

6-2006

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### Recommended Citation

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Psychology: Faculty Publications, Smith College, Northampton, MA.  
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# Generativity and Successful Parenting: An Analysis of Young Adult Outcomes

Bill E. Peterson

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**ABSTRACT** Generativity scores were assessed in parents and correlated with offspring outcomes. The offspring were participants in a longitudinal study spanning their first and senior years of college. Generativity of parents was positively related to offspring agreeableness and conscientiousness. Parental generativity was also related to offspring scores on future time orientation and positive affect. In addition, generative parents seemed to model their political interests to offspring, and that modeling was related to children's higher scores on generativity and greater interest in politics. Parental generativity was also related to offspring religiosity. Most of these relationships remained significant after controlling for offspring scores on generativity. Generativity of parents appears to be related to successful offspring outcomes.

In his writings, Erikson (1950, 1968) focused attention on how individual development occurs within the opportunities and constraints provided by a society. For Erikson, the mutuality of recognition between child and parent provides the earliest example of how an individual (the offspring) negotiates selfhood in the context of his or her society (represented at first by parents). Based in

I would like to thank Lauren E. Duncan and Eileen L. Zurbriggen for making suggestions to improve this manuscript. Thank you also to AnnaMarie Pedersen who helped content code the religion question.

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*Journal of Personality* 74:3, June 2006

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DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00394.x

large part upon parental responsiveness, an infant develops a sense of basic trust or mistrust of self and others that then sets the stage for the successful development of later virtues such as identity.

But the psychological perspective can be shifted away from the offspring to focus on the parent doing the caretaking. In so doing, we might highlight the psychosocial stage of generativity rather than trust or identity. Broadly defined, generativity is a concern with making a lasting contribution to the future, especially future generations, and is a central psychological preoccupation in midlife (Erikson, 1982). According to Erikson, it is through the generative efforts of parents that most children become socialized. Erikson (1950, p. 267) argued that “generativity . . . is primarily the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation.” Erikson (1968, p. 139) went even further and stated that the “nature of generativity . . . suggests that its most circumscribed pathology must . . . be sought in the next generation, that is, in the form of those unavoidable estrangements which we have listed for childhood and youth and which may appear in aggravated form as a result of a generative failure on the part of the parents.” Thus, for Erikson, the outcome of offsprings’ lives are contingent on the generative efforts of parents and those aspects of society that facilitate or degrade their attempts at generativity.

Given the centrality of parenting for understanding the concept of generativity, surprisingly little research has investigated the impact of parents’ generativity on offspring. After a review of existing research, this study will investigate whether parents who score high on a standardized measure of generativity produce offspring who manifest positive psychological and prosocial characteristics.

### *Prior Research on Parental Generativity*

Early case study research by Kotre (1984) and Snarey (1993) focused attention on the intergenerational links inherent in the concept of generativity. In their work they provided examples of “generativity chill” (a term coined by Snarey) when efforts at caring for offspring went awry and progeny were damaged and also successful generativity when generative efforts were rewarded with close mutual ties. Following Kotre and Snarey, a small number of other researchers have examined generative parenting. To review briefly, Pratt, Norris,

Arnold, and Filyer (1999) showed that generativity was related to adult interests in the socialization of values in young people. Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, and Bauer (2001) reinforced this point. They found in a sample of African American and Caucasian adults that generative individuals were well aware that they served as teachers and role models for their children. These two studies suggest that direct modeling is perceived as an important component of parenting for generative individuals.

A related line of research has focused on the positive outcomes of generative parenting for both parents and family units. McKeering and Pakenham (2000) examined how taking care of children expanded parental expressions of generativity outside of the home. For example, they found that fathers' concerns for their children's social-emotional development were related to larger concerns about the general welfare of society. Dollahite, Hawkins, and Brotherson (1996) used a narrative approach to understand key elements of fathering. In their larger research program, they use generativity theory to promote the welfare and health of families through generative counseling, focusing on the strengths that individual families bring to a therapy situation (e.g., see, Dollahite, Slife, & Hawkins, 1998).

All of these studies provide important information about the role of generativity in perceptions of parenting and caring for others. However, none of the above research focuses exclusive attention on the effects of parental generativity on offspring outcomes. This issue is critical for extending the construct validity of generativity as well as for understanding how positive characteristics manifest within families. In this study I focus on the generative links between parents and their children. Note, however, that establishing that generative parents produce offspring with positive characteristics does not tell us about the mechanisms of transmission that are involved. For example, suppose we find that generative parents produce conscientious children. Does this mean that generative parents socialize children to be conscientious? Or does it mean that generative parents transmit genes for conscientiousness to offspring? Ultimately, these kinds of questions cannot be answered empirically in the current study. However, the data used in this study can ascertain whether a connection exists in the first place between generativity in parents and a variety of theoretically expected outcomes assessed in offspring.

