

## **PARENT STATUS AND GENERATIVITY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RACE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Generativity, or providing for the next generation (Erikson, 1950), is usually associated with midlife, and related to parenting. However, the extent to which grandparenting or non-parenting are associated with generativity, especially within the context of race, is less well known. The current study uses narrative data from the Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood (FLSA;  $N = 150$ ) to examine the relationship between generativity and parent status—parents, grandparents, as well as non-parents—in midlife African Americans and Whites. Responses to questions concerning future plans in Life Story narratives were coded for four subtypes of generative expression: general generativity, productive generativity, generative caring, and generative need to be needed; these subtypes of generativity were associated with parent status in different ways for middle-aged men and women of each race group. The findings highlight the importance of context, providing a glimpse of expressions of generativity at the intersection of parent status and race.

Generativity, or “. . . the establishment, the guidance, and the enrichment of the living generation and the world it inherits” (Erikson, 1950, p. 123), is usually

associated with midlife (McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993; Stewart, Ostrove, & Helson, 2001), and related to parenting (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). However, less is known regarding generativity in childless individuals or grandparents (Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008; Thiele & Whelan, 2006); moreover, we also know little about race differences in generativity (Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2001), or how the intersection of race and social roles may differ, especially given the central role of grandparenting for African Americans (Pruchno, 1999). The current study is unique in that it examines levels of generativity for grandparents as well as parents and non-parents, using different subtypes of generativity coded from midlife African American and White men's and women's narratives of future selves.

Both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies have focused on midlife as the time when generativity is manifested, and potentially at its peak. For example, Stewart, Ostrove, and Helson (2001) found that women perceived generativity as more prominent in middle age (the 40s) than retrospectively in early adulthood (the 30s), and prospectively higher still in the 50s compared to the 40s. In a similar cross-sectional study, Zucker, Ostrove, and Stewart (2002) found comparable results, although generativity had leveled off by the time women were aged in their 60s. Newton and Stewart (2010) found that generative concerns increased over the course of middle age (between the 40s and 60s) in a longitudinal study of midlife women, actually peaking in the 60s. The authors speculate that Erikson's (1950) timeline for generativity may be extended in more recent cohorts, remaining a pre-occupation well into the 60s. Both the accomplishment of generativity, and feeling useful and needed, can be an important component of elderly life (Gruenewald, Liao, & Seeman, 2012; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998). Thus, the experience and benefits of generativity may extend beyond midlife.

Additionally, specific features of generativity may be more prominent at different ages. McAdams, de St. Aubin, and Logan (1993) assessed generativity in four ways: generative concerns, actions, commitment, and narrative experiences. Using a composite of all four features, middle-aged adults exhibited significantly higher levels of generativity than both younger and older adults. However, when the four features were disaggregated, although generative commitments and narratives demonstrated the same pattern as the composite, generative concerns and generative actions showed no age differences. This finding highlights the utility of measuring generativity in multiple ways in order to capture its nuances and facets.

Midlife itself has been termed the prime of life, at least for women (Mitchell & Helson, 1990), and a time of "maximum status and widest responsibilities" (Helson & Soto, 2005, p. 195). It is a time when children leave home, elderly family members often require care, parents may retire or become grandparents,

or career responsibilities increase. These observations underscore the relevance of individuals' social roles to the course of generativity. Although commitment to raising a family over career may be associated with higher levels of generativity at midlife (Stewart & Vandewater, 1993), within the family, generativity may not be focused solely on caring for the next generation, but other generations as well: Peterson (2002) found that women who provided care for parents, particularly fathers, expressed higher levels of generativity. For midlife individuals who do not have children, generativity may be expressed within the context of their careers (Clark & Arnold, 2008; Peterson & Stewart, 1996).

### **PARENTHOOD AND GENERATIVITY**

Although parenthood may be the "most private and local realm of generative expression" (McAdams et al., 1998, p. 22), generativity can also manifest as a desire for immortality, and caring for what one has created. These concepts are not necessarily limited to childbearing, but arise in mentoring, caring for others, or producing ideas or works that outlive the self. However, parenting provides a common context in which both women and men often express generativity. Similar to Stewart and Vandewater (1993), Newton and Stewart (2010) found that women who were primarily focused on family throughout adulthood were strongly focused on generativity at age 62. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) found that although adult women had higher levels of generativity than men, having children was more strongly linked with generativity for men than it was for women, although levels of well-being associated with generativity do not differ for parents compared to non-parents (Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). Thus, although raising a family may provide an opportunity for generative expression, it is not the only generative arena; conversely, adults who undertake parenthood may vary in their levels of generativity.

### **GRANDPARENTHOOD AND GENERATIVITY**

As a new role added in mid-to-late adulthood (Thiele & Whelan, 2006), grandparenting is an involuntary "countertransition" for an individual (Hagestad & Lang, 1986, p. 116), initiated by the distal voluntary act of becoming a parent, but completed by another's (i.e., one's own child) status as a parent. Grandparents often provide the emotional and financial resources necessary for their grandchildren to flourish (Coall & Hertwig, 2011; Laham, Gonsalkorale, & von Hippel, 2005). This may be especially pertinent for African-American grandparents, who often play traditionally

pivotal roles in holding their families together. African Americans also have twice the odds of becoming caregiving grandparents (Pruchno, 1999), and for African-American grandmothers in particular, the assumption of responsibility for raising their grandchildren has greater centrality, and they are less likely to experience burden from caring for their grandchildren compared to White grandmothers (Pruchno, 1999; Pruchno & McKenney, 2002).

