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Running Head: INTIMACY AND GENERATIVITY

Intimacy in young adults' narratives of romance and friendship predict Eriksonian generativity:

A mixed method analysis

Sean P. Mackinnon, Wilfrid Laurier University

Amanda Nosko, Wilfrid Laurier University

Michael W. Pratt, Wilfrid Laurier University

Joan E. Norris, Wilfrid Laurier University

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### Abstract

A quantitative and qualitative study tested Erikson's ego developmental hypotheses regarding the positive relationship between generativity and intimacy. At age 26, participants told two stories about "relationship-defining moments," one about a romantic partner, and another about a same-sex friend. Levels of relationship intimacy were coded from these narratives. "True Love" and "True Friendship" themes arose as the most prototypical, highly-intimate stories. Romantic intimacy and friendship intimacy as coded from narratives each contributed uniquely to the prediction of generative concern; as intimacy in each domain increased, so did generative concern. This relationship remained statistically significant, even when controlling for sex, current romantic relationship status, subjective well-being, optimism and depressive symptoms. Results suggest that our "relationship defining moment" narrative task is a useful tool for examining development in emerging adulthood, and that intimacy may be an important precursor to generative concern in early adulthood, consistent with Erikson's model.

Within Eriksonian theory (Erikson, 1950), forming intimate relationships with other people in young adulthood is a precursor to developing generativity – broadly, concern for the next generation – in middle adulthood. Erikson argues that a person’s radius of care extends outwards throughout the lifespan beginning with the self in adolescence (identity vs role confusion), moving outwards to a few close others in young adulthood (intimacy vs isolation) and ultimately expanding to include children and the larger society in middle adulthood (generativity vs stagnation). The linkages between many of the stages of Erikson’s theory have been extensively studied and widely documented (e.g., Dyk & Adams, 1987; Kacerguis & Adams, 1980; Marcia, 1976). However, less is known so far about the precursors of generativity as a stage of development (e.g., McAdams, 2001a). Nevertheless, following Erikson’s model, young adults who have achieved intimacy should experience and reflect more fully on generative concern. Using Erikson’s (1950) psychosocial framework as a guide, the current study explores narratives about “relationship-defining moments” with both same-sex friends and romantic partners in young adults. Specifically we expect that generative concern will be positively related to intimacy as coded from these relationship narratives.

### **What is generativity?**

In Erikson's theorizing, generativity emerges in midlife as a concern for (and commitment to) the well-being of future generations. Erikson argued that generativity can be expressed by caring for children and other family members, conserving or promoting societal traditions and values, or attempting to transform society for the good of the next generation. As research on generativity progressed in the 1980s and onwards, generativity evolved into a broad, multifaceted construct, with a variety of different categorization models. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) presented an integrative framework of generativity which is composed of seven

interrelated facets: (1) Cultural demand (e.g. cultural expectations for generative behavior), (2) inner desire (i.e. agency and communion motives), (3) generative concern for the next generation, (4) belief in the species, (5) commitment to specific goals and actions, (6) generative behaviors, and (7) generative scripts within life stories. Overall, this integrative model suggests that "...generativity is a configuration of seven psychosocial features, all of which center on the personal and societal goal of providing for the next generation" (McAdams, 2006a, p. 362).

### **Generativity as an individual difference variable**

Of course, not all adults exhibit the same levels of generativity. To the extent that generativity varies across persons, generativity can also be understood as an individual difference variable. Generativity has been measured in this capacity using a variety of methods, including clinical ratings (e.g. Snarey, Son, Kuehne, Hauser & Vaillant, 1987), q-sort tasks (e.g. Peterson & Klohnen, 1995) and autobiographical narratives (e.g. Conway & Holmes, 2004; Frensch, Pratt & Norris, 2007). Within McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) framework of generativity, five of the seven facets have received the most attention. The "inner desire" component has been assessed by examining themes of intimacy motivation (i.e. communion) and the need for power (i.e. agency) on the Thematic Apperception Test. Generally speaking, McAdams et al. (1986) find that intimacy motivation predicts generativity particularly well when combined with the need for power (see also Hofer, Busch, Chasiotis, Kärtner, & Campos, 2008). Generative concern (e.g., general concern for the well-being of the next generation), is typically assessed using self-report measures such as the Loyola Generativity Scale (the LGS, McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Generative commitment to goals and actions (how strongly people strive for generative outcomes in their daily life) are often assessed as "generative strivings" using a coding procedure adapted from Emmons (1986). Generative actions are measured using a

checklist of generative behaviors that participants may have engaged in within the last two months (e.g. "performed a community service"). Finally, generative themes in life narratives have been studied, as noted above (e.g., Frensch et al., 2007; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). These distinctions between specific elements of the model are useful to identify when studying generativity, since they are only modestly correlated with each other empirically, and are theorized to tap different facets of the generativity construct (McAdams & Logan, 2004). In this paper, we focus primarily on generative concern, as measured by the LGS.