## HYPOTHESES

### *Parental Generativity and Adjustment in Offspring*

One indicator of successful parenting is a well-adjusted child. In the developmental literature, authoritative parenting is related to children's and adolescent's well-being (e.g., Berk, 2000). Past research has also shown a relationship between authoritative parenting styles and generativity (Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997; Pratt, Danso, Arnold, Norris, & Filyer, 2001). Combining these two sets of findings leads to the hypothesis that parents who are generative should produce adult offspring who are reasonably happy with themselves. Furthermore, generative parents should feel closer to their children because of the greater levels of communication required with authoritative parenting relative to other parenting styles.

*Future time perspective.* In addition to examining well-being, I will also analyze offspring responses to a measure of future time perspective. This is a construct operationalized years ago by Kastenbaum (1961) but relatively neglected in personality research. Future time perspective relates to generativity via an argument made by Van De Water and McAdams (1989). Building from Erikson's (1950, p. 267) theoretical ideas, they showed that generative individuals possess a fundamental "belief in the human species." This belief manifests as a strong faith in the human potential to avoid destructiveness and to promote a better future for all people. Indeed, Pratt et al. (2001) found that generative mothers viewed the development of their adolescent children in optimistic, growth-oriented terms. These mothers looked forward to the anticipated achievements of their autonomous children. This general optimism should be modeled to children in such a way that offspring also become mindful of the future. Furthermore, as discussed by Fingerman and Perlmutter (1995), planning for the future is valued positively in U.S. culture. The alternative is to live life on a day-by-day basis without regard for the long-term consequences of current activities. This kind of extended moratorium probably leads to the self-absorption or stagnation that Erikson (1982) argued was the antithesis of generativity. Thus, in terms of this study, offspring of generative parents should be interested in the future and, hence, project themselves into the future to a greater extent than offspring of less generative parents.

*Religion.* Another prosocial characteristic examined will be religious faith. As Dillon, Wink, and Fay (2003; Dillon & Wink, 2004) have shown, generative individuals tend to score higher than less generative individuals on measures of religiousness and spirituality. These findings are important because they suggest that generative individuals belong to established churches (e.g., religiousness through regular church attendance) but can also hold nontraditional beliefs about a higher power (e.g., more self-directed spiritual seeking). Based upon the work of Dillon and her colleagues, generative parents should have successfully established a firm base of religious faith in their offspring.

#### *Parental Generativity and Prosocial Characteristics*

*Personality traits.* Successful parents should also produce offspring who have prosocial personality characteristics. Which personality characteristics qualify as prosocial? Research suggests that the characteristics of agency (e.g., successful self-promotion at work) and communion (e.g., love) are two fundamental aspects of human existence related to adjustment (e.g., McAdams, 1985). According to theory and research, people who express agentic and communal characteristics (without focusing too exclusively on one or the other) are psychologically healthy and have good relationships (Helgeson, 1994). Thus, it is reasonable to hypothesize that generative parents should produce offspring who are comfortable as agentic and communal individuals. Agency and communion will be assessed in the current study as trait characteristics by using the Five-Factor Model of personality.

The Five-Factor Model (the Big Five) has emerged as a way to organize human traits into five superordinate clusters (e.g., John & Srivastava, 1999; McCrae & Costa, 2003). Standardized measures of these clusters provide a basic way to categorize people on the dimensions of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. Two Big Five traits that seem conceptually linked to prosocial agency and communion are aspects of Conscientiousness and Agreeableness, respectively. In general, generative parents should make efforts to do what is possible to raise children who are relatively conscientiousness and agreeable. These traits would be valued because of their links to a successful love life (communion) and work situation (agency)—domains of life by

which people in the United States judge themselves and are judged by others (e.g., McAdams, 2001, ch. 6). Wiggins and Trapnell (1996; Wiggins, 1991) argued that Extraversion is closely tied to agency, but the agentic (i.e., productive) aspects of Conscientiousness seem more relevant for generativity than characteristics typically associated with Extraversion (e.g., dominance, energy). Note, as discussed earlier, any connections between parental generativity and offspring Agreeableness (and Conscientiousness) might be due primarily to genetic factors rather than environmental ones. Although we cannot tease out environmental versus genetic lines of transmission, we can control for parental scores on the Big Five in order to estimate the particular effect of parental generativity on offspring Big Five scores.

