

# The Normativity of Life Scripts and Its Relation with Life Story Events across Cultures and Sub-Cultures

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## Abstract

This study explored the normativity of individual life scripts and their relation to actual life story memories across countries (Turkey, Germany) and subcultures (urban versus rural, of migrant versus of indigenous descent). Young adults from provincial Karabük and metropolitan Istanbul (Turkey), second generation Turkish migrants and Germans from Frankfurt a.M. (Germany) provided both their individual versions of the life script and seven most important personal memories. We expected the agreement on the life script, its normativity, and correspondingly its guiding influence on the selection of life story memories to correlate positively with a collectivistic, negatively with an individualistic cultural orientation. We thus expected life script normativity to be highest in provincial Karabük, less in Istanbul, still less in Turkish migrants in Germany, and finally lowest in native Germans. The study basically confirmed expectations for the normativity of life scripts, but not for the normativity of most important memories. We conclude that the normativity of life scripts is influenced by the individualist versus collectivist cultural orientation.

**Keywords:** Life script, Cross-culture, Sub-culture, Life story, Normativity

The cultural life script is defined as “culturally shared expectation as to the order and timing of life events in a prototypical life course” (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004, p.427). It helps organizing our life story by presenting a basic grid of expected events and their normative timing. This life script definition follows what Habermas and Bluck (2000) termed the cultural concept of biography, suggesting a set of biographically salient events with related age norms (Neugarten, Moore & Lowe, 1965). Berntsen and Rubin (2004) added the notion of script as the normative sequence of events or actions (Schank & Abelson, 1977). According to the life script account, the culturally normative transitional events occur mostly in adolescence and young adulthood, and they are intrinsically positive because following cultural norms is valued positively. This set of positive transitional events serves as a framework for recalling important autobiographical memories and for determining which events should become part of the life story (Habermas & Bluck, 2000).

In their initial study, Berntsen and Rubin (2004) asked Danish university students to imagine an ordinary infant of their own gender and to write down seven most important events that are most likely to take place in the infant’s future life. They also asked the participants to estimate the prevalence, valence, importance, as well as the approximate age of these events. Events that had been nominated by at least 4% of the participants were retained in a list of 36 Danish life script events. Having children, marriage, beginning school and college were the most frequently mentioned events. Berntsen and Rubin (2004) confirmed the three fundamental characteristics of the cultural life script: (1) there is a strong cultural agreement on a life script, which is (2) composed of dominantly positive events with consensual specific age estimates mostly from ages 15 to 30, and (3) only few negative events with no consensual age estimates.

Erdoğan, Baran, Avlar, Taş, and Tekcan (2008) replicated Berntsen and Rubin’s study in Turkey. There was a significant overlap of the Turkish with the Danish life script, with a few specifically Turkish life script events such as military service and circumcision. Also leaving home was evaluated negatively by Turks, but positively by Danes. In addition, the Turkish life script included more events rated as negative (Erdoğan et al., 2008).

Other studies assessed life scripts from different cultures such as Germany (Habermas, 2007), the US (undergraduates - Rubin, Berntsen & Hutson, 2009; African-Americans – Coleman, 2014), Japan (Janssen, Uemiyama & Naka, 2014), the Netherlands (Janssen & Rubin, 2011), Malaysia (Haq & Hasking, 2010), and Qatar (Ottsen & Berntsen, 2013). These studies provide strong evidence for the existence of strong national life scripts with reasonable cultural or religious differences such as performing the pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslims (Haq & Hasking, 2010) or Seijinshiki ceremony for Japanese culture (Janssen, Uemiyama & Naka, 2014). Recently Zaragoza Scherman (2013) re-analyzed the results of seven studies from four countries: Denmark, the USA, Turkey, and the Netherlands. She indicated that the most popular three events across all studies were “having children”, “getting married”, and “beginning school”. All these studies including Scherman’s re-analysis supply robust evidence regarding the basic theoretical assumptions of the life script account, a preponderance of positive events in the second and third decades of life with only few non-normative, negative events without consensual age norms.

### **Development of the Normativity of Life Scripts**

A number of developmental studies suggest that the knowledge of the cultural life script is acquired mostly between late childhood and mid-adolescence, which implies that the normativity of individual life scripts increases across adolescence (Bohn & Berntsen, 2008, 2013; Habermas, 2007). Bohn and Berntsen (2008) proposed to measure the normativity of individual

life scripts with a *typicality score*. The more technical definition will be provided in the methods section.

Coleman (2014) conducted an intriguing study with African-Americans as an example of an ethnic minority. He argued that disadvantaged minority groups such as African-Americans experience a greater prevalence of negative events. Therefore he expected less idealized, more negative individual life scripts in African-Americans in comparison with cultural life scripts of Danish (Berntsen & Rubin, 2004), Turkish (Erdoğan et al., 2008), and American undergraduates (Rubin et al., 2009) and with Dutch adults (Janssen & Rubin, 2011). However, the prevalence of negative events in life scripts was similar to the other studies, but African Americans agreed less on a cultural life script compared to other cultural groups. Moreover, the number of event categories in individual life scripts and the number of events not belonging to the cultural life script were higher than in other groups. These results imply that the individual life scripts of African-Americans as a discriminated-against minority are richer in terms of event diversity and displays less agreement on life script events.

### **Life Script and Life Story Events**

The cultural life script not only guides us by presenting a prototypical life course, but also influences autobiographical memory when we are asked for important personal life events, also termed life story events. A number of studies reported a remarkable overlap between cultural life scripts and life story events (Glück & Bluck, 2007; Thomsen & Berntsen, 2008). When people were asked for important life events with positive and negative valence, similarly with the life scripts, people tended to remember positive events mostly from early adulthood (Schroots & Assink, 2005; Demiray, Gülgöz & Bluck, 2009), whereas negative personal events, given their non-normative nature, ranged randomly across all periods of life (Collins, Pillemer, Ivcevic & Gooze, 2007).

Age seems to be an important factor that effects the overlap between life scripts and life events. Bohn (2010) and Tekcan et al. (2008) found a larger overlap between the cultural life script and personal life events in older than in younger adults. Zaragoza Scherman (2013) suggested that the results might be affected by the fact that the younger age groups have not yet personally experienced most of the cultural life script events. However, older children and early adolescents learn all events from the cultural life script at the same rate, independently from whether they might have already experienced them themselves or not (Habermas, 2007).

Rubin, Berntsen and Hutson (2009) conducted a cross-cultural study of the overlap between the cultural life script and the most important life story events derived from Danish and American participants. The overlap was higher in the Danes (70%) than in the Americans (46%). The authors suggested that the cultural diversity in USA might have led to less overlap between the cultural life script and personal life story events.