### **Generative concern is linked to well-being**

Understanding the antecedents of generative concern is important, since it is typically correlated with psychological health and prosocial behaviours (McAdams, 2001a). Generative concern is positively correlated with general subjective well-being, psychological well-being, positive affect and emotional stability (Ackerman et al., 2000; Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2005; McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan, 1993; de St. Aubin & McAdams, 1995; Rothrauff & Cooney, 2008). It is also linked with political activism (Peterson & Duncan, 1999), positive (i.e. authoritative) parenting styles (e.g., Peterson, Smirles & Wentworth, 1997; Pratt, Danso, Arnold, Norris & Filyer, 2001), and successful parenting outcomes (Peterson, 2006). Despite these positive outcomes, little is known about the precursors of generative concern in young adulthood. Following Erikson's (1963) model, relationship intimacy should be positively related to generative concern in young adults.

### **The link between intimacy and generative concern**

Intimacy has often been described as a feeling of closeness, and a willingness to openly share intimate thoughts with another person (Bauminger, Finzi-Dottan, Chason & Har-Even, 2008). Erikson (1950) recognized the period of young adulthood as the crux of the sixth stage of

psychosocial development: intimacy versus isolation, a stage characterized by exploration of personal relationships. As a general principle, Erikson argues that resolving issues in earlier stages allows the developing individual to more effectively resolve issues in succeeding stages. Thus, after successfully resolving the intimacy versus isolation conflict in young adulthood, Erikson argues that adults move into the seventh stage, generativity versus stagnation, which is most prominent during midlife (Erikson, 1963; McAdams, 2001a). During this stage, the expression of generativity, typically through parenting or in one's work, is most important, though later in this period, generativity may be more frequently expressed as broader societal concern for the welfare of youth in general (e.g., Snarey, 1993). In this way, according to Erikson (1963), successful resolution of psychosocial issues at earlier stages in life helps facilitate positive development at later stages.

Generally speaking, research has tended to support Erikson's model. Vaillant and Milofsky's (1980) findings supported Erikson's stage model using a male sample, though they noted that the age at which each stage was traversed could vary widely. Peterson and Stewart (1990) examined the diaries and novels of British feminist Vera Brittain and found that Brittain's concerns with identity and intimacy decreased as she progressed through midlife, while her generative concerns tended to increase. Sheldon and Kasser (2001) found that older individuals (60+) tended to report more strivings regarding generativity and fewer strivings regarding intimacy and identity when compared to younger participants. Conway and Holmes (2004) found that content analyses of autobiographical memories retrieved by free and cued recall were systematically related to Erikson's psychosocial stages. They argued that autobiographical memories that were highly goal relevant at the time tend to be more efficiently encoded into memory, and as a result, these highly self-relevant memories were the ones most easily retrieved.

Although autobiographical memories from midlife were most likely to include generative themes, memories of midlife still included memories involving intimacy and identity themes. Moreover, memories of young adulthood also tended to contain generative themes (though not to the same extent as midlife), suggesting that Erikson's stage model is a more gradual progression, rather than one based on absolute age. With this in mind, it is important to note that generative concern is not exclusively the domain of midlife (e.g., McAdams, 2001a). Generally speaking, young adults can often show relatively high levels of generative concern and motivation (Lawford et al., 2005), though most researchers argue that generativity is most important during midlife (e.g. Stewart & Vandewater, 1998).

McAdams (2001a) suggests that the role of intimacy is a key topic for the genesis of generativity that deserves much more research. That is, if people have intimate social relationships with others, will they be more likely to exhibit generative concern? As described above, there is support for the idea that intimacy concerns reach their peak during young adulthood and that generativity concerns reach their peak during midlife. Yet, despite wide interest in Erikson's model over the years, the relation between intimacy and generativity as psychological constructs has rarely been tested in the literature. In one exception to this general rule, Christiansen and Palkovitz (1998) found significant positive correlations between psychosocial intimacy and generativity in midlife fathers, as measured by self-report questionnaire scales. Though studies as discussed above are generally supportive of the notion of intimacy being an important predictor of generative concern, they typically examine only midlife individuals. Clearly, there is still much to be known about the factors that foster the development of generativity. The current paper will take a narrative approach to measuring intimacy within friendships and romantic relationships as a means of more broadly addressing the

interrelationship between these two key contexts of relationship intimacy and generative concern.

