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# Selfless or Selfish? Generativity and Narcissism as Components of Legacy

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**Abstract** Erikson's concept of generativity, or caring for the next generation, acknowledges the presence of narcissism or any type of self-preoccupation as potentially negative. However, other theories articulate generativity as including features of self-involvement, such as a drive for symbolic immortality (McAdams and de St. Aubin *J Pers Soc Psychol* 62(6):1003–1015. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.62.6.1003, 1992). Recent empirical research also supports this view by identifying generativity and narcissism as both incorporating the beneficial components of agency and communion (Frimer et al. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 101(1):149–163. doi:10.1037/a0023780, 2011; Gebauer et al. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 103(3):854–878. doi:10.1037/a0029629, 2012). Moreover, creating a legacy—something left behind when one dies—entails levels of both generativity and narcissism; thus, in the presence of generativity, narcissism may be seen as positive rather than negative. The current study examined generativity and narcissism, and their association with legacy, which was coded from midlife adults' narratives concerning the future (age 55–58;  $N = 155$ ). The findings indicated that a combination of high generativity and high narcissism was associated with the highest level of composite legacy, one in which both self and other are implicated. Results are discussed in light of the potentially positive outcomes of narcissism and its synergistic properties for legacy creation when combined with generativity.

**Keywords** Narcissism · Generativity · Legacy · Midlife

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## Introduction

As a psychological construct, generativity, "...the establishment, the guidance, and the enrichment of the living generation and the world it inherits" (Erikson 1974, p. 123), is usually envisaged as a relatively positive, benevolent force. However, generativity combines both agency (the desire for self-assertion, individuality, and mastery) and communion (the desire for contact and cooperation)—or a focus on both the self and other—and is thus not entirely selfless (Frimer et al. 2011; Mansfield and McAdams 1996). Indeed, Frimer et al. view the integration of agency and communion as a new composite: "enlightened self-interest" (2011, p. 149). This suggests that generativity can be combined with narcissism, a construct usually viewed more negatively than generativity. Legacy, often associated with generativity, includes elements related to both self and other (Hunter and Rowles 2005). Legacy has been variously described as leaving something behind when we die, leaving our mark on the world, making a lasting impression, or contributing in a personal way to the future. These are all concepts closely related to generativity. Thus, legacy—and by association, generativity—may have a darker side, one more akin to narcissism: commonly perceived as negative, especially when the creation of a lasting impression is considered. In the current research, we aim to disentangle the degree to which these psychological concepts (generativity and narcissism) are present in the legacies outlined by midlife men and women in their narratives of the future.

## Generativity

Researchers continue to develop and refine the concept of generativity, usually associated with midlife (McAdams et al. 1993; Newton and Stewart 2010; Stewart et al. 2001),

although it can also emerge in early adulthood (Peterson and Stewart 1993). While often associated with parenthood, other social roles, such as caring for elderly relatives (Peterson 2002) or mentoring (Clark and Arnold 2008), also provide contexts for generative expression. Extending Erikson's ideas, Kotre (1984) described a more self-focused type of generativity; one that embodies "... a desire to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self" (p. 10). Among other types of generativity, Kotre outlined agentic cultural generativity or the idea of symbolic immortality. Thus, Erikson and Kotre provide slightly different approaches to the construct: Erikson suggests it is predominantly other-focused, whereas Kotre suggests it is self-focused.

Two constructs most consistently linked to generativity are agency and communion (Ackerman et al. 2000; Frimer et al. 2011; Mansfield and McAdams 1996; Peterson and Stewart 1993), suggesting that generativity can be conceptualized as a blend of personality factors. For example, Mansfield and McAdams (1996), in comparing highly generative and less generative adults, found that generative adults expressed higher levels of communion, although their levels of agency were no different from less generative adults. They also expressed higher levels of the integration of agency and communion; that is, when generative adults related life story scenes, they mentioned both generativity concerned with extending the self (i.e., agency) while at the same time mentioning the production of ideas and products that help the next generation (i.e., communion). The blend of agency (self-focused) and communion (other-focused) factors inherent in generativity was further examined by Frimer et al. (2011), who compared 25 "moral (or generative) exemplars" (p. 152)—individuals who had received an award for extraordinary volunteerism—with a sample of 25 less generative participants. Generative exemplars expressed more communal themes than those who were less generative; they also more frequently expressed a blend of communion and agency, a composite the authors label "enlightened self-interest."