### **Cultural Differences Possibly Motivating Differences in Life Scripts**

Past studies show certain differences between national life scripts that are rooted in different religious and cultural rituals and laws, such as the pilgrimage to Mecca for Muslims (Haque & Hasking, 2010) or military service and circumcision for Turkish life scripts (Erdoğan et al., 2008). The findings also imply some cultural differences in the normativity of individual life scripts (Coleman, 2014) and in the overlap between life scripts and life events (Rubin, Berntsen & Huston, 2009; Umanath & Berntsen, 2013). Past studies focused on cultural differences in life scripts that had been mostly derived from well-educated participants living in industrialized urban centers. On the other hand different subcultures, different social classes, and urban versus

rural areas within the same country may have different cultural values and concepts of biography (Bluck & Habermas, 2000; Taras, Kirkman & Steel, 2010). For example, we can assume that a provincial life style is more conservative and offers closer interpersonal relations with mutual responsibilities that influence individuals' lives in comparison to an urban life style. On the other hand, urban life is characterized by autonomy-related social expectations and offers more alternative life styles (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005).

When comparing entire cultures, there may be systematic differences beyond specific rituals and national laws. Individualistic cultures in comparison to collectivistic cultures display a wide variety of social expectations and life styles. For example, individualistic cultural cultures, such as the US, the UK and Germany (Hofstede, 1997), give greater importance to the individuals own needs and emphasize autonomy than to relatedness to others (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005). In contrast, collectivistic cultures, such as Turkey, Arab and Asian countries (Hofstede, 1997), see the needs of the group, e.g. the family, to be more important than the needs of individuals (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2005).

Kağıtçıbaşı (2012) suggested a theoretical framework. She states that in addition to the individualistic demands of Western culture and relational characteristics of collectivistic cultures, the consistent process of globalization including socio-cultural and economic changes associated with urbanization, industrialization and migration create new lifestyles with both individualistic and collectivistic social demands. Kağıtçıbaşı (2013) distinguished three family types based on three kinds of sociocultural context. The interdependence family model is especially common in collectivistic cultures and rural areas. Children play an important economic role by contributing to the household and securing their parents' old age. Therefore this family model has an obedience oriented child rearing style that generates a related self, characterized by the importance of continuation of the collectivistic family values. On the other hand the independence family model is common among individualistic cultures and urban areas. The permissive parenting style emphasizes the importance of self-reliance and autonomy that leads to the development of an autonomous self. Lastly, the emotional interdependence family model is common among urban regions of collectivistic cultures and migrant minority groups from collectivistic cultures in the individualistic Western world. This model creates an autonomous-related self. As a consequence of urban Western life style and a collectivistic culture, both autonomy and maintaining close emotional relations are important (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2013). The studies conducted with Turkish migrants in Belgium (Phalet & Claeys, 1993) and in Germany (Phalet & Schonpflug, 2001) supported Kağıtçıbaşı's suggestion and reported that migrants tend to display both individualistic and collectivistic self-characteristics.

In parallel with Kağıtçıbaşı's model, Wang (2013) proposed that the culturally desired sense of self shapes also the construction of our autobiographical memories through child-parent conversations. Accordingly, in a conversation on personal past events, European American parents try to support the child's sense of an autonomous self by focusing on the child's own actions and predilections. In this way, the sense of being distinctive and unique can be a central part of personal memories and hence autobiographical self. On the other hand, especially East Asian parents emphasize the social-relational context more, contributing to the construction of an autobiographical self which is centered on social interactions and collectivity.

Taking into account these findings, we suggest that every society or culture is composed of various sub-cultures with possibly not only differing living conditions, but also with different mental representations of a prototypical life course. We believe that the existing literature

regarding life script normativity and its reflections on actual life events based on the life scripts derived from well-educated urban populations generalizes findings to entire societies or cultures without taking into account the intra-societal and subcultural differences.

### **The Present Study**

The aim of this study is to explore the normativity of individual life scripts and their relation to actual life stories in subcultures such as potentially bi-cultural migrants and young people living in urban versus rural areas. Furthermore we explore the role of individuality versus relatedness which might mediate the effects of culture on life scripts.

Based on the idea that the urban life style offers more alternatives regarding different life styles and life courses in comparison to the traditional structure of provincial life style we expected more normative individual life scripts and more normatively formed lives in provincial living conditions in comparison to urban conditions within the same culture. More specifically, we expected more normative individual life scripts in a Turkish rural than in a Turkish urban population.

Individualistic cultures such as the German culture view the person as a unique unit and emphasize the importance of self-actualization and making individual life choices. However, in collectivistic cultures such as the Turkish culture, social expectations regarding a normal life course may be more clearly defined and may lead to more social pressure on individuals. In a parallel way, based on Kağıtcıbası's theoretical framework, the state of being a migrant or of migrant descent in Western countries affords both an individualistic and relatedness orientation, comparable to the urban Turkish population. We add that on the other hand, unlike the urban Turkish population, the Turkish migrant population has to integrate two different cultural systems regarding a normal life course, and that individual members of the group might lean more towards a Turkish or a German life script, creating some additional within-group heterogeneity. Therefore we expected migrants' offspring to have more varied individual life scripts and more varied, less normatively formed lives as represented by actual important life events in comparison to the urban Turkish population. Going along with Kağıtcıbası's prediction we expected German-descent Germans to have the least normative life scripts and life events. However a very high degree of within-group heterogeneity in the migrant group might also lead to the least normative, i.e. similar life scripts and life events in the migrant instead of the German group.

Thus, we tested two major hypotheses: 1) we expected more agreement on, and thus a more normative individual life script and 2) more overlap between individual life story events and the cultural life script respectively in provincial Turkey than in urban Turkey, than in Turkish migrants' offspring in Germany, than in Germans.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

We studied four groups of students of professional schools between the ages of 20 and 30. The provincial Turkish group was from Karabük at the Black Sea, a medium-sized provincial center. Participants had been living with their parents in nearby rural areas before starting professional school in Karabük. The urban Turkish group was composed of young adults living in Istanbul, whose parents or grandparents had migrated to Istanbul from various rural regions of Turkey. The participants were the first generation who had been born in Istanbul. We restricted the Istanbul group to the first generation born in Istanbul to make sure the students had grown up in Istanbul, excluding the very large student population who moved to Istanbul from rural

regions to study at the university. Also we thereby rendered the group more comparable to the German-Turkish group, with parents migrating from a rural region. The third group was composed of second generation Turkish migrants living in Frankfurt a.M. in Germany. Finally the last group consisted of German participants who were born and living in Frankfurt. Participants studying social work, elderly care, informatics, child development, textile technology, and other subjects were approached via flyers in professional schools or announcements in class rooms both in Germany and Turkey.