### **The narrative approach**

Within McAdams' (1995; McAdams & Pals, 2006) theoretical model, there are three conceptually distinct levels of personality. Level 1 includes dispositional "Traits" that tend to be stable over time and are exhibited across a variety of situations. Level 2, "Characteristic Adaptations," includes a wide variety of motives and personal strivings, as well as constructs that exist within specific context, time, place or role. Level 3 is the domain of "Identity and Life Stories," and focuses on the whole autobiographical narrative, and how it serves as a means of unifying and giving personal meaning to a person's self-concept. Given that relationship intimacy tends to vary in importance across the lifespan (Conway & Holmes, 2004) and can vary significantly across relationships (e.g. a person could have strong intimate relationships with friends, feel ambivalent towards their parents, and have recently broken up with their romantic partner), an open-ended, Level 3 autobiographical narrative approach seems to be one appropriate way to access this construct of intimacy across contexts.

In this study, we used a "relationship-defining" narrative task to elicit the stories told by young adults about their same-sex friends and romantic partners. This task is somewhat novel, but was adapted from the widely used "self-defining" narrative tasks of McAdams and others (e.g., Blagov & Singer, 2004; McAdams, 2001b; McLean & Thorne, 2003). These tasks are based on the idea that autobiographical memories become organized around the construction of a sense of identity during the period of adolescence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000), and continue to be core elements in the adult's sense of self. Such self-definition has been seen as one of the key functions of personal memories and narratives (e.g., Wang, 2004; Pillemer, 2001).

Our approach here was to use a parallel conception of how people might construct social relational aspects of the self within the context of close relationships with specific others (e.g., McLean & Thorne, 2003; Thorne, 2000). If, as Thorne has argued, the self arises in the context of social relations, we expected that requests to tell such a “relationship-defining” narrative about a key experience of the self with another would make sense to adults, and that the way in which young adults responded to this task would reveal interesting aspects of their self construction of these relationships in terms of personality qualities such as intimacy and generativity. One of our implicit research questions, then, was the extent to which such a narrative procedure would prove interesting and useful in examining the individual’s development in these core personality tasks of emerging adulthood (Erikson, 1963). Aside from our methodological interest in this new narrative procedure, the current research is focused on relationship intimacy in two domains: same-sex friendships and romantic partners.

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

One basic assumption of Erikson's (1963) psychosocial theory is that successful resolution of psychosocial issues at each stage should lead to better psychological adjustment. Given the issues most salient to young adults (i.e. intimacy versus isolation), relationship intimacy as coded from narratives should be positively correlated with measures of psychological adjustment at age 26. However, we predict that intimacy within romantic relationships will be more important than friendship intimacy when predicting psychological adjustment, as growth in this context is developmentally most salient in young adulthood (whereas growth in friendship intimacy is perhaps more salient in adolescence, Carbery & Buhrmester, 1998). Moreover, given that prior work has tended to find a correlation between generative concern and psychological well-being at a variety of age levels (Ackerman et al.,

2000; Lawford et al., 2005; McAdams et al., 1993), we predict a similar correlation between generative concern and psychological adjustment. Thus, our first hypothesis is as follows:

H1: Romantic intimacy and generative concern will be positively correlated with general subjective well-being and optimism, and negatively correlated with depression.

Given the Eriksonian framework (1950; 1963) underlying this research, we predict that both friendship intimacy and romantic intimacy as coded from relationship-defining narratives will be positively correlated with generative concern at age 26. However, in order to show that these narrative intimacy variables incrementally advance the literature on generative concern, intimacy must be able to predict generative concern over and above some well-known correlates of generative concern. McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) found that young adult women tend to score higher on generative concern than do men, making sex an important covariate. As noted above, generative concern and psychological adjustment also tend to be positively correlated in a variety of samples (Ackerman et al., 2000; Lawford et al., 2005; McAdams et al., 1993), so our model should also control for the participants' overall psychological adjustment if it is to remain credible. Finally, current romantic relationship status is robustly correlated with subjective well-being (e.g. Dush & Amato, 2005), and will quite probably be correlated with our measure of romantic intimacy (i.e. people who are currently in a romantic relationship will likely have more positive and intimate stories to tell than those not currently in a romantic relationship), so current relationship status is another useful covariate for our model. Thus, our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Both romantic intimacy and friendship intimacy will be positively correlated with generative concern. This relationship will remain significant even when controlling for sex, current relationship status, subjective well-being, depressive symptoms and optimism.

