exam, university exam
University graduation (or ceremony)	College graduation
Working, entering job market	Career, work life, get a job, job application

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