Istanbul, Karabük and migrant groups were each composed of 104 participants (52 males, 52 females), whereas the German group was composed of 103 participants (51 males, 52 females) due to incomplete data. Age did not differ significantly between groups,  $F(3, 411) = 2.508, p = .053, \eta^2 = .018$ , with mean ages 22.84 years ( $SD = 2.10$ ) for Karabük, 23.12 ( $SD = 2.31$ ) for Istanbul, 23.54 ( $SD = 2.45$ ) for migrants and 23.63 ( $SD = 2.57$ ) for Germans. The mean years of education of parents however did differ significantly,  $F(3, 409) = 46.01, p < .001, \eta^2 = .252$ . Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests indicated that parents of the German group ( $M = 12.89, SD = 2.78$ ) were more educated than those of the migrants ( $M = 10.50, SD = 3.10$ ), of the Istanbul group ( $M = 9.48, SD = 3.09$ ) and of the Karabük group ( $M = 8.24, SD = 2.78$ ). Moreover parents of the migrant and Istanbul group were more educated than those of the Karabük group.

### Procedure

All data were collected by the first author, who is a native Turk from Istanbul and speaks German fluently, and by two native German-Turkish research assistants who were born in Germany. Some participants (24% in each group) were interviewed individually in an office assigned by the respective Turkish school or at the Goethe University Frankfurt. The other participants filled out the questionnaires in groups in their classrooms. Migrant participants were free to choose the questionnaire language, 88 % of whom chose German, the others Turkish. Following a socio-demographic form, participants provided a life script. They were asked to imagine an ordinary infant of their own gender and cultural background, and to write down seven most important events that were most probably to take place in her or his life. Participants also estimated a culturally expected appropriate age for each event and rated the events' valence with the help of a 7 point-Likert scale, 1 labelled 'very negative' and 7 'very positive' (only 76% of participants). Finally, participants were asked to turn to their own personal life story and to report the seven most important personal memories from their entire life as well as their respective valence as either positive, negative, or neutral.

**Content coding of events.** All nominated events in both the life script and the life story task were categorized, using the categories used by Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) and by Habermas (2007). Additional event categories were introduced in case the kind of event was mentioned by at least 4% of participants in any of the groups. Events that were mentioned by less than 4% of participants in all groups were scored as 'other'. A total of 21 event categories were added for the life script answers and a total of 26 event categories were added to describe the personal life events. Using these categories, 24 % of all life script and life story events were coded independently by the first author and one other coder. Cohen's kappa based on all of the participants was .95 for life script events and .89 for life story events. The remaining life script and life story events were coded by the first author.

The valence of seven most important personal memories of 96 participants was coded as positive, negative, or neutral. Average measure intraclass correlation based on 96 participants

was  $r_{ic} = .97$ . Disagreements were resolved by discussion. The remaining 319 participants were asked to evaluate the valence of important life story events themselves.

**Calculating the similarity of individual life scripts and of individual life events to cultural life scripts.** To establish how much each individual's life script and personal life story respectively corresponded to the normative cultural life scripts (termed life script typicality and overlap between personal life story and cultural life script), we compared them to two kinds of cultural life scripts. First, we used a Turkish cultural life script collected by Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) from 200 University students (ages 18 to 34) in Istanbul for our Karabük and Istanbul group, and a German cultural life script collected by Habermas (2007) from 149 university students (ages 18 to 30) in Frankfurt for our German group.<sup>1</sup> For the migrant group, we calculated the similarity to the Turkish and the German life script as well as the mean values of both. For all three we obtained relatively similar results and therefore decided to use the mean values of the two life script typicality scores based on the two cultural life scripts.

A cultural life script is established by including all events that are mentioned by at least 4% of all participants in the original samples. A life script event is defined as any event that is part of the life script. The individual life script typicality score is calculated by summing up those cultural life script events nominated by the individual, each weighted by its relative frequency in a normative sample, divided by the number of events named (usually 7) and multiplied by 100. The score may thus range from 0 to 100. A high score indicates a high degree of overlap of an individual life script with the cultural life script.

The advantage of using the life scripts from Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) and Habermas (2007) was that they are based on fairly large samples. However these life scripts are not equally representative for the four subcultures we studied here. First of all, Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) derived the life script from students studying in Istanbul in one of the best universities in Turkey, implying a quite different socio-demographical background from that of the participants studying at professional schools in Karabük and Istanbul. Furthermore the migrant group encounters two different cultural life scripts at the same time and thus presents unique demographic characteristics that can be easily overlooked by using ordinary Turkish or German life scripts as norms. For these reasons we also calculated a second set of life script typicality scores based on the cultural life script derived from the one of our four groups to which the respective participant belonged.

Following the way we calculated life script typicality scores above, we also calculated a weighted score for the overlap between individual life events and life script to determine how much a life followed the cultural life script. We weighed all life events that corresponded to a life script event by the relative frequency of that event in the normative cultural life script sample, summed them up, divided them by the number of life story events nominated (usually 7), and multiplied that by 100, resulting again in a score that could vary between 0 and 100.

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<sup>1</sup> This life script was not published in 2007. It included 71.8% beginning school, 61.1% having children, 60.4% marriage, 51.0% falling in love/first partner, 47.7% graduate from high school, 35.6% first job, 32.9% beginning daycare, 28.9% first sex, 22.8% College, 22.8% leaving home, 19.5% puberty, 18.1% other's death, 15.4% parent's death, 13.4% retirement, 12.1% settle on career, 11.4% own death, 10.1% first kiss, 9.4% driver's license, 6.7% first friend, 6.0% serious disease/accident, 6.0% quarrel, 5.4% having grandchildren, 4.7% divorce, 4.0% menopause, 4.0% not severe illness/accident, 4.0% partner's death.

## Results

We first describe the specific life scripts of each group and then test the hypotheses, first group differences in the normativity of individual life scripts, then in the overlap between individual life story events and cultural life scripts. The level of significance was set at  $\alpha=.05$ . We conducted ANOVAs with linear contrasts to test our hypotheses.