Given that we acquired rich autobiographical narratives about “defining moments” with friends and romantic partners, it makes sense to analyze the qualitative content of these stories more thoroughly. As McAdams notes in his 1995 paper, “...good explanation relies upon good description...” (p. 369), so to more fully understand the relationship between intimacy and generative concern, we must clearly describe the content of the narratives we collect. In fact, there is reason to believe that “prototype stories” will arise when people tell relationship-defining stories about friends and romantic partners. That is, certain types of stories will occur much more frequently than others. The idea of identifying story prototypes has long been considered in analysis of fiction. For instance, Campbell (1949/2008) argues that there is a universal formula for storytelling known as a “monomyth” which has been followed for thousands of years. When following Campbell’s formula, the protagonist enters into a strange new world, faces trials and tribulations, and eventually returns a changed person. Just like works of fiction, life narratives often follow certain scripted patterns. For example, McAdams et al. (1997) found a prototypical “commitment story” among highly generative adults, and suggested that such prototypic stories might be common in modern cultures. McAdams (2006b) has also identified a “redemption” theme that typifies the average North American life narrative, involving positive growth and transformation of the self after a negative experience. More interestingly still, McAdams and colleagues found that adherence to this sort of redemptive formula within one’s life narrative is more common in highly generative individuals (McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten & Bowman, \*2001). Keeping this in mind, there might be a set of culturally-bound prototype stories that exist when talking about relationship-defining moments with friends and romantic partners. These prototypes are likely to issue at least partly from cultural ideals regarding the way such relationships should be characterized (e.g., the idea of “true love” in the romantic context in

many Western societies, McAdams, 2001b). Thus, one broad research question will be addressed using thematic analysis:

RQ1: What are the prototypical relationship-defining stories told about same-sex friends and romantic partners within North American culture?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Participants included 100 individuals. Their mean age in years was 26.4 ( $SD = 0.86$ ), 68% of participants were female, 74% had completed a university or college program (98% had completed high school), 89% were born in Canada and 86% spoke exclusively English at home. In addition, 71% of participants reported being in a “committed romantic relationship,” with a mean relationship length of 4.28 years ( $SD = 3.13$ ), while 13% currently had custodial care or guardianship of children. This is a subsample of a larger longitudinal study ( $N = 896$ ) examining the transition to adulthood (e.g., Dumas, Lawford, Tieu, & Pratt, 2009; Jackson, Pratt, Hunsberger & Pancer, 2005). Participants were initially assessed at age 17 and were assessed again at ages 19, 23 and 26. However, the life-story interviews of interest were only assessed at age 26. Thus, we will only be examining the age 26 data in the current study. When comparing participants who dropped out of the study to those who remained at age 26, no differences are found in age 17 measures of gender, emotional adjustment, perception of parenting or average high school grade.

### **Procedure**

This study took the form of a structured interview that lasted approximately one and one half hours, followed by questionnaires which took approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted by research assistants blind to the hypotheses of this study. During the interview,

participants were asked to tell narratives about "relationship defining moments" with a same-sex friend and with a romantic partner.<sup>1</sup> The order was counterbalanced across participants. The exact prompt used by interviewers was as follows:

“I will now ask you to tell me two additional stories. Speaking aloud, please tell me about a relationship-defining memory or event that you have regarding your relationship with each of the individuals given. Your relationship-defining memory for your relationship with an individual named X, for example, may have been a time that you spent with X that showed you what your relationship was all about. Okay, so giving as much detail as possible, please tell me about a relationship-defining memory or event that you have regarding [a same sex friend / a romantic partner]. Tell me exactly what happened, where it happened, approximately how long ago it happened, who was involved, what you did, what you were thinking and feeling, what impact this experience may have had upon you, and what this experience says about who you were or who you are.”

The interviewer did not interrupt the description of the event, but rather asked for additional information at the end, if the participant did not answer all the above questions. Intimacy themes were coded from transcripts at a later date (see materials section, below). Following this interview, participants filled out a demographics form and the Loyola Generativity Scale, among a series of adjustment and social interaction scales (e.g., Dumas et al., 2009).

## **Materials**

### **Demographic measures.**

Several demographic measures were recorded at age 26, including gender, current romantic relationship status (i.e. are they currently in a romantic relationship?), current parental

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<sup>1</sup> Participants were asked to tell narratives about several other areas of their life during this interview, which contributed to the overall interview length. These additional narratives are not analyzed or discussed in this paper.

status (i.e. are they currently a primary caregiver for a child?), current romantic relationship length (i.e. length of the current relationship in months), family financial status (i.e. household income), parent educational background (i.e. maximum education received by parents) and nationality (i.e. country of birth).

### **Questionnaire measures.**

*Loyola Generativity Scale* ( $\alpha = .88$ ). The LGS is a 20-item self-report questionnaire which measures generative motivations and behaviors using 9-point scales ranging from 0 (very strongly disagree) to 8 (very strongly agree). A sample item would be "I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences." Items were summed together into a total score. See McAdams & de St. Aubin (1992) for further information on the validation of this scale.