## Narcissism

The notion of generativity as a combination of concepts focused on self and other, such as agency and communion, shares similarities to non-pathological narcissism. Indeed, a small body of extant research relates narcissism to communion as well as agency (e.g., Ackerman et al. 2011; Bradlee and Emmons 1992; Gebauer et al. 2012; Wink 1991).

In distinguishing normal from pathological narcissism, Ackerman et al. (2011) describe it as reflecting, "...the strategies used to promote a positive self-image and facilitate agency by otherwise psychologically well-adjusted individuals" (p. 68). The same authors also found that agency-related personality constructs were positively

related to scores on the Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI), although this association was mainly driven by two NPI subscales: Leadership/Authority (associated with lower social anxiety, neuroticism, anxiety, and personal distress, and therefore perceived as more adaptive) and Grandiose Exhibitionism (associated with less adaptive factors such as self-absorption and exhibitionism). Bradlee and Emmons (1992) also found a positive association between narcissism and agency, but a negative association between narcissism and communion.

The potentially more adaptive facet of narcissism described by Ackerman et al. (2011)—Leadership/Authority—adds to earlier work by Wink (1992), who used California Q-sort-based narcissism scales (CAQ; Block 1961) to identify a similarly adaptive subtype of narcissism: autonomous narcissism, one of three subtypes (the others being willfulness and hypersensitivity). Leadership/Authority is characterized by feelings of being a good leader, as well as the ability to influence people, whereas autonomous narcissism is characterized by positive aspects of personality, such as psychological well-being and empathy, and is related to greater well-being and life satisfaction, at least for midlife women (Edelstein et al. 2012). Although midlife is a time when decreases in narcissism may be more adaptive and, as such, have benefits for well-being (Kernberg 1975; Roberts et al. 2010; Hill and Roberts 2012), it is also possible that maintaining a certain level of narcissism enables midlife adults to value their potential legacy contributions.

Combining agency, communion, and narcissism, Gebauer et al. (2012) propose an agency–communion model, according to which all narcissists share the same motives for grandiosity, esteem, entitlement, and power, but use different means to pursue them. For example, agentic narcissists might mention, when prompted to think of grandiose thoughts, "I am the most intelligent person" (p. 854), whereas communal narcissists, given the same prompt, might say "I have a very positive influence on others" (p. 861). This suggests some similarity between Gebauer et al.'s concept of communal narcissism and Frimer et al.'s (2011) concept of enlightened self-interest: both are self-serving through service to others.

In sum, agency and communion are components of both generativity and narcissism, albeit related in different ways; agency and communion are both positively associated with generativity, whereas only agency is positively associated with narcissism (and communion is *negatively* associated with narcissism). Thus, generativity and narcissism share much of what could be considered elements of a "lasting impression," or legacy, also involving a combination of self and other. As Rubinstein (1996) commented, "Legacies involve both narcissism and selflessness" (p. 3). However, it is worthwhile to keep in mind that developmentally these

two constructs predominate at different stages of life: generativity is usually associated with midlife, whereas narcissism is negatively associated with age (Foster et al. 2003).

### Legacy

Legacy has been broadly defined as what one leaves behind when one dies (Rubinstein 1996). This could include tangible items, such as those listed in a last will or testament (Kane 1996), or more intangible factors, such as how individuals would like to be remembered, for example, through communication of wisdom or values to the next generation. Kane comments: “One of the many euphemisms for dying—passing on—is also a term for transmission of material and immaterial legacies” (p. 5). The creating of a legacy can be a highly personal contribution to the future, benefitting both the creator of the legacy and the legacy’s recipients (Hunter and Rowles 2005). Using in-depth interviews with participants aged 31–94, Hunter and Rowles identified three types of legacy: biological legacy, material legacy, and a legacy of values, evident in all participants to varying degrees, and often overlapping.