### Cultural Life Scripts of the Four Different Groups

Table 1 shows the life script events and expected age-at-event reported by participants in each group. Findings were consistent with the basic theoretical assumptions of life script theory. All four life scripts were composed of dominantly positive events, and life script events were estimated to occur mainly between 15 and 30 years of age. Moreover, to describe the valence of life script events we counted ratings of 1,2 and 3 as negative, 4 as neutral, and 5,6 and 7 as positive. We calculated the percentages of positively evaluated life script events, resulting in 80% for Karabük, 67% for Istanbul, 81% for Migrants, and 78% for Germans.

However, the number of event categories differed by groups. The German group presented the richest diversity of events with 32 categories, followed by the migrants with 28 and Istanbul with 23 categories each, and the Karabük group last with 21 categories. The overlap between these four life scripts and the life scripts derived from Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) were 52% of events for Karabük, 65% for Istanbul, and 46% for migrants. Similarly, 66 % of life script events of the German group and 61% of the migrant group overlapped with life scripts collected by Habermas (2007).

### The Normativity of Life Script Events across Groups

The first hypothesis expected the most normative individual life scripts in Karabük, second most in Istanbul, third most in the migrant, and least in the German group. The normativity of life scripts was assessed by a variant (scaled to a range between 0 and 100) of the typicality score suggested by Bohn and Berntsen (2008) as well as by an additional measure of within-group agreement suggested by Tekcan and colleagues (2012). Since we expected a linear effect, we tested linear contrasts.

We first present life script typicality scores based on the student samples of Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) and Habermas (2007), then those based on the life scripts of our own four groups (cf. Table 1). Figure 1 shows no linear trend for the life script typicality scores based on the normative samples collected by Erdoğan and Habermas (averaging the scores resulting from both life scripts for the migrant group), and the corresponding linear contrast was not significant,  $F(3,411)=0.008$ ,  $p=.929$ ,  $\eta^2=.000$ . However, hypothesis 1 was confirmed (see Figure 1) when calculating life script typicality scores on the basis of our four groups for Karabük, Istanbul, migrant and German groups, with a significant linear contrast,  $F(3, 411) =47.30$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2=.103$ . Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests indicated that all groups differed significantly from each other except for the Istanbul and migrant group.

A second measure of how strong life script norms are in a group is the degree of agreement on the most frequently named events (Tekcan et al., 2012). For each participant we calculated which percentage of individual life script nominations belonged to the seven most frequent events in the respective own group. An ANOVA showed a significant linear trend between groups,  $F(1, 411) =12.10$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2=.029$  (see Figure 2). Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests indicated that the percentage of seven most frequent events was higher in the Karabük than in the German group.



### The Overlap of Individual Life Story Events with Cultural Life Scripts

Table 2 presents the relative frequencies of the seven most important personal memories, termed life story events. The number of life story event categories named at least 4% of participants was 30 in the Karabük, 32 in the German, 33 in the Istanbul and 35 in the migrant group. The percentage of life story events that overlapped with the Turkish life script of Erdoğan et al. (2008) was 47% in the Karabük, 40% in the Istanbul, and 40% in the migrant group. Similarly 53% of life story events in the German group and 37% in the migrant group overlapped with the German life script of Habermas (2007). Moreover, we calculated the percentages of life story event overlap with each group's own life script, resulting in 38% for Karabük, 36% for Istanbul, 46% for Migrants, and 47% for Germans.

Our second hypothesis expected to find most overlap between the life script and life story events in Karabük, then in Istanbul, then in the migrant group, and least in the German group. First we used the life scripts collected by Erdoğan and colleagues (2008) and Habermas (2007), again averaging the scores resulting from both life scripts for the migrant group. Then we used our four groups as cultural life scripts for each member of each respective group for a second indicator. Figure 3 does not show the expected linear trends for either of the two typicality scores. Linear contrasts for overlap scores based on Erdoğan et al. (2008) and Habermas (2007) norms were significant, but opposite to the expected direction,  $F(3, 411) = 61.51, p < .001, \eta^2 = .130$ , as were those based on our four groups,  $F(3, 411) = 201.94, p < .001, \eta^2 = .329$  (see Figure 3). Post hoc Tukey's HSD tests indicated that overlap scores based on Erdoğan et al. (2008) and Habermas (2007) norms in the German group were higher than in the migrants, in the Istanbul group and in the Karabük group. Moreover overlap scores in the migrant group was higher than in the Karabük group. On the other hand, post hoc Tukey's HSD tests indicated that overlap scores based on our four groups' norms in the German and in the migrant groups were higher than in the Istanbul group and in the Karabük group. Additionally, overlap scores in the Istanbul group was significantly higher than in the Karabük group.

One possible explanation for these unexpected results is that groups differed in the amount of negative life events named, most of which are not part of the life script. To explore this alternative explanation we conducted two ANOVAs with the proportion of life events consisting of negative non-life script events, finding a significant group difference based on the Erdoğan /Habermas norms,  $F(3, 411) = 16.79, p < .001, \eta^2 = .109$ . According to the post hoc Tukey's HSD tests, mean percentages of negative life events in the Karabük and Istanbul groups were higher than in the German group and Migrants. The second ANOVA based on the cultural life scripts of our four groups,  $F(3, 411) = 44.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = .245$ ; in the post hoc tests, all groups differed significantly from each other except for the migrant and German groups (see Figure 4).

To explore whether taking into account the role of the negativity of life events might allow confirming hypothesis 2, we added non-life script negativity as a control variable in the initial AN(C)OVAs. The effect sizes of the earlier linear trends between our groups which had been in the direction opposite to the hypothesis were cut in half, but continued to be substantial in size and highly significant both for the life story events overlap with the Erdoğan/Habermas norms,  $F(1, 410) = 32.03, p < .001, \eta^2 = .072$ , as well as for the for the life story event overlap with the cultural life scripts of our four groups,  $F(1, 410) = 87.18, p < .001, \eta^2 = .175$ .<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> As stated above we classified the valence of life story events of the 96 participants and the remaining participants reported their own evaluation. In order to explore whether the different source of evaluation impacted on our results, we replicated statistical analyses only with the participants who themselves provided the valence of the life

## Discussion

The aim of this study had been to take a closer look at life script normativity and the corresponding relation between life script and life story events in terms of different sociocultural contexts, including different degrees of urbanization and different cultures. We will first discuss the results regarding the normativity of individual life scripts, then the results concerning the overlap between life scripts and actual life story events, then differences in the content of life scripts and important life events between the four groups, to finally note limitations and spell out implications of our findings.