*Life Orientation Test* ( $\alpha = .86$ ). The LOT is an 8-item self-report questionnaire which measures dispositional optimism, measured on a 9-point scale ranging from 0 (very strongly disagree) to 8 (very strongly agree). A sample item would be "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best." Items were summed together into a total score. See Scheier and Carver (1985) for information on the original development of this scale.

*Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale* ( $\alpha = .89$ ). The CES-D is a self-report measure designed to measure depressive symptoms in the general population. This 20-item questionnaire uses a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (rarely or none of the time) to 3 (most or all of the time). Participants were asked to consider their feelings "during the past week." A sample item would be "I was bothered by things that don't normally bother me." Items were summed together into a total score. See Radloff (1977) for further information on this scale.

*Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol* ( $\alpha = .89$ ). The SHARP is a 12-item self-report measure of subjective well-being. In order to increase variability, we used a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), rather than a simple "yes/no" dichotomy, as used in the original validation of the scale (Stones, Kozma, Hirdes, Gold, Arbuckle and Kolopack, 1996). A sample item would be "During the past month, I felt particularly content with my life?" Items were summed together into a total score.

*Intimacy themes.* The relationship narratives about a same-sex friend and a romantic partner were coded for themes of intimacy. Stories about same-sex friends were coded by the first author; stories about romantic partners were coded by the second author. Coders were not blind to the hypotheses of the study, but were blind to the scores participants received on the other quantitative measures during the coding process. Story themes related to relationship intimacy were identified using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method used for identifying patterns or "themes" within written or spoken data (see Braun & Clarke, 2006). We began by reading the data and coding sections of the transcript for interesting features (i.e. themes of intimacy, in this case). We did this in an inclusive, open-ended manner, keeping copious notes throughout the process. After multiple passes through the data, we began to collate these diverse codes into more holistic themes that summarized the data in a meaningful and relatively complete way. These themes can then be converted into quantitative codes that may be tested for inter-rater reliability and used as quantitative measure of intimacy (see Boyzatis, 1998). Themes were mutually exclusive in our coding system; only one dominant theme was coded per story.

Within the romantic narratives, four broad themes were identified using thematic analysis. Ranging from least intimate, to most intimate, the themes were as follows: (0) break-up

(a relationship ends, typically in an unpleasant way), (1) independence (narrator expresses the desire for independence from a romantic partner as an aspect of the relationship), (2) relationship building (the forward progress of a relationship), and (3) true love (realization of a future with the partner, that the partner is “the one”). See Nosko, Tieu, Lawford and Pratt (2010) for a more detailed discussion of these themes. The following are four short excerpts to illustrate each type of theme:

*“...We basically got into a huge argument regarding the studio [...] at the time I was willing to blind myself to negative things in order to keep what little positive there was, instead of just realizing that if there’s no chance of being able to reach some kind of agreement, not even agreement being reached, but just some kind of understanding, there’s no, no real reason to continue.” [0 = Breakup].*

*“I was dating somebody [...] and um, I was moving to Ireland, and she wanted to come, and I really didn’t want her to. And uh, I think it just showed that maybe it, I think it was more important to her than it was to me. But it wasn’t not important to me because I didn’t care about her, just I wasn’t even in the place where I could have like a serious relationship ...” [1 = Independence].*

*“I guess one of the biggest things is the chase. The girl I went out with for about a year or so, the pursuit, the building of the relationship, specifically, going for walks by a duck pond and stuff like that. Just talking for hours and stuff like that” [2 = Relationship building].*

*“...I think that would be probably getting engaged [...], and because it wasn’t forced or you know pushed, it was like a defining moment for sure because I realized that this person really did care about me so much that it was going to be forever ...” [3 = True Love].*

Within the friendship narratives, four broad story themes were also identified using thematic analysis: Again, from least to most intimate the themes were as follows: (0) Friendship conflict (friendship becomes weaker, or dissolves entirely), (1) task-orientation (a focus on shared activities or events rather than the relationship itself), (2) relationship building (the forward progress of a friendship) and (3) true friendship (supporting or being supported by a friend through tough times). The following are four excerpts, illustrating an example of each story theme:

*"... in the last year [my friend's] boyfriend actually ended up living with us for the year, so it ended up, I think it was a little more strained than it would otherwise have been if her boyfriend hadn't been there. [...] and so we haven't really been as close afterwards as we were before that ..."* [0 = Friendship Conflict].

*"... every year at Christmas time, she comes up to my house after we open, my family opens up gifts, and we, it's happened since we were ten, and we've done it every year, and I guess that's one thing that kind of keeps us together"* [1 = Task-Oriented].