In experimental studies, legacy has also been explored in its role as a component of aging and leadership. Individuals primed with death cues were more likely to allocate resources to those who would benefit in the future compared to the present (Wade-Benzoni et al. 2012). Older academics who also held legacy beliefs (i.e., one and/or one’s actions will have an enduring influence) exhibited transformational leadership, in which the leader goes beyond self-interests to motivate their followers using charisma, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Zacher et al. 2011). Hence, legacy involves both self-focused and other-focused factors.

Hunter and Rowles (2005) further explicate how both generativity and narcissism are combined in legacy. They propose that although narcissism or personal benefit is seen as a negative outcome in the presence of generativity, it is neutralized by its combination with generativity into the representation of a legacy that is left to others; that is, legacy is not primarily selfless, something generativity is usually conceived as being. The motivations underlying the concern with leaving a legacy may vary widely; the intent to leave something behind requires wanting to be remembered in some way, and both the individual creating the legacy and its recipients can benefit from the process. Thus, narcissism in this context loses some of its negative connotations and stigma.

### The Present Study

The present study is unique, in that it examines a blend of personality factors (generativity and narcissism) in the

expressions of legacies in the narratives of middle-aged men and women. We expect that the narratives addressing the future—expressed in responses to three questions covering the next chapter in participants’ lives, along with their hopes and dreams for the future, as well as their life projects—will contain generative and narcissistic elements to different degrees. These three questions form the “future script” portion of the life story interview (McAdams 2008), in which participants are asked to describe their lives in a series of chapters, as well as other questions including those pertaining to beliefs, high points, and low points (see “Method” section for a fuller description of the interview). Due to the nature of the future script questions on which the current research focuses, we term the concept of legacy in this paper, “lasting impression;” that is, we predict that how participants express their future legacies will be associated with their self-reported levels of generativity and narcissism.

### Hypotheses

- The three types of lasting impression, coded from future script questions, will be positively associated with both narcissism and generativity. In particular, self-script (in which participants express their lasting impression relative to themselves) will be positively associated with high levels of narcissism, given its focus on the self (agency); other script (in which participants express their lasting impression relative to others) will be positively associated with high levels of generativity, given its focus on others (communion); and composite script (in which participants relate their lasting impression as a combination of their personal contribution through service to others) will be positively associated with high levels of both narcissism and generativity.
- Additionally, combinations of high and low scores on both narcissism and generativity will be differentially associated with specific lasting impressions. Self-script will be related to a combination of high narcissism and low generativity; other script will be related to high levels of generativity and low levels of narcissism; and composite script will be related to high levels of both personality factors.

### Method

#### Participants

The Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood (FLSA) is an ongoing, 10-year study begun in 2008 that follows relatively healthy midlife adults (aged 55–58 at initial recruitment and for the present study) living in the greater

Chicago area. 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. Participants received \$75 for completing an initial round of online surveys and \$75 for completing a life story interview. In the current study,  $N = 155$ ; participants are 56 % White, 44 % African American, and predominantly female (65 %); median household income was approximately \$75,000–\$100,000, and median education level was a college degree.

## Measures

### *Generativity*

The Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS; McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992) is a 20-item self-report scale developed to measure individual differences in generative concern that 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 included “I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences,” “I do not feel that other people need me” (reversed), and “I think I will be remembered for a long time after I die.” The authors reported high internal consistency for the overall LGS ( $\alpha = .84$ ); in the present study,  $\alpha = .86$ .

### *Narcissism*

Narcissism was measured using the Narcissism Personality Inventory (NPI; Raskin and Hall 1979; Raskin and Terry 1988). This scale is made up of 40 pairs of opposing statements, such as “I really like to be the center of attention” and “It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention;” a point is scored if the response chosen most concerned attention-getting or narcissism (i.e., “I really like to be the center of attention”). Scores can therefore range from 0 to 40, with higher scores reflecting higher narcissism, and the NPI has exhibited adequate reliability and validity (Raskin and Terry 1988). In the current study, scores ranged from 1 to 35; reliability was  $\alpha = .85$ .