### Cultural and Subcultural Variations in the Normativity of Life Scripts

Our first hypothesis expected the normativity of individual life scripts to decrease the less related and the more autonomous the dominant orientation of a group is. We thus expected individual life scripts to be most normative in Karabük, less so in Istanbul, still less in the Turkish migrants' offspring in Germany, and the least in the Germans. We assessed the normativity of life scripts by their similarity to cultural life scripts and by within-group agreement. When using cultural life scripts collected in earlier studies (Erdoğan et al., 2008; Habermas, 2007) to determine the normativity of individual life scripts, groups did not differ from each other. However both when using each respective group's own collective subcultural life script to determine individual life scripts' normativity and when using within-group homogeneity of life scripts the expected group differences were confirmed. The samples in both of the earlier studies had been quite different in social composition from our groups, as was also evidenced by the low typicality scores. We suggest that the failure to find group differences was due to the lack of representativity of the two normative samples for the entire respective culture. In contrast, the other measure of normativity, which used each respective group as norm, did show the expected linear decrease of normativity of life scripts between Karabük, Istanbul, Turkish migrants, and German groups.

Consistent with our hypothesis, these results imply that the conservative and traditional social context in Karabük as an example of a provincial region led to more normative representations of an ordinary life. On the other hand the urban social context with more alternative life style choices presents less normative life scripts. Similarly, as expected, the typicality scores suggest more normative life scripts in the Istanbul than in the German group, which may again reflect differences in the collectivistic vs. individualistic orientations in these groups.

Finally, although our overall hypothesis was confirmed by the significant linear trend between our groups, the normativity of migrants' offspring life script was comparable to that of the Istanbul group and greater than that of the German group. This supports Kagitçibasi's theoretical framework which equates the urban and migrant collectivistic groups in terms of a combination of related and autonomous orientation. It did not support our speculation that the state of being a migrant requires integrating two different prototypical life courses, and that this combination and a possible heterogeneity in leaning more towards either Turkish or German norms might lead to less normative life scripts in comparison to the urban Turkish population.

### The Relation between Life Story Events and Cultural Life Scripts

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story events themselves, with little difference to tests run on the entire sample, respectively for Erdoğan/Habermas norms,  $F(3,315) = 11.61, p < .001, \eta^2 = .100$ , and for the life story event overlap with the cultural life scripts of our four groups,  $F(3,315) = 17.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = .140$ .

The second hypothesis expected that the normativity of actual personal lives, i.e. the overlap between important personal events and the respective cultural life script, would follow the same pattern as the normativity of life scripts, namely that the more autonomous and less related the (sub-)culture is, the less lives are oriented towards a prototypical or normative life script. We thus expected a decrease in the overlap of life story events with the cultural life script from Karabük to Istanbul to Migrant and to German groups. As for hypothesis 1, the first overlap indicator was based on life scripts derived from Erdoğan et al. (2008) and Habermas (2007), and a second indicator was based on the cultural life scripts of each respective group. For both of these norms, we found a linear effect, but opposite to our hypothesis. The Germans' life story events overlapped most, Migrants followed, and the least overlap was found in Istanbul and Karabük. In spite of the highly normative representation of an ordinary life course, the Karabük and Istanbul groups reported more life story events that did not correspond to the narrowly defined life scripts. On the other hand, in the German and migrant groups the more heterogeneous life scripts served more as a guideline for selecting the most important life story events.

Only part of the opposite linear trend was accounted for by the far greater percentage of negative non-life script events in the two Turkish groups. Apparently the typicality of the normative representation of an ordinary life does not predict the typicality of most important life story events. This suggests that the relation between life scripts and life story is more complicated than we had initially presumed.

The selection of by far more negative life events by the groups from Turkey may be influenced by various factors. First, the ethnic identity of the interviewer might have played a role in facilitating self-disclosure of negative life events for the participants in Karabük and Istanbul. However the participants in the migrant group also come from a similar ethnic and cultural background, but reported significantly less negative events than their counterparts in Turkey.

Alternatively, cultural display rules might inhibit or facilitate talking about negative personal events. In individualistic cultures expressing unhappiness is seen as sign of a personal failure and violates cultural norms. Therefore members of individualistic cultures tend to control the expression of unhappiness and to overemphasize positive experiences. In collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, sadness is seen as a powerless emotion and expressed more easily because it does not present a threat to group cohesion (Safdar et al., 2009; Matsumoto, Takeuchi, Andayani, Kouznetsova & Krupp, 1998). Thus the dominance of negative life events in Karabük and Istanbul might be a consequence of cultural display rules. Unfortunately we did not measure display rules and personal patterns of emotion expression.

Finally, the dominance of negative life events in Karabük and Istanbul group may be related to actually more unstable living conditions and comparably less state support in situations of need. Furthermore, the fact that in spite of the larger amount of negative life story events in Karabük and Istanbul, the dominance of positive events in these groups' life scripts supports the idea that the life script is independent from experience-based learning.

Moreover, given the fact, that 88 % of our Migrant participants chose to use German to fill in the questionnaire, the choice of language might play a role in the overlap scores of our migrant group. Wang (2013) indicates that in bilinguals language affects the accessibility of autobiographical events by triggering a specific cultural belief system. Wang, Shao & Li (2010) conducted a study with English-Chinese bilingual adolescents and asked to report

autobiographical events either in English or in Chinese. The participants interviewed in English described themselves in a more autonomous terms in comparison to the participants interviewed in Chinese. Thus although our participants were free to choose the language, the language chosen might have influenced the overlap scores by triggering autobiographical memories more in accordance with the culture of the language chosen.

### **Differences in the Content of Cultural Life Scripts and Life Story Events**

The Turkish and German life scripts showed similarities with life scripts found in earlier studies in young adult samples from Turkey and Germany. Across all groups and studies, the most frequently mentioned events were marriage, having children, beginning school, and university (Erdoğan et al., 2008; Tekcan et al., 2012; Habermas, 2007). On the other hand, there are some interesting discrepancies with earlier studies. For example, unlike earlier findings and unlike the other groups in this study, in the Karabük group settling on a career was among the most frequently mentioned events. This may reflect both financial concerns in the families and the importance of economic expectations in this socio-cultural context. Probably as a reflection of the conservative social norms of a provincial region, events regarding sexuality such as first partner and first period were reported in Karabük less frequently than in Istanbul or not at all. In addition, despite their low frequencies, supporting/obeying the family and supporting the child's future were two categories that were specific to the Karabük group and had not been present in earlier Turkish life scripts (Erdoğan et al., 2008; Tekcan et al., 2012), probably reflecting expectations typical of the interdependence family model, which is common in collectivistic cultures and rural areas (Kağıtçıbaşı 2013).