*"... I guess a couple years ago I remember calling her and [...] it was like a seven hour conversation about everything, religion, guys, like just, she's Moslem, and I'm Christian, so we were just talking about, I don't know, beliefs in general [...] I hung up the phone and it was like three o'clock in the morning and I was like that was one of the best conversations I've had with her ever ..."* [2 = Relationship Building].

*"...This guy uh, would always stand by me through thick and thin, doesn't matter what's going on [...] he's just one of those people that no matter what's going on in my life or what I've*

*done wrong, or what he's done wrong, we're both always there for each other and I think it's important to have a friend like that" [3 = True Friendship]*

Thus, through thematic analysis we have created two ordinal intimacy variables (one for friends, one for romantic partners) which each range from 0-3. These ordinal variables will be used as a measure of intimacy for our quantitative analyses. Two graduate-level coders scored 20 friendship narratives and 22 romantic narratives for this 4-point ordinal variable with kappas of .83 and .90 respectively, indicating that our intimacy measure had adequate inter-rater reliability.

To provide some convergent validity for this ordinal measure of intimacy, we also coded the same two relationship defining stories indicated in the method using a different, a-priori intimacy coding system. Within this alternate coding scheme, intimacy was coded on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 0 (no intimacy) to 4 (very high level of intimacy)<sup>2</sup>. This variable was coded by the first author. Two graduate level research assistants also coded 20 friendship narratives and 30 romantic narratives independently. Intra-class correlations (absolute agreement) comparing the coding by the first author to coding done by research assistants were substantial, (.81 for friend stories, .73 for romantic partner stories) indicating adequate inter-rater reliability. Our 4-point ordinal variable created through thematic analysis was robustly correlated with this supplementary coding method (friends  $r = .63, p < .001$ ; romantic  $r = .66, p < .001$ ), which provides some support for the convergent validity of our newly-created measure of intimacy. A cross-tabulation of the frequencies for our 4-point ordinal variable and our 5-point intimacy variable can be found in table 1.

## **Results**

### **Analytic Strategy**

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<sup>2</sup> You may contact the first author for a more detailed copy of this 5-point intimacy coding scheme.

First, we provide a descriptive summary of each variable in our model, including missing data, descriptive statistics and distribution. Next, we examine the impact of key demographic variables as potential covariates in our analyses. After this, we examine the zero-order correlation matrix to test the basic relationships between our narrative intimacy themes, generative concern, subjective well-being and current relationship status. After this, we use hierarchical multiple regression to see if our narrative intimacy themes can predict generative concern over and above sex, current relationship status and psychological adjustment. Finally, we present a more nuanced qualitative analysis comparing the similarities and differences between the types of stories told about friends and romantic partners. Specifically, we focus this qualitative analysis on the most highly intimate and prototypical story themes: True love and true friendship. It is hoped that this qualitative analysis will promote deeper understanding of our quantitative results using our narrative intimacy variables.

### **Missing Data**

Approximately 1.5% of the data on the questionnaire measures was missing. Nine participants had never been in a romantic relationship, so their romantic partner stories could not be coded. Moreover one additional romantic partner story and three friendship stories were deemed uncodable because their stories were either unrelated to the relationship at hand (e.g. did not talk about a same-sex friend when asked) or were too short (e.g. only a few vague sentences spoken for their story). Because of the relatively small sample size, missing data were addressed using pairwise deletion.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

Generative concern among participants tended to be higher than the theoretical midpoint of our scale overall,  $t(96) = 17.2, p < .001$ , which created a slight negative skew within the

distribution of this variable and suggests that our sample of 26-year olds exhibited at least moderately high levels of generative concern on the LGS. True friendship and true love themes emerge as the most prototypic, commonly observed themes, found in over half of all stories told in each context (see Table 2). Optimism and subjective well-being were slightly negatively skewed, while depression was slightly positively skewed, suggesting that our sample was generally well-adjusted, on average. The violations from normality (i.e. slight positive and negative skew) observed among our variables were relatively minor, so data transformations (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) were not deemed necessary. Descriptive statistics for all variables (means, standard deviations, frequencies) can be found in table 2.