According to Erikson and colleagues, grandparenting exemplifies the provision of care for both grandchildren and children, for example, through babysitting (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986), providing a sense of purpose during a time when generative needs may still be high (Thiele & Whelan, 2008), as well as the maintenance of a symbolic legacy through grandchildren (Kotre, 1984, 1999). Kivnick (1982, 1988) identified five meaningful factors of being a grandparent, including immortality through clan, a factor that seems most pertinent to the current study, representing the continuity of family in a direct line through one's descendants and into "the indefinite future" (Kivnick, 1982, p. 61); Kivnick refers to this type of generativity as post-maintenance generativity or grand-generativity, when older adults transfer the responsibility of caring for the current generation to their own children.

Although comparatively little empirical research examines the relationship between grandparenthood and generativity (Thiele & Whelan, 2006), there is some evidence that grandparenting staves off stagnation and contributes to successful aging, through social engagement. Indeed, foster grandparents have identified the sense of purpose they find, for example, "These children are our future. They need us to teach them . . . to point them in the right direction" (Fisher, 1995, p. 247). Grandparenting can be seen as an extension of parental responsibilities (Villar, Celdrán, & Triadó, 2012), and integral to passing on important life values (Bates, 2009).

### **RACE AS A CONTEXT FOR PARENTHOOD, GRANDPARENTHOOD, AND GENERATIVITY**

A relatively small core of studies examines race differences in levels and correlates of generativity. For instance, Hart et al. (2001) found that African-American adults showed significantly higher levels of generativity compared to White adults. More recently, in a sample of African-American women, Versey and Newton (2013) found that paid work moderated the relationship between generativity and successful aging, measured in that particular study as a composite of subjective health, life satisfaction, and confidence (Versey &

Newton, 2013). Similarly, in another recent study, generativity in middle-aged African Americans was only related to socioeconomic status (SES) (Jones & McAdams, 2013).

There is evidence that African-American and White men and women approach their midlife social roles in qualitatively different ways. African-American parents are more likely than White parents to view themselves as role models for their children (Hart et al., 2001). Caldwell and White (2006) outline the concept of generative fathering among African-American men who potentially assume responsibility for raising all young people in their community, whether or not they are kin, highlighting a difference in generative context for African Americans and Whites: the importance of the extended family in African-American communities. African-American and White midlife women also express generativity differently as it relates to successful aging; African-American women hold spiritual and religious values irrespective of generativity, whereas for White women, spiritual commitment and generativity are positively associated (Versey & Newton, 2013).

Given the strong ties to extended kin for African Americans, especially the prominence of grandmothers as caregivers (Cherlin, 2009), differences in generativity between races may more accurately be captured using methods other than self-report, such as the narrative coding methods used by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) or Stewart, Franz, and Layton (1988). Indeed, the less visible types of generativity not embodied by direct parenting or mentoring, arising within an “expanded radius of care” (Peterson & Klohnen, 1995, p. 20), may not be clearly reflected in self-report measures. Based on an extensive review of Erikson’s writings, Stewart and colleagues (1988) developed a coding scheme for Erikson’s adult developmental themes of identity, intimacy, and generativity as they were expressed in the personal papers of Vera Brittain, a British feminist and pacifist writer (Stewart et al., 1988, p. 44). Most relevant to the current study is these authors’ system for coding generativity into four types: broad general expressions, generative concerns about caring for others, being productive, and a need to be needed (see Method section for detail).

In sum, although generativity and midlife are associated, generativity and social roles are also related, and midlife can encompass a number of changing social roles (e.g., parenthood or grandparenthood). Additionally, the association between generativity and these social roles may differ for African-American and White women and men, and may not be adequately captured using self-report measures. Alternative measurement of different generative concerns such as preoccupations with caring and the need to be needed may be particularly important among older adults, especially African

Americans. The present study is unique in that it compares levels of generativity by parent status within race, using coded narratives.

### THE PRESENT STUDY

We examine the association between parent status and generativity, as well as potential differences in this association by race, in an age-homogeneous sample of middle-aged adults. We extend the literature concerning the relatively higher levels of generativity expressed by African Americans compared with Whites (Hart et al., 2001; Jones & McAdams, 2013; Versey & Newton, 2013) to examine social roles, and consider the four subtypes of generativity outlined by Stewart et al. (1988): general generativity (expressions of making a lasting contribution to future generations, particularly involving parenting or mentoring), productive generativity (expressions concerning the development of ideas, growth), generative caring (expressing concern for the capacity to care for others), and generative need to be needed (the expression of the need to be of use to others).