The life story events also support the interpretation that the groups differ in terms of autonomous vs related orientation. For example, family quarrel was among the most frequently reported life story events in the Karabük, Istanbul and migrant groups. But the high frequency of family quarrel need not reflect an actually higher frequency of quarrels in Turkish than in German families. Taking into account the interpersonal and collectivistic cultural background, family-related issues play a central role in Turkish life style. Therefore the more frequent mentioning of family quarrel as a most important life story event may rather reflect the central role of the family in people's lives. Similarly, other events involving interpersonal relations such as family support, problems with friends, and spending most of childhood separate from the family were the life story events that appeared only in Turkish groups including migrants. In a parallel way, other life story events emphasizing the interpersonal relations such as other's death, health problems in family and the importance of social relations were more common in Turkish groups.

Also the life script of the German group differed somewhat from the earlier life script. Travelling, baptism, confirmation, and owning house as well as finding own identity and problems in romantic relations were nominated here but had been absent in the earlier German life script (Habermas, 2007). Religion-related events such as confirmation and baptism as well as leaving home as a sign of autonomy were reported only by the German group. On the other hand, as expected military service and circumcision were specific for the Turkish groups. In addition, religious duties such as pilgrimage or namaz were specific to the migrant group. This might imply the importance of religion as a part of a cultural identity in a bi-cultural context.

Interestingly, travel and driver's license were the two items shared only by the two Frankfurt groups both in the life script and the life story tasks. In addition, other education-related events such as beginning daycare, high school graduation, and secondary school appeared only in life scripts and life story events of these two groups living in Germany. We

might interpret these commonalities partly as a reflection of the integration of two cultures for Migrants and partly as a consequence of a shared role of the national education system for the Germans' and Migrants' lives. Therefore we can assume that in Germany the educational system plays a very important role in the representation of a prototypical life as well as in people's actual life stories.

Another remarkable finding was group differences in the age estimation regarding some of the life script events. The youngest estimated age for marriage was reported in Karabük ( $M=24.24$ ,  $SD=3.45$ ), followed by Istanbul ( $M=24.63$ ,  $SD=2.58$ ) and migrants ( $M=27.21$ ,  $SD=6.42$ ). The oldest age estimation for marriage was reported by the Germans ( $M=28.44$ ,  $SD=3.73$ ), with similar differences regarding the settling on a career and having children.

### **Limitations and Implications**

One of the important limitations of our study is the small size and educational homogeneity of our sample. In future studies, larger and more representative samples should be used, which would also allow a more differentiated measurement of within-culture variability. The migrant group should probably be oversampled, because it displays a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics such as educational level, reasons for migrating, and ethnic identity. Secondly, in addition to cross-cultural differences, we wanted to explore the effect of urbanization on life script typicality and overlap between life scripts and life story events by comparing Karabük with Istanbul. However Karabük is also an urban center, although a provincial one. Therefore an even better or more extreme comparison would be between a metropolis like Istanbul and villages in a rural region. In addition, another limitation of our study might derive from the lack of counterbalancing the sequence of presentation. We always collected first life scripts and then life story events, because our primary interest was in normative life scripts not influenced by actual individual lives. The main aim of our study, comparing life script normativity and the overlap between life script and life story events across four groups, was not affected by this, because the order was identical for all four groups. However the normativity of life events may have been increased by this procedure..

Furthermore, we believe that future studies regarding potential differences in life scripts of other sub-cultures or minority groups as well as of factors potentially mediating between life scripts and life events, such as depressive tendencies and the actual adversity of living conditions will deepen our theoretical understanding of the role of the life script. Finally, studying the trans-generational transference of life scripts in cultures and sub-cultures such as in migrants and factors influencing it would be another important contribution to broaden our understanding of the intersection between culture, family, and individual memory (Fivush, Habermas, Waters & Zaman, 2011; Wang, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

Our study suggests that cultural and also sub-cultural differences such as urbanization and migration are closely related to differences in life scripts and especially to the normative power of life scripts. We maintain that studies of cultural life scripts need to take into account intra-cultural variations of life scripts. This would require either defining a national cultural life script in a representative sample, and not just students, or to compare individual life scripts to the relevant subcultural life script as we attempted to do in this study. Secondly, this study also implies that the normative value of life scripts in a specific culture or subculture does not predict how strongly the life script actually influences the selection of life events for a life story.

## Acknowledgment

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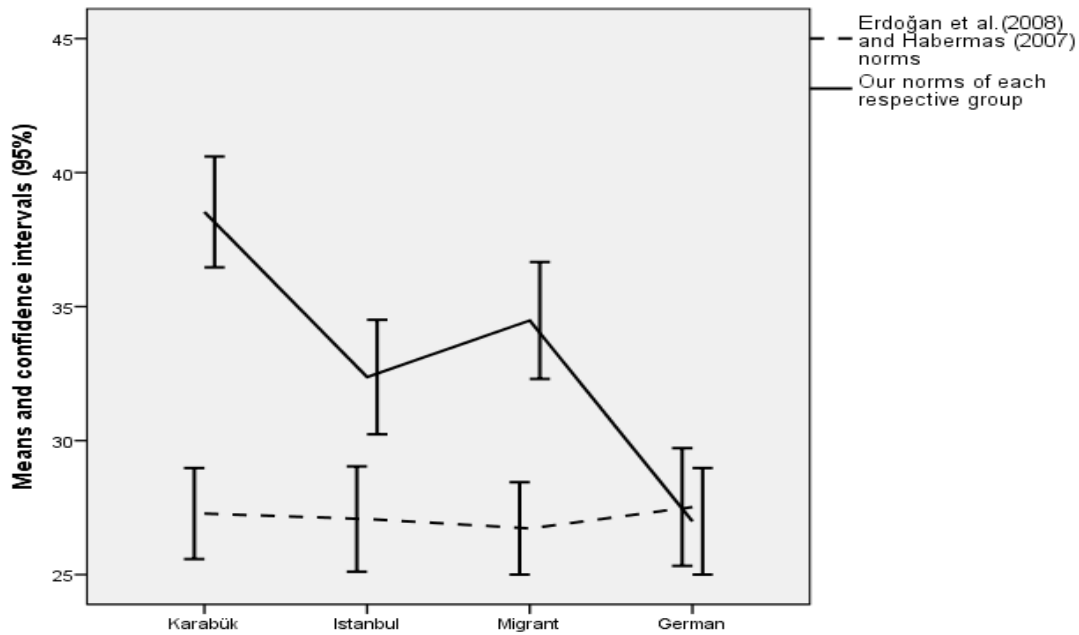
**Table 1. Relative frequencies (%) and mean estimated age-at-event for life script events for each group (ordered according to their frequency in the Karabük group)**