### **Relationships with Demographic Variables**

On average, women ( $M = 117.90$ ,  $SD = 17.56$ ) were slightly higher in generative concern than men ( $M = 107.2$ ,  $SD = 22.85$ ),  $t(94) = -2.50$ ,  $p = .014$ , consistent with McAdams and de St. Aubin's (1992) findings when validating the LGS. There were also some small gender differences in the types of story themes that arose. Sex was not correlated with relationship intimacy within friendship narratives ( $r = .09$ ,  $p = .42$ ) or romantic narratives ( $r = .09$ ,  $p = .42$ ). However, there were some small sex differences when analyzed at the individual theme level. Approximately 22.6% of men told relationship building stories about romantic partners, compared to 7.4% of women, which was a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2 = 4.64$ ,  $p = .031$ . Moreover, 36.7% of men told task-oriented stories about a same-sex friend, compared to 15.2% of women, which was also a statistically significant difference,  $\chi^2 = 5.59$ ,  $p = .018$ . There were no other gender differences for any other variables reported in this study. Sex will be entered as a covariate in our multiple regression analysis below to account for these systematic differences in the dependent variable.

Whether or not participants were currently in a romantic relationship (71% were in our sample) may also be an important covariate in our analyses. Participants who were currently in a romantic relationship were higher in generative concern, higher in subjective well-being as measured by the SHARP, and had higher levels of romantic intimacy in their narratives (see correlations in Table 3). Thus, current relationship status will also be entered in our multiple regression analysis below as a covariate.

We also tested whether or not overall story length, current parental status<sup>3</sup>, current romantic relationship length, family financial status and parent educational background and/or nationality predicted generative concern, intimacy or story theme, but all analyses were non-significant. As such, none of these variables will be entered as covariates in the analyses below.

### **Summary of zero-order correlation matrix**

Romantic intimacy, but not friendship intimacy, was correlated with positive psychological adjustment. Specifically, romantic intimacy was positively associated with subjective well-being. In addition, all three measures of psychological adjustment were positively correlated with generative concern. As generative concern increases, so does psychological adjustment. Finally, romantic intimacy, friendship intimacy, and current relationship status were all positively related to generative concern, which suggests that further exploration using multiple regression is merited. Together, these results support our first hypothesis, that romantic intimacy and generative concern will be positively correlated with

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<sup>3</sup> This might seem surprising in light of Erikson's theory and findings by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) which indicate a positive relationship between generative concern and parenthood status. However, this finding does not likely have theoretical significance. Because so few people in our sample had children (13%), the most likely candidate explanation is that our analysis was under-powered. As the distribution for a dichotomous variable strays from 50/50, power decreases (Kraemer & Thiemann, 1987). Consistent with this idea, a post-hoc power analysis of this result reveals that this analysis had power of .38, assuming a medium effect size ( $d = .50$ ).

general subjective well-being and optimism, and negatively correlated with depression. See table 3 for a complete zero-order correlation matrix.

### **Multiple regression: Intimacy predicting generativity with covariates added**

A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to test if romantic and friendship intimacy could predict generative concern over and above sex, current relationship status, subjective well-being, optimism and depressive symptoms. At step 1, only sex and current relationship status were entered into the model. Results showed that both were significant predictors of generative concern. At step 2, our three psychological adjustment variables were entered into the model. Results show that only optimism and sex emerge as significant predictors over and above all other variables; current relationship status no longer predicts generative concern significantly when controlling for subjective well-being, optimism and depressive symptoms. At step 3, both romantic intimacy and friendship intimacy were entered into the model. Results reveal that both intimacy variables contribute uniquely to the prediction of generative concern over and above our control variables (together contributing an extra 11% of the variance), thus supporting our second hypothesis, that both romantic intimacy and friendship intimacy will be positively related to generative concern even when controlling for sex, current relationship status, subjective well-being, depressive symptoms and optimism. Overall, this model accounted for 42% of the variance in generative concern (see table 4 for a more detailed presentation of B values, beta weights and  $R^2$  values at each step).<sup>4</sup>

### **Qualitative Analyses**

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<sup>4</sup> We conducted exploratory analyses with all possible interaction terms included in the model. All of these interactions were non-significant predictors of generative concern. However, our current sample size ( $N = 100$ ) is under-powered for testing moderation of any sort, so the current study cannot disprove or confirm the existence of interaction effects with any great degree of precision.

True love and true friendship themes were the most common themes observed, occurring in 60% and 51% of all stories, respectively. Thus, these stories can be seen as the most “prototypical” of all stories told. These two types of stories also represent the most highly intimate type of story within our coding scheme (see Method). In the following qualitative analysis, we chose to compare and contrast the two most intimate, most prototypical types of stories told by individuals in our sample both to clarify what a high intimacy score represents within our coding scheme, and to elucidate how friendship intimacy and romantic intimacy can contribute to generative concern in a basically additive way in the quantitative analyses.