We expect that grandparenthood will be as positively associated with total levels of generativity as parenthood, and non-parenthood will be associated with comparatively lower levels of total narrative generativity, the sum of all the subtypes, for African Americans and Whites. We also expect that grandparents may exhibit higher levels of the subtypes of generativity associated with a wider radius of care (generative caring, need to be needed). However, non-parents may express higher levels of productive generativity. Additionally, we expect race and gender differences in levels of total narrative generativity, and tentatively expect that African Americans—especially grandmothers—will express high levels of general generativity as well as total narrative generativity.

### Hypotheses

#### *Parent Status, Gender, Race, and Total Generativity*

Based on research concerning the relatively strong association between parent status and generativity, race and generativity, and gender and generativity (Kivnick, 1982; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Newton & Stewart, 2010; Thiele & Whelan, 2008), it is hypothesized that (a) being a parent or grandparent will be related to increased narrative expressions of total narrative generativity than being a non-parent for both African Americans and Whites. We also hypothesize that (b) women and (c) African Americans will express more total narrative generativity than men and Whites, respectively.

### *Parent Status, Race, Gender, and Subtypes of Generativity*

Given that general generativity is concerned with directly guiding the next generation, such as through parenting or mentoring, we hypothesize that this subtype of generativity will be expressed more by parents *and* grandparents, whereas non-parents will express higher levels of productive generativity (concerned with generating products and new ideas; Clark & Arnold, 2008; Peterson & Stewart, 1996). While we have no explicit hypotheses concerning generative caring or need to be needed, we might expect grandparents to express more themes concerning these potentially intergenerational subtypes of generativity. We also predict that general generativity themes, while high for both parents and grandparents, will be especially high for African-American grandparents (Cherlin, 2009), particularly grandmothers (Pruchno, 1999); additionally, expressions of generative caring will be particularly high for African-American non-parents, particularly men (Caldwell & White, 2006). That is, African Americans will express themes of generativity related to community or caring for others, such as caring generativity or need to be needed, relatively more frequently than Whites.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood (FLSA) follows midlife adults (aged 55-58) living in the greater Chicago area over 10 years as they negotiate the adult transition from middle-aged to youngest-old, achieving milestones such as grandparenthood or retirement. Participants were recruited by a private survey company utilizing flyers, bulletin board postings, and paid advertisements displayed at community centers, public libraries, local newspapers, religious institutions, and grocery stores. They received \$75 for completing an initial round of online surveys and \$75 for completing a life story interview. In the current study, data were taken from the first year of the study (2008); participants with complete data ( $N = 150$ , those with both survey and interview data, or 92% of the total sample) are 58% White, 42% African American, and predominantly female (65%). Following previous research conducted using the same sample as in the current study (Jones & McAdams, 2013), household income and highest level of education were standardized and combined as a broader representation of SES (see Measures section for details).

## Measures

### *Parent Status*

Participants were asked to provide a wide range of demographic and background information. Particularly relevant to our study were questions relating to participants' parent status: "Do you have any children?" and "Do you have any grandchildren?" Participants were classified as parents if they had children (whether biological, step, or adopted); grandparents if they had both children and grandchildren; non-parents if they reported not having any children; and coded 0 (*no children*), 1 (*children*), or 2 (*grandchildren*). The final dataset comprised participants for whom we had complete data (i.e., parent status, gender, race, SES, self-report generativity, as well as a completed Life Story Interview): parents ( $N = 79$ ), grandparents ( $N = 48$ ), and non-parents ( $N = 23$ ). Among African Americans, there were 19 parents, 33 grandparents, and 11 non-parents; among Whites, there were 60 parents, 15 grandparents, and 12 non-parents. Three individuals did not identify as either White or African American, and were excluded from analyses.

### *Gender*

Gender was coded as 1 (*female*) or 2 (*male*).

### *Narrative Generativity*

The Life Story Interview (McAdams, 1995/2008) follows a structured format that has been used for many years at the Foley Center for the Study of Lives at Northwestern University. Each participant is asked to describe key chapters and scenes in their life story, and to imagine where the story may lead in the future. The interview requires between 90 minutes and 2 hours to complete. For the present study, data from the interview given in the first year of the FLSA study were used. We were particularly interested in three questions indexing participants' thoughts about their future selves, aggregated in a section of the interview titled "Future Script." These questions concerned: the next chapter in life; dreams, hopes, and plans for the future; and the existence of a life project. Given that Erikson (1974) viewed generativity as caring for current generations and the world they would inherit, the forward-looking nature of these questions seemed particularly suited to coding for expressions of generativity.

Participants were specifically asked:

1. Your life story includes key chapters and scenes from your past, as you have described them, and it also includes how you see or imagine your

future. Please describe what you see to be the next chapter in your life. What is going to come next in your life story?

2. Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the future in your life story?
3. Do you have a project in life? A life project is something that you have been working on and plan to work on in the future chapters of your life story. The project might involve your family or your work life, or it might be a hobby, avocation, or pastime. Please describe any project that you are currently working on or plan to work on in the future. Tell me what the project is, how you got involved in the project or will get involved in the project, how the project might develop, and why you think this project is important for you and/or for other people.

Taken as a whole, these questions look to the future, as well as cover a range of distinct concepts—proximal, concrete happenings on the horizon (next chapter); concerns and wishes for the more distal future (hopes and dreams); and a combination of past, present, and future concerns and actions (project in life)—while sharing similar aspects of the life story.

