

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL 2

CRITICAL LIFE EVENTS INTERVIEW*

I would like to get to know you by talking about various aspects of your life. During this meeting, you will have an opportunity to construct the story of your life as you understand it regarding the past, present, and anticipated future. However, this autobiography will be highly selective. You will focus only on 12 specific “episodes” in your life story and describe each of them in detail. Therefore, it will not be possible to tell everything that has happened to you, how you would probably do if you were writing a book about yourself. During this conversation, a lot of important information about you will undoubtedly be omitted. Nevertheless, focusing on 12 “episodes” will provide an interesting and useful perspective.

People’s lives are very different. What’s more, people give meaning to their lives in many different ways. As a social scientist, I want to understand how people do it. That is why I collect and analyse autobiographies of people and look for significant similarities and differences in these stories. I will not try to find out what is wrong with you. I am also not going to assess your life. Instead, I want to “read” your life story as if it was a book, focusing on what types of characters, scenes, and motifs appear in it the most often.

This interview is based on the idea of critical life episodes. An episode is a specific event that occurs at a specific time and place. I would like you to focus on individual events rather than a series of events or a longer period of time. I will ask you to tell me about 12 critical life events in your life. For each of them, please provide the following information:

- When did this event take place?
- What exactly happened?
- Who else was involved in this event? How?
- What did you think, feel, and what did you want during this event?
- Why is this a significant event in your life? How did it affect you and your life? What can it tell us about you and your personality?

* Based on the Life Story Interview (McAdams, 2001) and the Guided Autobiography (Foley Center for the Study of Lives, 1997).

The conversation will last about 1 hour. It will be recorded on the voice recorder. At any time, when you feel tired, we can break it or postpone and finish next time. Have you got any questions? Shall we start?

1. The High Point

Let's start with the most positive event, a moment in your whole life when you felt excitement, joy, satisfaction, or other very pleasant emotions. Please tell about a specific episode.

2. The Low Point

Now think about your whole life and recall those experiences that are associated with the feeling of extremely negative emotions. Please choose one of them. Although the memory may be unpleasant, please try to tell as much detail as possible about this event.

3. The Most Recent Critical Life Event

Now I would like you to describe a significant negative event that took place in your life recently (up to 2 months) and the meaning of this event for you. A critical life event is one that can affect the way you think, experience emotions, behaviour, and how your body reacts. Although it is not traumatic, it can be somewhat compared to an earthquake. It shatters some current beliefs and changes the way you think about yourself, the world, and relationships with other people. What event comes to your mind?

4. Goal

At different times in our lives, we set different goals for the future. Please consider some goals that you are currently pursuing in one way or another. Please choose one goal that is most important to you. Then describe a specific event from the recent past (up to 2 months) in which you did something particular that was a natural step forward toward this goal.

5. Morality Event

We learn what is good and what is bad throughout our lives. I would like you to consider a special episode in your life in which you have somehow encountered a moral problem. It can be an episode in which you got involved in some immoral act, you learned a moral lesson, you struggled with a moral dilemma, or you undertook decision to follow new moral standards or any other episode of life that connects with morality in some way.

6. Turning Point

Looking back at your life, please identify some episodes through which you have undergone a significant change. Turning points can occur in many different areas of life. Indicate the specific episode in the history of your life in which you made an important transition or change in relation to your understanding of yourself. It is not necessary for you to have consciously seen the event at that time. It is rather important that you now see this event as a turning point in your life.

7. Continuity

Recently you described the experience in which you have undergone an important change in your understanding of yourself. Now, please focus on the opposite experience. Please recall moments in your life story that show your identity or continuity in your life. Please choose one event or experience that you think represents something that is stable and unchanged in you.

8. Life Decision

Our life line is broken by events that force us to make an important choice. So far, you've probably made at least few key decisions in your life. Please recall them and then describe in detail one specific event in which you made a life decision. Please tell me about the decision-making process, what kind of internal conflict you were struggling with, what was the final decision, and why was it important?

9. Interpersonal Conflicts

Now please tell a story about how a conflict of interest appeared in a relationship with someone important to you. What was the conflict about? What did you strive for? What was the other side's aim? How was this conflict resolved?

10. Activity

Tell me about an activity you did that has developed you the most so far. How and what did you start doing? What was this development about?

11. The Experience of Creativity

Please tell us about a significant event related to your encounter with creativity or some manifestation of someone else's or your own creativity.

12. Life Challenge

Looking back at your whole life, please identify and describe what you currently consider as the biggest single challenge you have faced in your life.

REFERENCES

- Foley Center for the Study of Lives. (1997). *Guided Autobiography*. https://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/docs/guided_autobiograph.pdf
- McAdams, D. P. (2001). The psychology of life stories. *Review of General Psychology*, 5(2), 100–122. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.5.2.100>