### *Parental Generativity and Intergenerational Politics*

The last set of variables examines the extent to which generative parents might orient their children towards political involvement. Knowledge about current political events allows individuals to maintain a sense of cultural generativity, which is the ability to pass on important values and ideologies to others (Kotre, 1984). Such information also serves as a basis for turning political interests into active commitments to advance social causes important to individuals (e.g., Peterson & Duncan, 1999b). Prior research has shown that generative individuals display more interest in the wider world of politics and are more likely than less generative individuals to participate in political activism (see, Cole & Stewart, 1996; Hart et al., 2001; Peterson & Stewart, 1996; Stewart & Gold-Steinberg, 1990).

However, what is unclear is how parents might influence the relationship between offspring generativity and political interest. How do generative parents pass on political interests to their offspring? This question will be examined through path analysis where it is hypothesized that generative parents will transmit their political interests to offspring through modeling (e.g., engaging them in political discussions). The transmission of parents' political interests and knowledge should be related to higher levels of generativity in offspring because politically (and socially) informed citizens tend to score higher on generativity (e.g., see Singer, King, Green, & Barr, 2002, for an analysis of how generative students in a community action internship program experienced more stress related growth than less generative interns). Highly generative offspring, due to

their political socialization by parents, should rate politics as more important to them than should less generative offspring. None of these relationships, however, should be affected by political orientation among offspring (e.g., conservative or liberal). At this point in time, there is no reason to suspect that liberal or conservative offspring are more likely to come from generative families.

In sum, this article will investigate whether generativity is related to producing happy adult children with prosocial personality characteristics and religious beliefs. In addition, analyses will focus on one way that values (in this case political values) get transmitted down the generational line.

### *Prior Research on Generativity in the Current Sample*

The data used in the current study come from a longitudinal sample of University of New Hampshire (UNH) students and their parents. In this sample, generativity has been investigated in two prior studies. In the first, Peterson et al. (1997) examined how generativity and authoritarianism differentially affected personality, political activity, and parenting style. In the second study, Peterson and Duncan (1999b) explored more completely the political commitments of generative UNH parents. Both of these studies used data collected before the UNH senior survey was administered in 1998. The current study examines the issue of parenting by linking the generativity scores of parents to their children's senior year outcomes.

## **METHOD**

### *Participants and Procedures*

Data from UNH students were collected in October 1994 of their first year, in March 1996 of their sophomore year, and, most recently, in March 1998 of their senior year. In addition, data from one of their parents (either a mother or father, as determined randomly) were collected during students' first year. Information about initial sampling procedures and survey design for the parents and offspring can be found in Peterson et al. (1997). Additionally, Peterson and Duncan (1999a) discussed the sophomore wave of data collection, and Peterson and Duncan (1999b) provided more information about parents. Finally, Peterson and Lane (2001), in a study of authoritarianism over time, provided data about students' senior year. Attrition analyses conducted in the latter studies



indicated few differences between senior year participation and those who did not participate in the sophomore or senior data collection. Attrition analyses for variables used in the current study will be reported later.

All the variables used in this study came from the 1994 parent survey and the 1998 senior year student follow-up. Sixty-nine students (out of 152 who participated in the first-year survey and remained enrolled at UNH) completed the senior year survey. This represented 49% of the women we contacted ( $n = 36$ ) and 43% of the men ( $n = 33$ ). The survey was 15 pages long and contained several personality scales, attitudinal measures, demographic questions, and open- and closed-ended queries about future goals and experiences at UNH. Ninety-seven percent of the students were Caucasian, a large majority (87%) indicated that they came from middle- or upper middle-class backgrounds, and most students (72%) were raised either Catholic or Protestant. At the time of the initial survey, the average age of parents was 47. Ninety-six percent of the parents whom we contacted during the students' first year completed surveys.

### *Measures*

*Generativity.* Generativity was assessed using McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992; McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993) Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), a 20-item instrument using *Likert* scaling (0 = *the statement never applies to me*, 3 = *the statement applies to me very often*). Example items included "I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences" and "I feel as though I have done nothing that will survive after I die" (reverse scored). Offspring ( $M = 38.25$ ,  $SD = 8.07$ ) and parents ( $M = 40.94$ ,  $SD = 8.17$ ) answered the LGS during the students' first year at UNH. Cronbach's alpha was .82 and .85 respectively.

*Parental feelings about offspring.* In order to assess parental feelings about their own children we asked parents two questions: "How close do you feel to your child?" (1 = *very distant* to 5 = *very close*) and "How much do you feel your child is like you?" (1 = *very different* to 5 = *very much alike*). Because responses to these two items were only moderately correlated ( $r = .38$ ), it seems useful to keep them conceptually distinct rather than combine them.