Responses varied in length. Participants' responses to the next chapter question ranged from 16 to 2499 words ( $M = 406$ ;  $SD = 376$ ); the length of responses to the plans, hopes, and dreams question ranged from 4 to 1658 words in length ( $M = 294$ ;  $SD = 220$ ); and responses to the future project question ranged from 3 to 1822 words ( $M = 431$ ;  $SD = 295$ ). Themes also varied; topics ranged from broad issues of work and retirement, finances, family, spouse or partner, self-improvement, beliefs, leisure travel, relocating, and caregiving, through specific issues such as writing an autobiography or losing weight.

The coding system used in the present study was developed by Stewart, Franz, and Layton (1988; later revised by Stewart, Franz, Paul, & Peterson, 1991). It has been used to code open-ended surveys, interviews, and personal documents, such as diaries or letters, in a cogent body of work by Stewart and colleagues (see, for example, Espin, Stewart, & Gomez, 1990; Franz, 1988; Newton & Stewart, 2010; Peterson, 1993; Peterson & Stewart, 1990; Stewart & Vandewater, 1993). The system identifies themes reflecting Erikson's (1968, 1982) three adult stages of identity, intimacy, and generativity in terms of the definitions and examples contained in his accounts. In the present study, we focused solely on coding for generativity. The first author, having achieved inter-rater reliability in previous work with one of the originators of the coding system, worked with the second author to become proficient at coding generative themes in participants' future self-narratives.

The two authors then worked together to code approximately 20% of future script responses, reaching an inter-rater agreement of 90% using the method recommended by Smith, Feld, and Franz (1992): twice the number of the raters' agreements on the presence of a category divided by the sum of both raters' scoring for that category. The remaining responses were then divided equally between the two coders; if either coder felt unsure regarding any coding, both coders reviewed and agreed upon the final coding by discussion.

Responses to all three questions could be coded for more than one type of generativity (general generativity, productive generativity, generative caring, generative need to be needed) and/or for multiple instances of one particular type of generativity. Responses were summed across questions to give each participant a total score for each generativity type. We also calculated total narrative generativity by summing the prevalence of all narrative subtypes of generativity. Following standard practice to avoid assessing sheer verbal fluency, scores were corrected by regression for their correlation with the number of words written in responses (Smith et al., 1992; Winter, 1973).

*General generativity:* Statements concerning *general generativity* included mentioning children, grandchildren, or non-relatives, such as students, mentees, or other individuals to whom the participant gave their time and direct guidance. Examples of general generativity include desires to “get my daughter’s financial situation very stable” and “I want to be around here for my grandbabies.”

*Productive generativity:* Statements coded for *productive generativity* mentioned the creation or development of products or ideas for future generations. Respondents' contributions could be concrete, such as a garden or work of art, or abstract, such as new ideas or philosophies. For example, one participant articulated their life project in this way:

. . . traditional retirement as we've thought about it for the last two generations ain't going to exist. And that got me on to a whole project, which I call [ ]. I've even kind of set up a website. And, and I went beyond just the whole vocation issue [to] how do you revitalize marriages that last for a long period of time. How do you have relationships with children where you're more of a—you know, you can be a peer as opposed to, you know, telling them what to do? How . . . do you deal with, you know, kind of the growth of your own spirituality and, you know, wisdom so that you can share that effectively? So that's kind of my project . . . to try and figure out how to make what I want to say commercially accessible.

*Generative caring:* Expressions of *generative caring* included statements concerned with the capacity to care for others. Whereas many participants expressed this type of generativity in terms of caring for the next generation, generative caring could also include the previous generation. For example, caring for one's parents can be considered a generative act as it often involves preserving past generations for future ones, as one participant observed about their parents:

So, to see their health decline, to see the depression that's just—it's ruined their lives, take place, is—I guess everybody's got to go through it, and you see the full circle. So, they took care of me, and now I'm taking care of them. That's my next chapter of my life.

*Generative need to be needed:* Statements scored for the *generative need to be needed* included expressions of some sort of inner need to be of use to others, and were often characterized by participants' expressions of simply wanting to "feel of some use" through volunteering or other charitable acts. For example, one respondent answered, "I think the main thing I hope to accomplish in the next chapter of my life . . . is to be able to help make a difference in someone else's life, whether it's some sort of volunteer work or something like that." Additionally, a total generativity score was calculated by summing each participant's score for all four types of generativity.

Finally, although we focused on coding for expressions of generativity in these narratives of future selves, it was certainly not the only measure of positive functioning in midlife. Participants often listed what they were looking forward to in general terms, or listed other personal issues they wanted to focus on, or how they envisaged their lives would change; or not, as evidenced by this participant in response to the next chapter question:

For me that's easy. So now I just do what I want to do. In fact I love traveling, I love theater, music, concerts. . . . I am a big theater goer at the Black Ensemble Theater we were just there again Saturday night. . . . I like luxury. I like just having fun, so it's just continuing more of that.