### *Lasting Impression*

The life story interview (McAdams 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 be going in the future. The interview requires between 90 minutes and two hours to complete.

In the present study, the interview was given in the first year of the Foley Longitudinal Study of Adulthood (FLSA). We were particularly interested in three questions concerning the future, and these questions were aggregated under the title “Future Script;” they concerned the next chapter in life; dreams, hopes, and plans for the future; and the existence of a life project. Participants were specifically asked “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?”; “Please describe your plans, dreams, or hopes for the future. What do you hope to accomplish in the future in your life story?”; and “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.”

Responses varied in length; for the “next chapter” question, responses ranged from 16 to 2,499 words ( $M = 406$ ); the length of responses to the “plans, hopes, and dreams” question ranged from 4 to 1,658 words in length ( $M = 294$ ); and the responses to the “future project” questions ranged from 3 to 1,822 words ( $M = 431$ ). Themes also varied, with topics ranging from broad issues of work and retirement, finances, family, spouse or partner, self-improvement, beliefs, leisure travel, relocating to a different state, and caregiving, through specific issues such as writing an autobiography or losing weight.

The first two authors coded future script responses for themes pertaining to making a lasting impression, using a system developed by Newton and Stewart (2011). This system identifies three types of lasting impression focused on the self, other, or a composite of both self and other; these are labeled self-script, other script, and composite script, respectively. Examples of responses coded for each type of lasting impression are given in the “Appendix.”

A response typically coded for self-script contained expressions of concern about making a lasting contribution related to the participant themselves and is meaningful in a solely personal way, such as “I just hope to be able to, to be a strong ad—advisor to my children, my grandchildren, my nieces, and my nephews so that they can come to me and they can ask me something, and I can share with them something that, that, that, that I’ve gone through.” Responses were coded for other script if they contained concerns about

making a lasting contribution for people or places outside the participants' immediate circle of care, or for the greater good; for example, "...work with African American students that don't [have] good self-esteem...helping them to explore the African past so that they can take pride in what—who they were and who their ancestors were and the accomplishments that they achieved throughout history and not just these last few hundred years but with thousands of years of history which they can be proud of." Lastly, responses coded for composite script contained both self and other script themes, combined in certain ways, that is, a particular situation in which the self-script was aimed at or benefited the greater good. In this way, this final type of lasting impression was not merely a composite of self and other types, but referenced the self in the service of others, either within one statement or with respect to one particular situation. For example, one participant responded that their life project was "...the mentoring program that I'm starting, and that's real now. And I want to do a rites of passage for young girls between the ages of ten and 15. I think it's like really instrumental that young women learn younger their value. And I just want to show a girl or kid that she's valuable, you know, what she can do with her life. And that was—I tried that with my daughter, and I was successful, and I'm so happy that I was."

The two coders worked together on approximately 20 % of future script responses, reaching an inter-rater agreement of 90 % using the method recommended by Smith et al. (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 lasting impression (self-script, other script, or composite script) or for multiple instances of one type of script. Responses were summed across questions to give each participant a total score for each script. 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 (Winter 1973; Smith et al. 1992).

#### *Covariates*

Gender, income, and race were added to analyses as covariates.

*Gender* Gender was coded as 1 (*female*) and 0 (*male*).

*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 bimodal for both African Americans and Whites: the median income for African American households ranged from \$50,000 to \$75,000, whereas for White households, this figure was between \$75,000 and \$125,000.

*Race* Race was coded as 1 (*White*) and 2 (*African American*).

#### Plan of Analysis

We were interested in how lasting impression related to both generativity and narcissism, and ran basic correlations to ascertain relationships. We also ran regressions, using centered variables where appropriate (i.e., for continuous variables, such as the measures used for generativity and narcissism) to assess the unique contributions of both generativity and narcissism to each of the types of lasting impression (self-script, other script, or composite script). After basic relationships were assessed using the full Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), we then followed the example of Ackerman et al. (2011) and examined the subscales of the measure—Leadership/Authority, Grandiose Exhibitionism, and Entitlement/Exploitativeness—as well as controlling for gender, income, and race. Interactions were probed further, following the procedure recommended by Aiken and West (1991). Because differences in levels of generativity have been found by income (Jones and McAdams 2013), race (Versey and Newton 2013), and gender (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992), we also ran a series of regressions controlling for these demographics.