*Positive Affect.* Positive affect in offspring was assessed during their senior year using the Affectometer 2 developed by Kamman and Flett (1983). The Affectometer 2 is reviewed in Robinson, Shaver, and Wrightsman (1991). The measure consisted of 40 items that tapped 10 qualities of happiness. The Affectometer began "Read each statement below and try to think about how it applies to you. Please rate each item according to

the following 5-point scale." The scale was anchored as follows: 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *all of the time*. Each element of affect was measured with two sentence items and two adjective items. Half of the items were reverse worded. Following are the 10 subscales with the positively worded sentence and adjective items provided as examples.

Confluence was assessed with items like "My life is on the right track" and the adjective "Satisfied" (Cronbach's alpha for the four items was .68). Optimism was measured with items such as "My future looks good" and "Optimistic" (Alpha was .63). Self-Esteem was assessed with items such as "I like myself" and "Useful" (Alpha was .80). Self-Efficacy was evaluated with items like "I can handle any problems that come up" and "Confident" (Alpha was .72). Social Support was assessed with "I feel loved and trusted" and "Understood" (Alpha for the four items was .70). Social Interest was measured with "I feel close to people around me" and "Loving" (Alpha for the four items was .51). Freedom was evaluated with items like "I feel I can do whatever I want to" and "Free-and-easy" (Alpha was .54). Energy was measured with items like "I have energy to spare" and "Enthusiastic" (Alpha was .48). Cheerfulness was measured with items like "I smile and laugh a lot" and "Good-natured" (Alpha was .66). Finally, Thought Clarity was assessed with "I think clearly and creatively" and "Clear-headed" (Alpha for the four items was .67). The 10 subscales of the Affectometer 2 can also be combined into an overall measure of Positive Affect. Doing so resulted in an alpha of .94.

*Future time perspective.* Future time perspective was assessed during participants' senior year using items developed by Fingermaier and Perlmutter (1995). Respondents rated how often they thought about the following time periods: "the next day," "the next few weeks," "this year," "the year after this," and "ten years from now." Participants answered using a 7-point scale (1 = *very rarely* to 7 = *very often*). Items were combined into a single scale assessing overall future time orientation. Cronbach's alpha for the five items of the scale was .76.

*Offspring religiousness.* Religion was assessed using the demographic sheet included in the survey. Respondents were asked to write down their religious background. Respondents were also asked to indicate how important religion was in their life. If respondents indicated that they grew up with organized religion (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, Jewish) and did not indicate that religion was unimportant to them, they were given a score of 1. Those who did not indicate a traditional religious background (e.g., agnostic) or indicated that their religious upbringing was unimportant to them received a score of 0. Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they were religious. Finally, offspring were asked to write a few

sentences indicating how their religious beliefs had changed over 4 years of college. Responses were content coded for any repudiation of religious beliefs (e.g., "I know absolutely nothing about religion and I don't believe in God."). In order to score for religious repudiation participants had to state they were an atheist or actively to reject religion wholesale in their response. Doubts about aspects of religious belief (e.g., skepticism about some religious leaders) were generally not scored. Two raters who worked independently of each other conducted the content coding. Percent category agreement between the two coders on the presence or absence of religious doubt was .83. Disagreement was resolved through discussion. Nineteen percent of respondents doubted religion in this way.

The two variables of religiosity and religious repudiation seem to be conceptual opposites. However, there were some respondents (5 out of 40) who indicated that religion was at least somewhat important to them while at the same time repudiating religion in the open-ended response. On the other hand, of the nonreligious students, 8 out of 13 actively repudiated religion. Given the fact that these two variables did not overlap completely to categorize students, it seems worthwhile to keep them conceptually distinct when considering their relation to parental generativity.

*Offspring personality.* Personality was assessed using a measure of the Big Five developed by John, Donahue, and Kentle (1991). (See also Benet-Martinez and John [1998] who provided English- and Spanish-language versions of these Big Five scales.) Extraversion was assessed with 8 items, including "I see myself as someone who generates a lot of enthusiasm." Agreeableness was assessed with 9 items, including "Has a forgiving nature." Conscientiousness was assessed with 9 items, including: "Is a reliable worker." Neuroticism was assessed with 8 items, including "Worries a lot." Openness was assessed with 10 items, including "Likes to reflect, play with ideas." All items on the inventory were answered on a 5-point scale (1 = *disagree strongly* to 5 = *agree strongly*). Cronbach's alpha was .88 for Extraversion, .74 for Agreeableness, .83 for Conscientiousness, .80 for Neuroticism, and .81 for Openness.