### *Self-Report Generativity*

The Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) was used as a self-report measure to validate coded generativity; it is a 20-item self-report scale developed to measure individual differences in generative concerns, and exhibits significant convergent validity with measures of both generative behavior and narratives. Each item is rated on a 0 (*never*) to 3 (*very often or nearly always*) Likert-type scale. Items include "I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences," "I do

not feel that other people need me” (R), and “I think I will be remembered for a long time after I die.” McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) report high internal consistency for the LGS ( $\alpha = .84$ ); in the present study,  $\alpha = .86$ .

#### *Socio-Economic Status*

A broader composite measure of SES, representing both personal and financial resources, was calculated from both family income and participants' highest level of educational attainment (Jones & McAdams, 2013); because these two variables were highly correlated ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ), they were standardized and summed. SES is important to consider when conducting analyses that involve between-group differences or strong associations between SES and other variables. For this study, we conducted preliminary analyses to examine the relationship between SES, narrative and self-report generativity, and parent status within group. SES was significantly related to general generativity for the total sample, was significantly lower for African Americans compared to Whites, and significantly lower for grandparents in the total sample compared to both parents and non-parents; therefore, it is included in analyses.

*Annual family income:* Participants indicated their annual family income in increments of \$25,000 per annum from 1 ( $\leq \$25,000$ ) to 13 ( $> \$300,000$ ), with a median income of between \$75,000 and \$100,000. The income distribution was bi-modal for both African Americans and Whites: the median income for African-American households ranged from \$50,000-\$75,000, whereas for White households, this figure was between \$75,000-\$125,000.

*Highest level of education completed:* Participants indicated their highest level of education as 1 (*high school*), 2 (*some college*), 3 (*college—B.A. or B.S.*), or 4 (*graduate work*). The median education level for Whites was graduate work, whereas for African Americans it was a college degree.

The final (standardized) SES composite ranged from  $-3.23$  to  $2.71$  ( $M = .03$ ;  $SD = 1.62$ ).

#### *Plan of Analysis*

We ran correlations to ascertain the initial relationship between self-report generativity (measured by the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992)) and the four subtypes of generativity, and total narrative generativity. To compare levels of the four types of narrative generativity for parents, grandparents, and non-parents, separate three-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted for each of the subtypes of generativity, taking into account race, gender, and SES.

## RESULTS

An initial examination of the relationships between self-report generativity and types of expressed narrative generativity is presented in Table 1. The results show that total coded narrative generativity was positively associated with self-report generativity as measured by the LGS,  $r = .30, p < .01$ . The narrative generativity subtypes of productive generativity and generative caring were also positively related to LGS,  $r = .28, p < .01$  and  $r = .16, p < .05$ , respectively. However, general generativity and generative need to be needed were not related to LGS. These correlations show that our coded narrative types of generativity and LGS both measure generative concepts, and that both self-report measure and coded narrative measures of the construct are related. This initial analysis was used mainly to validate narrative generativity as it is used in the present study, and LGS does not feature in subsequent analyses.

### Parent Status, Gender, Race, and Total Narrative Generativity

Tables 2a and 2b display the means and standard deviations for total narrative expressions of generativity (as well as the subtypes of narrative generativity). Assessing the relationship between parent status, gender, race, SES, and total generativity, we found that levels not only differed by parent

Table 1. Intercorrelations of All Types of Generativity

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Loyola Generativity Scale	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. Total Narrative Generativity	.30**	—	—	—	—	—
3. General Generativity	.09	.58**	—	—	—	—
4. Productive Generativity	.28**	.41**	-.14 $t$	—	—	—
5. Generative Caring	.16*	.33**	-.01	-.10	—	—
6. Generative Need to be Needed	-.01	.36**	-.11	-.11	-.04	—

Note:  $N$ s range from  $N = 150$  to  $N = 154$ .

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ;  $t < .10$ .

Table 2a. Means (and Standard Deviations) of Types of Generativity and SES by Parent Status: White

	Parent status		
	Parent <i>N</i> = 60	Grandparent <i>N</i> = 15	Non-parent <i>N</i> = 12
Total Narrative Generativity	2.23 (1.96)	1.84 (1.93)	-0.04 (1.56)
General Generativity	1.05 (1.47)	1.38 (1.34)	-0.74 (0.80)
Productive Generativity	0.62 (1.23)	0.44 (1.25)	0.02 (0.64)
Generative Caring	0.37 (0.67)	0.26 (0.46)	0.57 (1.00)
Need to be Needed	0.17 (1.22)	-0.24 (0.72)	0.09 (0.76)
Socioeconomic Status	0.29 (1.36)	0.15 (1.93)	0.79 (1.72)

**Note:** Means for types of narrative generativity are corrected for verbal fluency, hence some scores will be negative.

Socioeconomic status is a standardized composite of yearly income and highest level of education.

Table 2b. Means (and Standard Deviations) of Types of Generativity and SES by Parent Status: African American

	Parent status		
	Parent <i>N</i> = 19	Grandparent <i>N</i> = 33	Non-parent <i>N</i> = 11
Total Narrative Generativity	2.51 (1.78)	2.47 (1.79)	1.40 (1.84)
General Generativity	0.52 (1.11)	1.03 (1.33)	-0.72 (0.66)
Productive Generativity	0.74 (1.17)	0.72 (1.01)	1.71 (1.67)
Generative Caring	0.62 (0.90)	0.68 (0.95)	0.54 (0.93)
Need to be Needed	0.63 (1.15)	0.02 (0.67)	-0.13 (0.72)
Socioeconomic Status	0.16 (1.36)	-0.85 (1.68)	0.35 (1.79)

**Note:** Means for types of narrative generativity are corrected for verbal fluency, hence some scores will be negative.