#### Results

Frequencies for each type of lasting impression varied; they are as follows: 75 % of all responses included one or more self-scripts, 56 % included one or more other scripts, and 23 % included one or more composite scripts. Correlations assessed the relationships between generativity, narcissism, and the three types of lasting impression, presented in Table 1. Generativity was significantly related to composite script and narcissism, and related to other script at the trend level; self-script was the exception, showing no association with generativity. Both self-script and other script were unrelated to narcissism; however, composite script was significantly positively related to both narcissism and generativity. Thus, composite script was the only type of lasting impression to be related to both generativity and narcissism.

To further test the relationships between generativity, narcissism, and composite script, we ran regression analyses and found that overall the model was significant,  $F(2,144) = 11.29$ ,  $p < .01$ , but that only generativity

**Table 1** Relationships between all variables

| Measure             | 1       | 2     | 3      | 4    | 5 |
|---------------------|---------|-------|--------|------|---|
| 1. Generativity     | –       | –     | –      | –    | – |
| 2. Narcissism       | .41**   | –     | –      | –    | – |
| 3. Self-script      | –.03    | –.05  | –      | –    | – |
| 4. Other script     | .14 $t$ | .12   | –.21** | –    | – |
| 5. Composite script | .34**   | .26** | –.20*  | –.03 | – |

Ns range from  $N = 149$  to  $N = 163$

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

significantly contributed to composite script,  $\beta = .29$ ,  $p = .00$ ; narcissism did not significantly add to this relationship. When introduced to the model, the interaction term (i.e., narcissism \* generativity) showed a trend relationship with composite script,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p = .06$ , although the model remained significant overall,  $F(3,143) = 8.83$ ,  $p < .01$ , with generativity remaining as a significant main effect,  $\beta = .34$ ,  $p = .00$ . No significant relationships between generativity, narcissism, and the other two types of lasting impressions (self and other) were found.

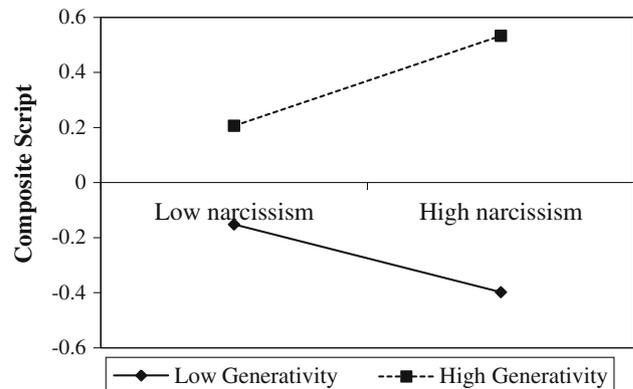
As a follow-up test of the relationships between narcissism, generativity, and lasting impression, we examined the utility of analyzing narcissism at the subscale level, by using the three facets of narcissism as identified from the NPI by Ackerman et al. (2011): Leadership/Authority, Grandiose Exhibitionism, and Entitlement/Exploitativeness. Sample items for each of the subscales are as follows: “I have a natural talent for influencing people,” and “I see myself as a good leader” (Leadership/Authority); “I really like to be the center of attention,” and “I will usually show off if I get the chance” (Grandiose Exhibitionism); and “I find it easy to manipulate people,” and “I will never be satisfied until I get all that I deserve” (Entitlement/Exploitativeness). In the present dataset, Cronbach’s alphas for these subscales ranged from adequate for Leadership/Authority and Grandiose Exhibitionism,  $\alpha = .73$  and  $\alpha = .74$ , respectively, to poor for the Entitlement/Exploitativeness subscale,  $\alpha = .36$ . Only the Leadership/Authority subscale was significantly associated with composite script,  $r = .18$ ,  $p < .05$ , and generativity,  $r = .43$ ,  $p < .01$ ; the other subscales (Grandiose Exhibitionism and Entitlement/Exploitativeness) were not associated with any of the scripts or with generativity.