Alphas for parents' scores on the Big Five (assessed in 1994) were comparable to offspring: Extraversion (.85), Agreeableness (.83), Conscientiousness (.81), Neuroticism (.84), and Openness to Experience (.82).

*Parental transmission of politics.* Parental transmission of political values was assessed with 11 items. Parents were given a checklist of the items and asked to indicate if their child "depended on any of the following clues in learning about the importance to you of social events" like the "Persian Gulf War" and the "Collapse of Communism." The 11 cues

were “Events you talked about with him/her,” “Events you talked about with other adults,” “The work you do,” “Political organizations you belonged to,” “Charitable organizations you contributed to,” “Books you read,” “Music you listened to, sang, or played,” “Your preferences in clothes and hairstyles,” “Movies you liked,” “Television programs you watched,” and “Your reaction to news stories.” On average, parents checked 6.82 of the items ( $SD = 2.49$ ). Cronbach’s alpha for the 11 items was .69.

*Political interest and orientation.* Offspring interest in politics was assessed during their senior year using a single item: “How important are political and social issues to you?” A 5-point scale was used (1 = *not at all important* to 5 = *very important*). Students were moderately interested in politics ( $M = 3.09$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ). Political orientation was assessed with the following item: “If you had to place yourself on scale of 1 to 7 with 1 indicating a strong Liberal and 7 indicating a strong Conservative, where would you place yourself?” Students were fairly middle-of-the-road by their senior year ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ).

#### *Attrition Analyses*

In the current study, there were 10 variables assessed in parents or offspring during the initial 1994 survey: parent generativity, parent Big Five, offspring generativity, the two parental feelings about offspring, and political modeling. Because scores on these 10 variables were available for all original respondents, we could examine whether any of them differentiated offspring who chose to participate during their senior year and those who did not. According to between sample *t*-tests, there were no significant differences in any of the 10 variables.

*Partial Correlations.* In addition to computing the bivariate correlations between parental generativity and the offspring outcome variables, I will also compute correlations between offspring generativity and the offspring outcome variables. Offspring generativity should show a similar pattern of correlates as parental generativity to the outcomes. In order to control for the effect of offspring generativity on outcomes, I will also compute correlations between parental generativity and offspring outcomes that partial out the effects of offspring generativity. In this way we can ascertain whether parental generativity influences offspring outcomes above and beyond any effects that might exist due to offspring generativity. Finally, for the Big Five outcomes, I will also control for the effects of parental Big Five when computing the correlations between parental generativity and offspring Big Five.

## RESULTS

As expected, generativity in parents was correlated positively with feelings of closeness to their child ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = .69$ ,  $r = .35$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and with perceived similarity to their child ( $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = .98$ ,  $r = .33$ ,  $p < .05$ ). These correlates simply establish that generative parents feel more positively towards their children than do less generative parents.

Table 1 presents correlations between generativity and senior year outcomes. In the third column of numbers, it can be seen that offspring generativity was significantly, positively related to three subscales of the Affectometer: freedom, cheerfulness, and self-esteem. Offspring generativity was also correlated positively with future time orientation and endorsement of the family's religion. It was nega-

**Table 1**  
Offspring and Parental Generativity Correlated With Offspring Outcomes

1998 Offspring Outcomes	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Correlations With 1994 Generativity		
			Offspring	Parent	Partial
Affectometer 2					
Overall Positive Affect	158.39	17.95	.24 <sup>+</sup>	.33*	.26*
Confluence	14.97	2.10	.21	.37*	.32*
Freedom	15.35	2.56	.27*	.34*	.26*
Social Support	15.64	1.97	.18	.32*	.27*
Self-Efficacy	15.84	2.13	.15	.27*	.23 <sup>+</sup>
Social Interest	16.45	2.14	.25 <sup>+</sup>	.27*	.19
Cheerfulness	16.71	2.40	.29*	.25 <sup>+</sup>	.16
Energy	15.93	2.28	.12	.25 <sup>+</sup>	.22 <sup>+</sup>
Self-Esteem	15.87	2.27	.32*	.20	.08
Optimism	16.17	2.24	.09	.19	.17
Thought Clarity	15.48	2.25	.05	.18 <sup>+</sup>	.18
Future Time Orientation	4.71	1.00	.30*	.33*	.24 <sup>+</sup>
Family Religion	.67	.47	.27*	.10	.01
Religious Repudiation	.19	.40	-.44*	-.39*	-.27*

*Note:*  $N = 57$ . The column labeled Partial shows the correlation between parental generativity and offspring outcomes with offspring generativity partialled out.