Socioeconomic status is a standardized composite of yearly income and highest level of education.

status,  $F(2, 130) = 5.02, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , but also race,  $F(1, 130) = 5.14, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , and gender,  $F(1, 130) = 4.19, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$ : women expressed higher levels of total generativity than men, and African Americans expressed higher levels than Whites. Comparison of parent statuses showed that both parents and grandparents expressed similar levels of total generativity; however, parents expressed significantly higher levels than non-parents,  $p < .01$ , and grandparents also expressed more themes of total generativity than non-parents,  $p < .05$ . There were no differences by SES, and no two- or three-way interactions for this particular analysis.

### **Parent Status, Gender, Race, and Subtypes of Narrative Generativity**

#### *General Generativity*

For general generativity (i.e., providing direct guidance for the next generation in the form of parenting or mentoring), we found a difference by parent status,  $F(2, 130) = 11.41, p < .01, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , such that parents and grandparents expressed significantly more themes of general generativity in their future scripts than non-parents,  $ps < .01$ . There were no differences by SES, gender, or race, and no two- or three-way interactions.

#### *Productive Generativity*

This narrative subtype of generativity referenced the creation or development of products or ideas for future generations. In examining the relationships between parent status, race, gender, SES, and productive generativity, race was the only significant predictor,  $F(1, 130) = 5.96, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .04$ : African Americans had significantly higher levels of productive generativity than Whites. Although there was no three-way interaction, we did find a two-way interaction for race \* parent status,  $F(2, 130) = 3.35, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$ , showing that African-American non-parents expressed significantly more themes of productive generativity than White non-parents (Figure 1a), and that African-American non-parents also expressed higher levels of productive generativity than African-American parents,  $p < .05$ , and African-American grandparents,  $p < .05$  (Figure 1b).

#### *Generative Caring*

This subtype of generativity is concerned with the capacity to care for others. For this subtype, we found a relationship between race and generative caring,  $F(1, 130) = 4.56, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .03$ , such that African Americans expressed

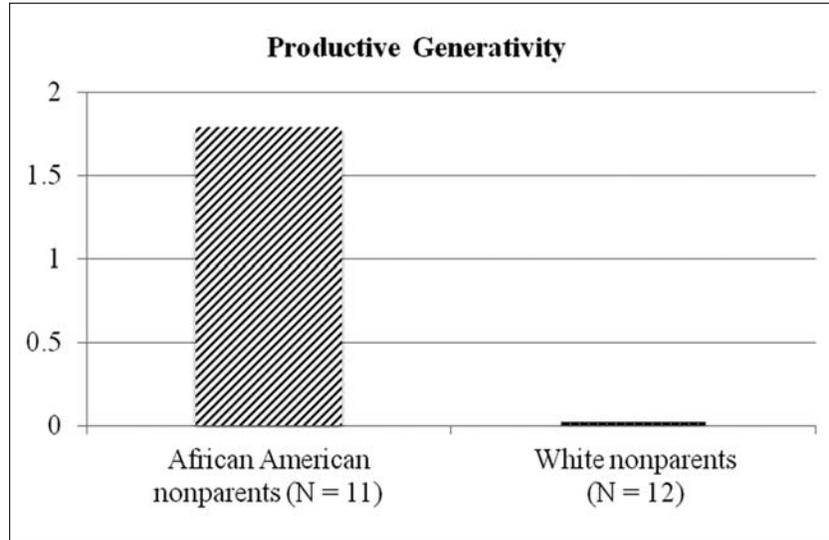


Figure 1a. Productive generativity for African-American non-parents and White non-parents.

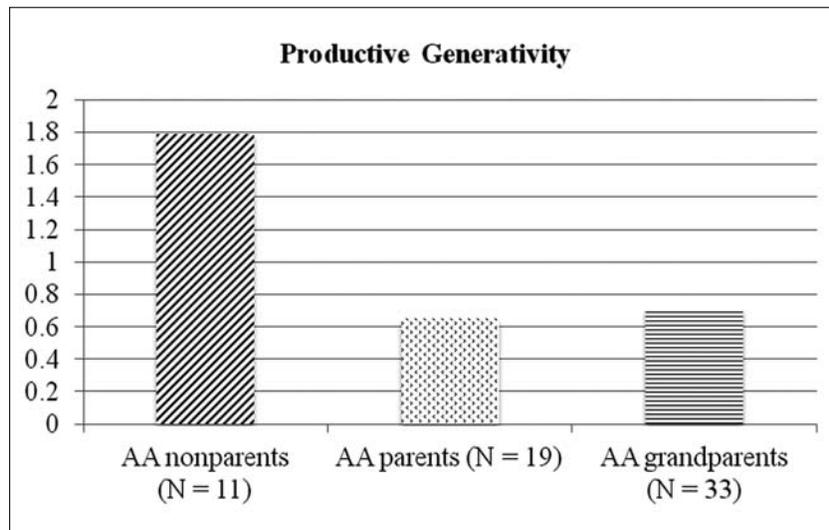


Figure 1b. Productive generativity for African-American non-parents, parents, and grandparents.