When we ran further regression analyses examining the relationships between generativity, the subscales of the NPI, and legacy scripts, the only significant relationship continued to be with the composite script. Specifically, the overall model for the Leadership/Authority narcissism subscale, generativity, and composite script was significant,  $F(3,143) = 8.45$ ,  $p < .01$ , with the generativity \* Leadership/Authority interaction this time also significant,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p = .03$  (see Table 2). Aikin and West

**Table 2** Relationships between the Leadership/Authority subscale of narcissism, generativity, and composite script

| Predictor                           | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                                     | $\beta$ | $\beta$ |
| Leadership/Authority                | .04     | .03     |
| Generativity                        | .33**   | .40**   |
| Leadership/Authority * generativity |         | .18*    |
| $R^2$                               | .12     | .15     |

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$



**Fig. 1** Effect of Leadership/Authority subscale of narcissism on composite script for individuals with low generativity and high generativity

(1991) recommend further probing of two-way interactions using centered, unstandardized variables. Fig. 1 represents the relationship between Leadership/Authority and composite script for those individuals high or low in generativity. Individuals high in generativity who also scored high on the Leadership/Authority subscale expressed relatively more composite script legacy themes than their colleagues in the three remaining groups (low narcissism/high generativity, low narcissism/low generativity, high narcissism/low generativity), whereas those individuals low in generativity and high in narcissism expressed the least number of composite script themes compared with their colleagues. To be thorough, we also ran analyses with the other subscales (Grandiose Exhibitionism and Entitlement/Exploitativeness) and each of the scripts, but no other relationship was significant.

Finally, results for the analysis of generativity, Leadership/Authority, and composite script using gender, income, or race as controls mainly remained unchanged from the uncontrolled analyses reported above. There was no main effect of gender, and no three-way interaction between gender, generativity, and narcissism. Similarly, annual family income was neither a main effect nor part of a three-way interaction. When we controlled for race, we found a main effect,  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .04$ ; however, there was no

three-way interaction of race \* generativity \* narcissism. Therefore, the relationship between generativity, narcissism (as measured by the Leadership/Authority subscale), and composite script was not moderated by gender, income, or race.

## Discussion

The main focus of this study was to examine the concept of legacy through narrative expressions of lasting impressions by midlife men and women. We included a measure of the other-focused element of legacy—generativity—while also adding a more self-focused indicator—narcissism. Significant findings indicated that the composite script, in which lasting impressions included concern regarding both the self and others, was associated with both generativity and narcissism. As well as being positively associated with each other, generativity and narcissism were both related to the composite script, and participants relatively high in narcissism scored higher on composite scripts, as did participants relatively high in generativity. This was also the case with participants high in *both* generativity and narcissism, indicating that high levels of narcissism were associated with a particular type of legacy (i.e., composite script) only in the presence of high generativity. When combined in regression analyses, generativity was a significant main effect, whereas the full measure of narcissism (NPI) was not, although the generativity \* narcissism interaction demonstrated a trend-level relationship with composite script. However, when we examined the Leadership/Authority subscale of the NPI, the generativity \* narcissism interaction became significant and the relationship between these variables was not moderated by gender, income, or race.

The finding regarding composite script is consistent with previous studies that examine the blend of self-focused and other-focused personality factors, such as those concerned with agency (self) and communion (other), and how the two relate to generativity (Ackerman et al. 2000; Frimer et al. 2011; Mansfield and McAdams 1996). Arguably, expressions of composite script in the present research most closely resemble the “moral exemplars” of Frimer et al.’s (2011) study: those highly generative individuals who expressed themes of enlightened self-interest. What the current study adds is a more explicit analysis of narcissism and—together with generativity—how it is articulated in narratives of the future. Additionally, we have focused on middle-aged individuals, for whom overt expressions of narcissism could be viewed as developmentally maladaptive, whereas expressions of generativity could be regarded as adaptive. Moreover, the synergistic nature of high narcissism in the presence of high generativity, as well as their association with composite script

(perhaps the most adaptive or encompassing type of legacy), supports work concerning conscientiousness and neuroticism (Roberts et al. 2009): In a study of couples’ health, Roberts et al. found that adults high in both neuroticism and conscientiousness were healthier. The authors discuss the benefit to the health of being neurotic within the context of conscientiousness.