Event	Karabük			Istanbul			Migrant			German		
	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	%	M	SD	%	M	SD
Marriage	93	24.24	3.45	80	24.63	2.58	88	27.21	6.42	67	28.44	3.73
Settle on career	67	25.52	4.03	48	23.37	4.22	40	26.76	5.77	37	26.26	5.28
Having children	62	26.86	4.08	60	27.59	3.87	56	29.70	5.48	47	29.93	3.07
Begin school	59	6.49	.69	61	6.51	1.36	46	6.53	.65	56	6.17	.53
Circumcision	37	4.08	3.55	30	5.20	4.03	07	4.14	2.96	-	-	-
Military service	32	19.96	2.85	32	20.64	1.54	-	-	-	-	-	-
Own death	26	65.35	10.82	20	72.91	8.90	20	77.80	6.36	15	75.46	6.27
University	24	18.75	.89	40	18.12	3.09	61	19.90	2.75	40	19.77	2.24
Retirement	18	55.29	13.85	15	58.33	8.34	12	66.25	3.57	16	67.68	4.34
First partner	16	16.50	2.63	26	15.17	2.63	19	19.45	4.40	36	17.02	4.33
First Job	15	19.91	3.10	16	20.25	2.95	24	20.08	3.01	21	20.00	3.14
Puberty	14	13.00	1.66	13	12.76	2.00	11	13.72	1.61	05	13.00	.70
Begin high sch.	12	15.33	2.01	09	14.33	1.00	-	-	-	-	-	-
University grd.	12	23.50	3.50	05	24.00	3.67	08	26.00	2.72	05	24.20	.83
Sup/obey family	12	31.90	14.14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Own birth	10	0	-	13	0	-	17	0	-	10	0	-
Sup. child's fut.	08	33.25	7.88	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Self-sufficiency	07	20.00	-	-	-	-	05	24.40	4.61	-	-	-
Owning house	06	33.00	10.36	06	31.16	12.81	06	34.33	7.94	06	30.66	14.67
Begin walking	05	1.75	.50	09	1.62	.91	-	-	-	-	-	-
Being success.	05	18.20	5.58	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Getting older	-	-	-	11	63.63	6.36	05	69.00	5.47	-	-	-
First period	-	-	-	11	12.40	.69	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others death	-	-	-	10	38.75	11.08	08	38.42	24.74	12	26.08	12.50
Begin talking	-	-	-	08	1.57	.78	-	-	-	07	1.28	.48
First friend	-	-	-	06	7.83	4.21	12	8.16	3.56	15	7.53	4.29
Knowing the pa.	-	-	-	05	1.80	.83	-	-	-	-	-	-
High school grd.	-	-	-	-	-	-	51	17.71	1.76	38	17.53	1.21
Secondary sch.	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	12.72	2.76	14	10.35	1.21
Begin daycare	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	3.50	1.09	23	3.45	.88
Travelling	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	23.90	9.67	10	19.60	4.78
Religious dut.	-	-	-	-	-	-	09	16.66	9.23	-	-	-
Driver's license	-	-	-	-	-	-	08	18.50	.75	10	18.50	1.43
Grandchildren	-	-	-	-	-	-	07	63.00	6.55	12	57.50	6.41
Parents death	-	-	-	-	-	-	06	43.50	18.26	09	44.88	22.18
16. or 18. Birth.	-	-	-	-	-	-	06	17.33	1.03	-	-	-
First birthday	-	-	-	-	-	-	05	1.00	-	-	-	-
Leave home	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	22.06	4.36
First sex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	13	16.38	2.95
Baptism	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12	.66	.49
Confirmation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10	13.80	2.97
Finding ide./rel.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	07	26.42	16.04
Owning a car	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	07	22.85	2.60
First kiss	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	05	14.60	.89
Prob.roman. rel.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	05	19.40	1.34
Master	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	05	27.60	1.51
Other	143	-	-	141	-	-	124	-	-	116	-	-

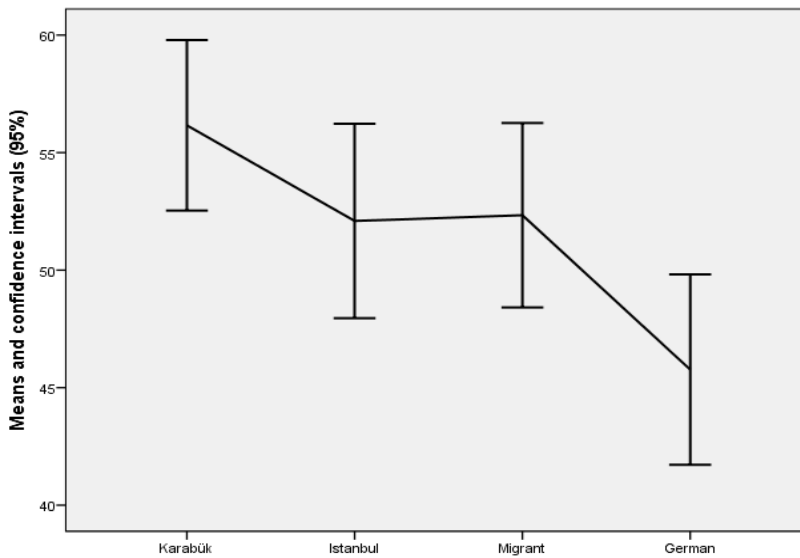
Note: Begin high sch.=Begin high school; University grd.= University graduation; Sup./obey family=supporting and obeying the family; Sup. child's fut.= Supporting the child's future; Being success. =Being successful; Knowing the pa.= Knowing the parents; High school grd.= High school graduation; Secondary sch.=secondary school; Finding ide./rel.=finding own identity or religion; Prob. rom. rel.= Problems in romantic relations; Religious dut. = Religious duties e.g. pilgrimage or namaz; 16. or 18. Birth.= 16th- or 18-th birthday

**Table 2. Relative frequencies (%) of life story events for groups (ordered according to their frequency in the Karabük group)**