higher levels than Whites. Parent status, gender, and SES were not significant. There were no two-way interactions; however, there was a three-way interaction: parent status \* race \* gender,  $F(2, 130) = 3.20, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$ . That is, African-American non-fathers had significantly higher levels of generative caring than White non-fathers,  $p < .05$ , as well as African-American non-mothers,  $p < .05$ . However, the low number of African-American non-fathers ( $N = 2$ ), African-American non-mothers ( $N = 9$ ), and White non-fathers ( $N = 4$ ) precludes any meaningful conclusions from these results.

#### *Generative Need to be Needed*

Similar to general generativity, levels of generative need to be needed (the inner need to be of use to others in some way) differed by parent status,  $F(2, 130) = 3.23, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .05$ . However, in this case, parents expressed significantly more themes of needing to be needed than grandparents,  $p < .05$ , although parents did not differ from non-parents, and non-parents did not differ from grandparents. There were also no differences by race, gender, or SES, and no two- or three-way interactions.

In sum, we found differences by parent status for levels of total narrative generativity, general generativity, and generative need to be needed. Additionally, gender differences were found for total narrative generativity, as well as race differences for levels of productive generativity and total generativity. A two-way interaction—race \* parent status—was evident for productive generativity, and a three-way interaction was evident for generative caring—parent status \* race \* gender—although the cell sizes for this particular interaction were very small.

## DISCUSSION

These results provide partial support for our hypotheses. Our hypotheses that (a) being a parent or grandparent would be associated with higher levels of total narrative generativity compared to being a non-parent for both African Americans and Whites, (b) that women would have higher levels of total generativity than men, and (c) that African Americans would have higher levels of total generativity than Whites were supported. As hypothesized, expressions of general generativity (or mention in their future plans of the provision of direct guidance for future generations) were more prevalent for parents and grandparents compared to non-parents, although the hypothesis that non-parents would express higher levels of productive generativity was not supported. The expectation that grandparents would exhibit higher levels of generative caring and generative need to be needed was not supported; in fact,

if anything, non-parents (generative caring) and parents (need to be needed) expressed more of these themes. Although the prediction that African-American non-parents would exhibit particularly high levels of generative caring was somewhat supported (i.e., for African-American non-fathers), the prediction that providing direct guidance for future generations (general generativity) would be especially prominent in the future narratives of African-American grandparents was not supported.

The findings in the current study provide a nuanced picture of midlife and the relationship between parent status and generativity by including analyses of race, gender, and SES. Our finding that parenthood was associated with higher expressions of total narrative generativity than non-parenthood for both race groups is consistent with earlier work considering social roles and generativity (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Newton & Stewart, 2010; Stewart & Vandewater, 1993). Our finding that grandparenting was similar to parenting as a generative role is also consistent with previous research (e.g., Bates, 2009; Fisher, 1995; Kivnick, 1982). Both African-American and White grandparents showed similar levels of generativity compared to parents, which was not surprising, given the literatures concerning the association between grandparenting and generativity (Kivnick, 1982), extended kin roles in African-American communities, and the pivotal role of grandparents in general (Cherlin, 2009). What is unique about this finding is that it demonstrates the relatively similar association of *grandparenthood* and generativity when compared to the association of parenthood and generativity, providing empirical evidence for an important extension to Erikson's idea of generativity: contributing to future generations.

Furthermore, although we cannot test this in the current data, there may be qualitative differences in what general generativity embodies for parents versus grandparents: grandmothers often mention caring for their grandchildren while also caring for their children, a sort of double-layered legacy of multiple generations (Erikson et al., 1986). However, our failure to detect a stronger relationship between African-American grandparents and both expressions of total narrative generativity and expressions of the capacity to care for others (generative caring) was unexpected, and perhaps suggests that, contrary to what the literature suggests, African-American grandparents do not feature as caregivers as prominently for this particular sample.

Although those individuals who did not have children were generally lower on most types of generativity, African-American non-parents demonstrated the highest level of productive generativity (concern with the creation of products and/or ideas for future generations) of all parent statuses by race, suggesting that a wider circle of care may more accurately capture the ways in which these adults express generativity. This finding may not only speak to

the importance of the wider community for African Americans, but also to the broader idea that individuals express generativity based on their personal resources. Given the between-group differences in SES by race—that is, that Whites had significantly higher SES than African Americans—it is possible that people express their generativity within their contextual constraints. For African Americans in this sample, and perhaps lower SES individuals in general, this may be through generating new ideas or philosophies for the next generation, or through passing down certain values, as well as caring within their community; for Whites, perhaps generativity means the ability to provide more material support in the form of financial stability. Put another way, and as Hart et al. (2001) suggest, Whites may feel a greater sense of control over their lives compared to African Americans, who may experience a wider variety of social constraints through their experience as a racial minority in the United States. Although generally supporting the notion of parenthood and grandparenthood as central to generativity (Erikson et al., 1986; Kivnick, 1982), these profiles outline more clearly the facets of generativity, while suggesting that life contexts—such as socioeconomic status and race—are also important considerations.