Although composite script behaved much as expected, the other findings were somewhat perplexing. Contrary to our prediction, we found no relationship between self-script and narcissism, and even closer examination of the separate facets of the NPI scale—Leadership/Authority, Grandiose Exhibitionism, and Entitlement/Exploitativeness—only further supported the finding concerning composite script with the full NPI scale, with generativity and the NPI subscale Leadership/Authority being related to composite script. However, our finding concerning this “adaptive” facet of narcissism indicates that it is still useful to analyze the NPI at the facet level, as Ackerman et al. suggest (p. 67), and supports Ackerman et al.’s (2011) ideas of an agency-related narcissism, reflecting positive self-promotion strategies. Furthermore, it provides support for our finding of no relationship between narcissism and self- or other script. Of note, however, is that there continues to be some debate concerning the NPI’s exact factor structure (see, for example, Cain et al. 2008, for a review).

Given that Erikson’s (1974) concept of generativity is focused more on others, particularly the next generation, it was surprising that the relationship between other script and generativity was only modest. It is entirely possible that a third variable is more related to leaving a lasting impression focused on others, such as ego integrity. For example, Kivnick (1996) situates legacy (or lasting impression) at the crossroads of Erikson’s 7th and 8th stages; that is, generativity and ego integrity, which is the process of “...coming to terms with the life one has lived thus far, and acknowledging and accepting of past choices, made along life’s course” (Erikson et al. 1986, p. 70). However, for people in their mid-to-late fifties (i.e., those in the present sample), this developmental stage may not yet have fully emerged. Alternatively, other underlying constructs may be more strongly related to generativity and narcissism, and underscore all types of lasting impressions/legacy, including Levenson’s concept of self-transcendence (Levenson et al. 2005), or the concept of civic engagement (e.g., Putnam 2005). Moreover, it may be that generativity, as it pertains to lasting impression, is less concerned with expressions of selfless devotion to the next generation and more indicative of a self-focused drive for symbolic immortality (McAdams and de St. Aubin 1992). Future research into the relative nature of a legacy—whether selfless or self-indulgent—might help to clarify how meaningful the legacy is to its intended beneficiaries.

This research is not the first to portray narcissism in a more positive way. As previously noted, Ackerman et al. (2011) described the more adaptive Leadership/Authority facet of the NPI, adding to earlier work by Wink (1992), who used California Q-sort-based narcissism scales (CAQ; Block 1961) to identify autonomous narcissism. Indeed, Edelstein et al. (2012) found that autonomous narcissism was associated with greater well-being and life satisfaction (Edelstein et al. 2012).

Few studies have assessed narcissism in middle age (see Edelstein et al. 2012 and Wink 1992, for exceptions), a period of life when a decrease in narcissism is thought to be normative and adaptive, and has benefits for well-being (Kernberg 1975; Roberts et al. 2010; Hill and Roberts 2012). On the other hand, relatively high levels of generativity are maintained or increase during this life stage (Newton and Stewart 2010; Stewart et al. 2001; Stewart and Vandewater 1998). For midlife men and women in the current study, we may be observing the expected ebb and flow of these two personality constructs as they relate to the cultural concept of legacy; levels of all concepts—narcissism, generativity, and lasting impression, as well as the relative relationships between them—may look very different for younger and older people.

For example, although a focus on legacy tends to develop with increasing age, there is evidence that generativity may be prominent not only in midlife, as Erikson suggested, but also at earlier ages (Espin et al. 1990; Peterson and Stewart 1993), and levels of generativity can continue to increase into at least late middle age (Newton and Stewart 2010). Were we to follow the current sample, we might observe an overall increase in generativity. Additionally, there is substantial debate concerning whether developmental changes in narcissism are more important (Roberts et al. 2010), or whether changes occur as a function of cohort (Twenge and Foster 2010), that is, as Roberts et al. suggest, the difference between “developmental me” versus “generation me.” From a developmental standpoint, to exhibit high levels of narcissism in midlife may be maladaptive; from a cohort perspective, perhaps high midlife levels of narcissism are evidence of a normative increase in narcissism. Thus, ideas concerning the adaptive nature of narcissism can change, depending on both age and cohort. Moreover, future research with the FLSA or other midlife samples may find alternative adaptive relationships between generativity, narcissism, and expression of lasting impressions.