<sup>+</sup> $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ .

tively correlated with religious repudiation. Interestingly, as shown in the fourth column of numbers, parental generativity was even more strongly related to most of the offspring outcomes. Parental generativity was positively and significantly correlated with overall positive affect among offspring and five of the Affectometer subscales: Confluence, Freedom, Social Support, Self-Efficacy, and Social Interest. In addition, parents' generativity was moderately correlated (positively) with future-time perspective in offspring and negatively correlated with their offspring's rejection of formal religion. As shown in the fifth column of numbers, most of these bivariate correlates held up even after controlling for the effects of offspring generativity. The bivariate correlation between parental generativity and offspring generativity was .39,  $p < .05$ .

Table 2 presents correlations between generativity and offspring scores on the Big Five. Offspring's first-year generativity scores were significantly related to only one of the Big Five factors assessed during the senior year: Extraversion. However, as expected, parental generativity was significantly, positively correlated with offspring Agreeableness and Conscientiousness (albeit the relationship with Conscientiousness was not quite significant,  $p < .10$ ). However, as shown in

**Table 2**  
Offspring and Parental Generativity Correlated With Offspring Personality

Offspring Personality	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Correlation With 1994 Generativity			
			Offspring	Parent	Partial 1	Partial 2
Big Five in 1998						
Extraversion	3.43	.83	.49*	.20	.01	.06
Agreeableness	3.83	.49	.15	.34*	.31*	.28*
Conscientiousness	3.82	.58	-.02	.22 <sup>+</sup>	.25*	.14
Neuroticism	3.03	.72	.00	-.21	-.22 <sup>+</sup>	-.16
Openness to Experience	3.96	.56	.15	.05	-.01	-.20

*Note:*  $N = 57$ . The column labeled Partial 1 shows the correlation between parental generativity and offspring Big Five with offspring generativity partialled out. The column labeled Partial 2 shows the correlation between parental generativity and offspring Big Five with parental Big Five partialled out.

<sup>+</sup>  $p < .10$ . \* $p < .05$ .

**Table 3**  
**Correlation Matrix for Generativity, Political Transmission, and the Importance of Politics**

	Parent Variables		Offspring Variables		
	Parent Generativity	Transmission of Political Values	Offspring Generativity	Importance of Politics	Political Orientation
<b>Parent Variables</b>					
Parent Generativity					
Transmission of Political Values	.44*				
<b>Offspring Variables</b>					
Offspring Generativity	.39*	.31*			
Importance of Politics	.06	.35*	.34*		
Political Orientation	.10	.02	.00	-.10	

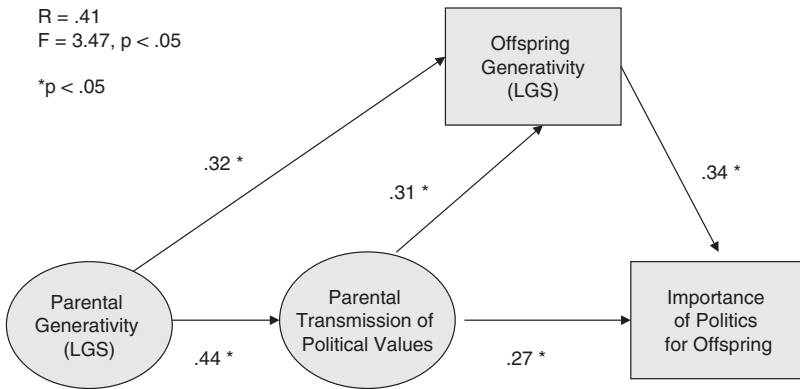
\* $p < .05$ .

*Note:* The parent generativity and transmission of political values variables were assessed among parents. Offspring provided scores for the offspring generativity, importance of politics, and political orientation variables.

the fifth column of numbers, parental generativity was significantly correlated with Agreeableness and Conscientiousness after controlling for offspring generativity. Finally, as shown in the sixth column of numbers, after controlling for parents' scores on the Big Five, only offspring Agreeableness was significantly related to parent generativity. That is, parental generativity was positively correlated with offspring Agreeableness after partialling out the Agreeableness scores of parents.

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for the generativity and political variables. As noted earlier, offspring generativity during the first year and parent generativity were significantly correlated ( $r = .39$ ). As shown in Table 3, parental generativity was also significantly, positively correlated with parental transmission of political values. Political transmission was significantly correlated with offspring generativity as well. Finally, the importance of politics to offspring was significantly, positively related to offspring generativity and the transmission of politics from parents. Political orientation was uncorrelated with any of the above variables.