The current study produced a number of unexpected findings. Although the hypothesis that, in the total sample, non-parents would express higher levels of generating products and ideas for the next generation (generative productivity) was not supported, African-American non-parents expressed significantly higher levels of productive generativity than African-American grandparents and parents. As mentioned above, it could be that we are observing one way in which childless African Americans can express generativity that maximizes their personal resources, given the SES for African Americans in the current sample. This may also encompass a wider understanding of community and the extended family of which it is constituted, as suggested by the generative fathering observed by Caldwell and White (2006).

Our finding that African-American non-fathers exhibited relatively prevalent expressions of the capacity to provide care, or generative caring, compared with both White non-fathers and African-American non-mothers should be interpreted with caution. As previously mentioned, the cell sizes were small for this parent status by race interaction. However, it warrants further examination with a larger sample, and points to the process by which older African-American men prepare the next generation (Caldwell & White, 2006).

Parents expressed more themes concerning an inner need to be of use to others (or need to be needed) than grandparents, which was also not expected. This particular result could reflect the fact that parents in this sample may have to compete with grandparents, extended kin, or other community

members in the parenting of their children; specifically, African Americans, given the higher prevalence of grandparents compared to Whites. Perhaps also, midlife grandparents may express lower levels of needing to be of use because they are, in actuality, very much needed; thus they continue to experience a capacity for generativity (Stewart & Vandewater, 1998), rather than feeling that they are no longer of use within the family structure. Equally, midlife parents may be experiencing the loss of the companionship of their children as they move away from home.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

Major concerns with the present study are issues with measurement, sample size, and age. There are many ways to measure generativity, and although a strength of this study is that it contains both narrative and self-report measures, we may have limited the range of generativity by not including specific questions regarding work-related leadership, types of employment, and informal caregiving or volunteering (for example). Specifically, further investigation of what generativity “looks” like within different social roles and races could inform the measurement of generativity in future studies, possibly pointing the field towards more inclusive ways of measuring this construct. Additionally, open-ended questions about the meaning of community could inform development of a scale concerning community importance that equally taps midlife Whites’ and African Americans’ generative links within a wider radius of care.

Although total narrative generativity, as well as expressions of the generative subtypes indexing the generation of products and ideas (productive generativity) and the capacity to provide care (generative caring) were correlated with the Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), general generativity and generative need to be needed (or the need to feel of some use) were not. This issue of relatively low correlations between the subtypes of narrative generativity may be cause for concern, and raises the possibility that these measures may not be measuring generativity. Perhaps there is a distinction here between measures of general philosophical generative concerns (productivity and caring) and measures that imply a specific recipient’s role in one’s generativity: that is, in the case of general generativity, younger people, or acknowledgment of one’s generativity, in the case of needing to be needed. Additionally, general generativity, in which participants expressed making contributions to future generations through direct guidance, includes mentioning children and grandchildren; as such, our finding that parents and grandparents are both higher than non-parents might appear to be a tautology. However, this type of generativity also includes directly guiding and mentoring

other individuals, such as students, mentees, or non-relatives; in this respect, non-parents may be equally as likely to express this generative subtype in their narratives of the future.

The sample is relatively small, and may not be particularly representative of midlife adults in the United States. However, it is relatively representative of adults aged 55-58 in the greater Chicago area, with a roughly equivalent race ratio of 58% White, 42% African American (Census data for 2010 put Chicago at 45% White, 32.9% African American). Yet, further research is recommended before any strong conclusions are drawn regarding potential race differences in generative expression in the wider population.

Although a strength of this study is the limited age range, this can also be viewed as a limitation: midlife encompasses a broader range of ages (usually approximately 40-65); thus, 55-58 is a relatively thin slice of midlife. Generativity may mean different things for adults in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, and the roles examined here—parent, grandparent, or non-parent—are also likely to differ in their meaning, especially if they are off-time. Thus, including a larger age-range of midlife adults could speak to another concern regarding the typicality of the current findings, and possibly more accurately detail how generativity is expressed depending on parent status in midlife for African-American and White adults. For all these reasons, replication with a more representative sample would help disentangle developmental aspects from contextual aspects of midlife generativity.

If social roles commonly shape expressions of generativity, as present and past research has found, this could also be extended more fully to the context of career or work (e.g., Clark & Arnold, 2008; Peterson & Stewart, 1996), an area not examined in the present study. The types of work one undertakes could influence—and be influenced by—how generativity manifests, and may be more evident in non-parents. For example, Rubinstein (1996) found that many of the older childless women she interviewed were engaged in professional careers, often in the supportive professions such as teacher, nurse, or secretary. This line of investigation may prove fruitful in future research.

In sum, our findings add insight to the current body of knowledge concerning generativity, particularly at midlife: a “crossroads” of sorts, involving roles ranging from parenting or grandparenting to different types of caregiving (e.g., one’s own parents), retiring, or developing a career. Additionally, considerations of social role and race indicate that generativity is not a monolithic concept, and that the life contexts in which these roles unfold (race and parent status, as well as SES) are important for how generativity is expressed.

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