Another important consideration of the present study is the nature of the questions from which responses were coded. The three different future script questions may “pull” for the type of lasting impression that participants express; that is, responses to the next chapter question may not be indicative of either generativity or narcissism, but rather elicit reports of forthcoming events from participants; the hopes and dreams

question may encourage responses that contain concerns for the self (narcissism) and concerns for others (generativity), as participants express their wishes for the future; and the life project question encompasses the past, present, and future, and may therefore be more likely to elicit a combination of both self- and other-focused concerns. Thus, each question may be subtly suggestive of qualitatively different “legacies.” Closer examination of the frequencies of lasting impressions by question gave some credence to this idea: the majority of composite scripts occurred in responses to the life project question (15 %), with only 4 % of composite scripts expressed in “next chapter,” and 9 % in “hopes and dreams.” Likewise, self-scripts were predominantly expressed in responses to the “next chapter” (50 %) and “hopes and dreams” (44 %) questions, whereas other scripts were predominantly expressed in the “hopes and dreams” (25 %), and “life project” (31 %) questions. Relationships between generativity, narcissism, and type of lasting impression by question were also examined in post hoc analyses. No associations between any of the constructs were found for responses to the next chapter question; however, for the hopes and dreams question, generativity was significantly associated with other script, and both generativity and narcissism were significantly related to composite script. Similarly, for the question concerning life project, generativity and narcissism were significantly related to composite script; additionally, for this particular question, generativity and self-script were significantly *negatively* related (as one might expect).

### Limitations

The current research uses a relatively small sample, possibly making it less than optimally representative. Although the sample is similar in composition to the 2010 greater Chicago community in terms of race (current sample: 56 % White, 44 % African American; Chicago community: 45 % White and 32.9 % African American), it is also relatively well educated, financially well-off, and predominantly female. The findings presented here should be interpreted with caution, as replication using a larger, perhaps more representative sample are needed in order to make more definitive conclusions.

A strength of the study—that participants are all aged 55–58—is also a limitation, given that midlife encompasses a much broader time span. The findings presented here may pertain only to those midlifers in their 50s, what of those in their 40s or early 60s? Possibly, the balance of generativity and narcissism, as well as thoughts of legacies, will be different for individuals in early midlife compared to those in late midlife.

Clearly, what one leaves behind when one dies (Rubinstein 1996) is a lasting impression blended from the

expressions of concern for others as well as the self and is imbued with both generativity and narcissism to varying degrees. The current study contributes to the understanding that, as components of a legacy, generativity may not be totally selfless, while at the same time narcissism may not be totally selfish.

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## Appendix: Coding Scheme for Lasting Impression (Legacy)

| Script    | Definition   | Examples   |
|-----------|--|--|
| Self      | Respondent expresses concerns about making a lasting impression that is related to his or herself or is solely meaningful in a personal way  | <p>"I took it under my wing to start working on the family history."</p> <p>"...to turn my dissertation into a book"</p>   |
| Other     | Respondent expresses concerns about making a lasting impression for people or places outside of her immediate circle of care, or for the greater good                                | <p>"I am really big with the League of Women voters. I do a lot for that and that is all volunteer"</p> <p>"I might go do the Peace Corps."</p> <p>"...help the homeless and help abused women"</p>  |
| Composite | Respondent expresses concerns for making a lasting impression that is both self- and other-focused, can be in a single statement (1) or with respect to one particular situation (2) | <p>(1) "Publish another book that would help young women"</p> <p>(2) "I do, aside from monetary donations, signing up voters and doing rallies and mailings and I've taken my daughter to Washington more than once. And we've—I like to think that makes a difference, and I have said to her, this is what—this is how we work here"</p> |

NB: Overall response can contain multiple examples of self, other, or composite scripts

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