In order to test hypothesis that generative parents have an impact on their children’s political interests through modeling, a path analysis was conducted. In order to compute the path analysis, the importance of politics for offspring was regressed on three blocks of variables. Offspring generativity was entered first, followed by the political modeling variable, and then parental generativity. As expected, and shown in Figure 1, generative parents modeled their political ideologies to offspring (standardized  $\beta = .44$ ). They also produced more generative offspring ( $\beta = .32$ ). Also as expected, political modeling was positively related to offspring generativity ( $\beta = .31$ ) and the importance of politics ( $\beta = .27$ ). Finally, the more generative offspring rated politics as subjectively more important to them ( $\beta = .34$ ) than did less generative offspring. The multiple  $R$  predicting the importance of politics was  $.41$ ,  $p < .05$ .



Standardized beta coefficients are used to link significant paths.

**Figure 1**  
**Generativity, Intergenerational Transmission, and the Importance of Political Events.**

**DISCUSSION**

In summary, parental generativity was correlated with offspring positive affect, future time perspective, transmission of religious beliefs, and prosocial personality characteristics. Generative parents also seemed to transmit political values to their offspring, which, in turn, was related to increased offspring generativity. Most of these



correlates held up even after controlling for the influence of offspring generativity. Furthermore, in general, the magnitudes of the bivariate correlates for parental generativity and offspring outcomes were slightly stronger than the correlates shown for offspring generativity and offspring outcomes.

### *Positive Affect and Generativity*

The offspring of more generative parents seemed happier with life relative to offspring with less generative parents. The magnitudes of the correlations between parental LGS and all 10 subscales of the Affectometer 2 were very similar. They ranged from 0.18 to 0.37. These magnitudes are impressive given that the offspring in the sample completed the Affectometer 4 years after they left their parents' home for college. These findings complement the existing work of Ackerman, Zuroff, and Moscovitz (2000) and de St. Aubin and McAdams (1995) who found that generativity in midlife adults was related to their personal well-being. As shown in the current study, generativity also has an impact on well-being across generations. The fact that their children seem relatively well-adjusted and happy with life must be a source of satisfaction for generative parents who reported feeling closer and more similar to their child when their offspring first left home for university.

Furthermore, offspring of generative parents oriented themselves toward the future. The ability to project into the future seems like a crucial component of the optimism inherent in a generative stance. As argued by Erikson (1983, p. 12), the ability to bring children into a dangerous world where "technology . . . (has) eradicate(d) . . . all the relative safety zones associated with the existing territorialities on earth," presupposes an optimistic belief in the human species that "care" will dominate over (nuclear, chemical, biological, or environmental) destructiveness. (See Van De Water & McAdams, 1989, for empirical evidence of Erikson's claim within individuals.) As shown in the current study, this ability to anticipate the consequences of current actions by anticipating future life events extends down the generational line to the offspring of generative individuals.

In addition, parental generativity was positively related to offspring agreeableness and conscientiousness. This is an important finding. In past studies, the LGS has been positively associated *with* midlife individuals to Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientious-

ness, and Open to Experience, and negatively associated with Neuroticism (de St. Aubin & McAdams, 1995; Peterson et al., 1997). This makes sense since, with the exception of Neuroticism, the remaining four factors are positively valued in American society, as is generativity. In the current study the impact of generativity was examined across people (i.e., across generational lines). Although it may be awkward to think of children as generative products, the findings are consistent with McAdams's (1985) thesis that generative individuals strive to create positive legacies of self. Children with prosocial characteristics of Agreeableness and Conscientiousness can be viewed as one type of legacy. Of course, with this kind of correlational study, it is impossible to disentangle issues of inheritance as well as issues of cause and effect. It may be that offspring who are easier to rear (e.g., those with agreeable and conscientious traits) make it easier for parents to assert generativity.

Even if one prefers the argument that generative parents produced agreeable and conscientious kids, another question remains unanswered. To what extent do offspring biologically inherit positive traits from generative parents and to what extent is the socialization of character involved (e.g., McCrae et al., 2000)? In part the answer to this question depends upon the extent to which paper-and-pencil measures of the Big Five tap into inheritable features of personality. At this point, this study has merely shown that generative parents have children who possess at least two key positive personality traits.

It should be noted, however, that in recent years, studies of behavioral genetics have shown that personality traits like the Big Five possess high levels of heritability (e.g., Bouchard & Loehlin, 2001). In fact, research on twins suggests that most of the convergence on personality traits among siblings can be understood as an expression of genetic similarity rather than shared family environments. Surprisingly, heritability seems to extend as well to the expression of attitudes. For example, Tesser (1993) argues that social psychologists need to be aware about what kinds of attitudes seem more inheritable (e.g., views on the death penalty) or less inheritable (e.g., opinions about coeducation) in order to effectively design studies of attitude change. No one has yet assessed the heritability of generativity. However, given that generativity has been operationalized by many as a trait-like characteristic (e.g., through the LGS), it stands to reason that generativity would share the high heritabilities of traits like Conscientiousness and Agreeableness.