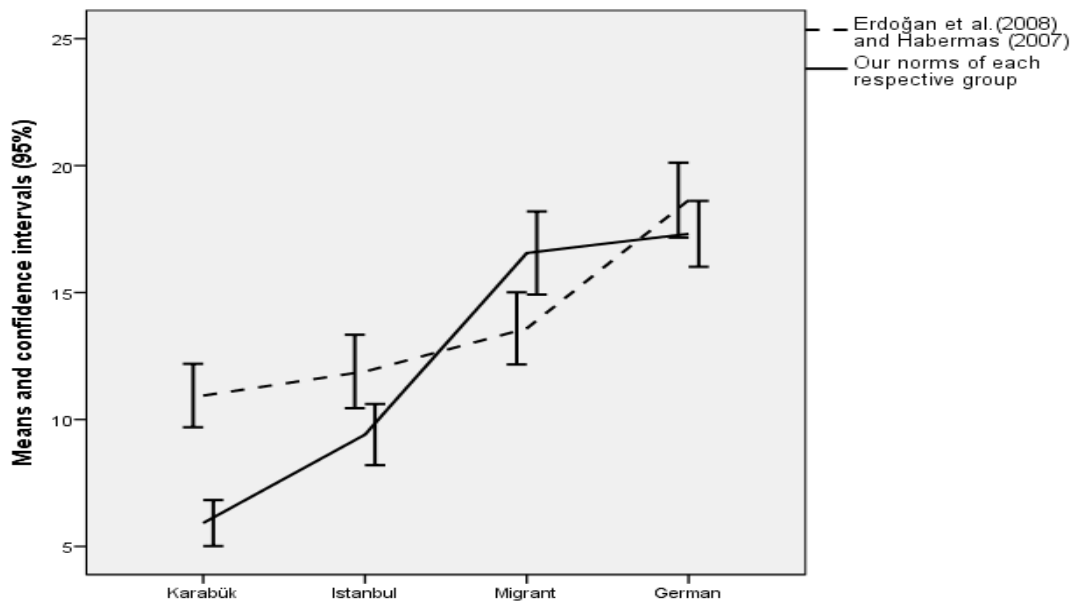
Event	Karabük	Istanbul	Migrant	German
University	71	61	74	79
Other's death	35	22	28	18
Falling in love/First partner	35	35	25	53
Family quarrel	25	26	08	-
Academic difficulties	26	33	17	12
Family support	26	08	09	-
Health problems in family	23	19	07	09
Importance of social relations	22	12	21	12
Not severe illness / accident /injury	18	12	08	05
Problems in romantic relations	17	22	15	16
Leave home	17	16	07	32
Problems with friends	17	15	06	-
Begin school	16	26	33	26
Serious disease_/ illness	15	11	11	08
Own birth	15	06	09	07
Personal psychological problems	14	04	09	-
Hobbies / leisure activities	12	15	15	14
Begin high school	12	15	06	09
Financial problems in the family	12	06	-	-
Parents' divorce	11	09	09	10
Move	10	22	12	05
First job	09	20	22	28
Parent's death	07	07	-	06
Marriage of sibling	07	05	09	-
Getting into fights	07	-	-	-
Childhood far from family	06	-	-	-
Traffic accident	06	-	-	-
Neglect/abuse experience	05	11	-	-
Being successful	05	06	07	-
Puberty	05	-	-	-
Travelling	-	09	14	25
Birth of nephew	-	09	08	-
High school graduation	-	07	49	60
Religious duties e.g. pilgrimage or namaz	-	06	11	-
Psychological problems in family	-	05	-	-
First sex	-	05	-	15
Circumcision	-	05	-	-
Driver's license	-	-	25	12
Secondary school	-	-	18	24
Sibling's Birth	-	-	16	05
Visiting/short term residence in Turkey	-	-	10	-
Begin daycare	-	-	09	15
Marriage	-	-	09	-
Death of pet	-	-	06	06
Moving to Germany	-	-	06	-
First vacation without parents	-	-	-	11
First Kiss	-	-	-	07
First friend	-	-	-	06
Internship	-	-	-	06
Confirmation	-	-	-	05
Having children	-	-	-	05
Other	139	134	137	131



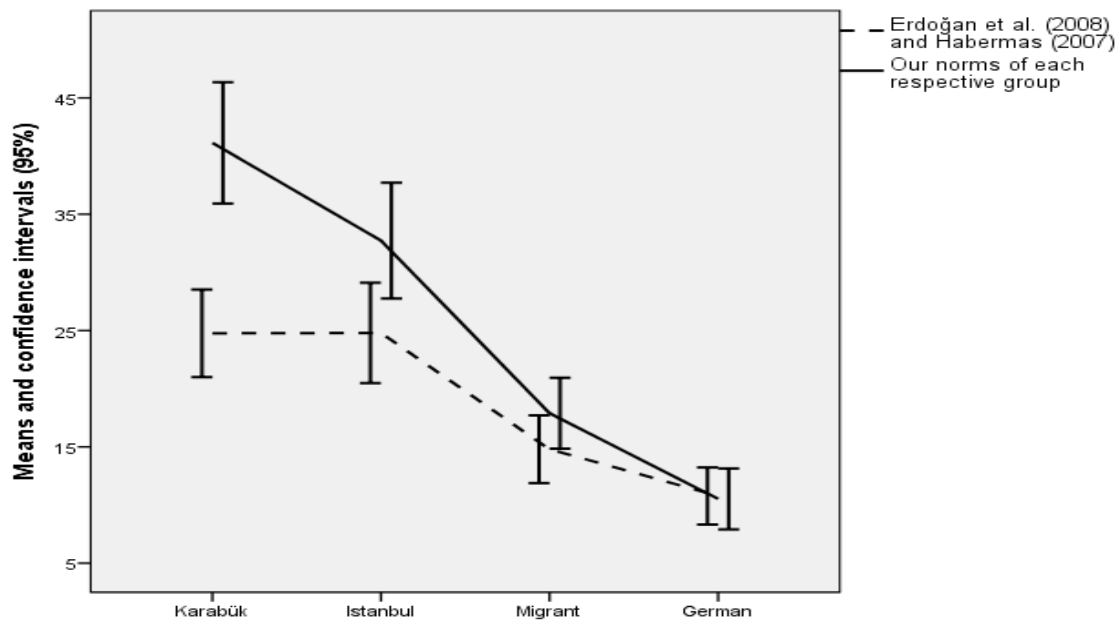
**Figure 1. Means of Life Script Typicality Scores Based on Erdoğan et al. (2008) and Habermas (2007) Norms and Based on the Cultural Life Scripts of Each Respective Group**



**Figure 2. Mean Relative Frequencies (%) of the Seven Most Frequent Events in Each Group's Life Script in Individual life Script Nominations**



**Figure 3. Mean Relative Frequencies (%) of Overlap Scores of Life Story Events Based on Erdoğan et al. (2008) and Habermas (2007) Norms and Based on the Cultural Life Scripts of Each Respective Group**



**Figure 4. Mean Percentages of Negative Life Story Events That Are Not Part of the Erdoğan et al. (2008) and Habermas (2007) Norms or of the Cultural Life Scripts of Each Respective Group**