It seems likely, therefore, that the positive correlation between parental LGS scores and offspring Agreeableness and Conscientiousness is due in part to genetic transmission. In other words, generative parents transmit agreeable and conscientious characteristics to their children through genetic inheritance. Future work in behavioral genetics can clarify more specifically how lines of transmission work.

### *Generativity, Political Values, and Religious Faith*

Parental generativity was positively related to offspring generativity and to the transmission of political values. Apparently, as discussed by Erikson (1980), generativity runs in families. Although the arrow connecting the two generativity scores in the path analysis points from parents to offspring, clearly the relationship is not as simple as indicated. In his original formulations, Erikson (1950) noted that adult men and women “need to be needed.” That is, adults benefit in many ways by caring for children (e.g., increases in self-esteem, feelings of competence, increased ability to love). The rhythms of day-to-day life in a household offer plenty of opportunities for mutual influences between parent and child; thus, the full breadth of generativity will be understood only by moving away from crude scale scores to look more closely at the intimate kinds of generative exchanges made in parent-offspring dyads (e.g., Snarey, 1993). It may be easiest to start by examining people who have consciously articulated generativity narratives (e.g., McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997).

Not only does generativity run in families, but politics does as well. As expected, parents high on generativity transmitted political values in relatively direct ways to their children. This active effort at political socialization was correlated with the offspring’s heightened scores on generativity. Kotre (1984) argued that one component of generativity was an awareness of one’s culture and its products. Politics are an important aspect of culture, and so it is not surprising that political socialization of offspring should relate to parental LGS scores.

Although generativity of parents was uncorrelated with the importance of family religion in offspring, parental generativity was negatively related to the wholesale rejection of religion by offspring. This provided partial confirmation of the work of Dillon et al.

(2003). Using data from their follow-up of 60-year-old longitudinal data, Dillon et al. found that generativity was positively related to religiousness and spirituality during early, middle, and late adulthood. Indeed, the generativity scores of the offspring in the current sample were positively correlated with the importance of their family's religion in their lives,  $r = .27, p < .05$ . This finding, in addition to the absence of religious repudiation in children of generative parents, shows that the findings of Dillon et al. (2003) are not due to cohort effects of their sample born in the 1920s. Current generations of young people who are interested in religion are also focused on generative concerns. Note that the findings in the current study do not indicate that atheists are nongenerative. The correlates between generativity and religiosity are low to moderate in magnitude. Secular humanists might have generative grounds for arguing against positions taken by some religious leaders.

### *Overall Discussion*

In recent years researchers have begun validating theoretical ideas on generativity that have been around for five decades (Erikson, 1950). The current article provides further evidence of the construct validity of generativity. In all cases, the LGS related in expected ways to the personality, political, and other outcome variables examined. Although past research has shown that generativity relates to personality and political interest within persons, the current research showed that generativity had similar effects across persons. Researchers have discussed the intergenerational nature of generativity in theoretical and empirical (including qualitative) ways (e.g., Kotre & Kotre, 1998; Snarey, 1993; Snarey & Clark, 1998), but further research is needed that documents the cross-generational impact of the variable.

For example, research in behavior genetics is important for understanding how much of generativity is genetically heritable. It may very well be that a genetic explanation accounts for most of the shared variance in the .39 correlation in LGS scores observed in this study between parents and offspring. If so, this does not indicate that family environments have no influence on offspring generativity. Rather, it seems possible for parents and different children in a family mutually to regulate specific types of generativity in each other. For example, how do offspring who become impassioned about a social issue (e.g., recycling) influence parents who may not have

thought one way or another about the issue? Do generative parents incorporate recycling into their proprium (i.e., Allport's, 1961, concept of the self that makes for inward unity), or do they recycle only as long as that child lives under the same roof? In turn, how do parental commitments to recycling influence other children in the household? Future research needs to assess more specifically the ways in which individuals might increase the generative scope of each other.

By its very nature, generativity involves the mutual recognition of intergenerational bonds. Such compacts can serve as a model for nonfamilial bonds and perhaps alleviate some of the stressors associated with the so-called graying of America. As older generations increase in numbers proportional to younger generations, it will be important to maintain an open dialogue of intergenerational communication of the sort that seems to exist in families that support the generative strivings of each member.

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