While true love and true friendship themes are broadly similar to each other, there are notable differences. True love stories tended to focus on the moment participants realized that their partner was the person they wanted to spend the rest of their life with, and focused on themes of unconditional love. Frequently, these stories focused on the moment of first meeting their partner, falling in love with them shortly after meeting them, and how that first meeting led to their current successful relationship. For example:

*“...as soon as I met R, it was like I couldn’t, I don’t know, he was just so kind and he was thoughtful, and he was considerate [...] so we started talking on e-mail and then on the phone when I got back from the trip, and he came over a month after the cruise, and once he came over, I knew like right away [...] it was just kind of a confirmation that, I don’t know, we were meant to be together...”*

True love stories could also focus on how their partner supported them through a tough time, and how that event led to the realization that their love for each other was unconditional. For example, one participant described a defining moment with her partner after she had an emotionally distressing conflict with her sister:

*“I was screaming and crying, like it was just, I was a wreck and just for him to care enough to like you know, come out after me and wait, [...] I just remember feeling at that point that you know, that it [...] was unconditional at that point, like it didn’t matter how I looked, it didn’t matter if I was in dire straits, like he would still be there, [...] I remember days later just thinking you know what, I’m feeling very like secure in the relationship, just in the sense that I can just be myself, I can fall apart in front of him, and that’s okay.”*

In either event, whether the story was about "love at first sight" or receiving unconditional support and love from the partner, the hallmark of a true love story centers around a sudden, and powerful feeling of love for the other person, frequently accompanied by a comment on how the relationship was "meant to be" or how the partner is his or her "soulmate." These sorts of characteristics are indeed hallmarks of the Western romantic novel or movie, and likely play a large role in the personal stories adults adapt from such sources to narrate their own lives. Nevertheless, our findings above indicate that participants who tell these coherent, patterned stories revolving around powerful feelings of love for a romantic partner tend to be higher in generative concern. What seems to be most important in these stories is the sense that the romantic relationship is stable, secure and likely to continue indefinitely into the future.

In contrast, true friendship stories tended to focus exclusively on supporting (or being supported by) a friend during a difficult or trying time. True friendship stories focused on friends supporting each other through a variety of trials, including relatively serious life events, such as serious illness, relationship breakups, financial difficulties and deaths of loved ones to less dramatic, but still personally important events, such as being a good listener when a friend vents

about day-to-day hassles. For example, one participant documents how a friend supported her after a fight with her mother:

*“...there was a time when I was fighting a lot with my mom, and it’s just I was really, really in a bad place, and I can’t remember if it was my mom that called her or I that called her and she came over and just the fact that she was there and very supportive, [...] I just remember sitting outside in the back yard and she was there, just, I don’t even remember exactly what was said but just, to me, the fact that she was there meant a lot.”*

On the other hand, true friendship stories could also be about how the speaker provided support to one of his or her friends. For example, one participant talks about supporting a friend during prolonged illness:

*“... one of my good friends was diagnosed with a brain tumor [...] and I’d say a relationship defining moment was during his recovery [...] which was going over to his house when he was still bandaged up and beat up and recovering and you know, beat down looking and just sitting down and playing a simple game of cards with him, he was just exposing [...] a different side you don’t see, you know, where you’re vulnerable. I don’t know, he’s one of my best friends and we’ll be friends for life, so, you just see a different side of somebody and you know, if that was me, he would do the same for me ...”*

In either event, true friendship stories are about friends helping each other, even when times get tough, certainly another culturally prototypic theme in our media. In contrast to the true love stories, however, the focus of the story itself was typically not on a singular moment of powerful feeling, but rather on the importance of providing support for friends more generally, no matter what the circumstances might be at a given time. True friendship stories also contained no

mention of relationships that were predestined, or "meant to be," as was commonly found in true love stories. Nevertheless, generative concern was higher among participants who told highly intimate friendship stories that followed this general pattern. Perhaps having these experiences of caring (either given or received) helped participants relate to the importance of caring for others more generally, including the next generation. In any event, these stories are uniquely different in qualitative content from true love stories, which likely explains their additive contribution to predicting generative concern in the above analyses.

Though these were certainly key differences, it is also important to acknowledge that both types of stories shared similar themes of unconditional love, and involved strong positive feelings towards the friend or romantic partner in the story. Both stories also contained themes of helping others through various struggles, though the true love stories tended to use such examples as a means of illustrating how they came to realize the partner as their "soulmate." Regardless, these story themes tended to focus on secure, positive relationships with significant others, and though qualitatively different from each other given the nature of the relationships, can be seen as largely similar in emotional tone in many respects. Based on the quantitative analyses, both friendship and romantic narratives of closeness were important for the prediction of generative concern, in a basically additive way.

### **Discussion**

The current research sought to test the viability of using "relationship-defining" narratives about romantic partners and friends to predict generative concern in a young adult sample. Moreover, we sought to broadly support Erikson's (1963) psychosocial model in young adulthood by showing a link between relationship intimacy, psychological adjustment and generativity. This study provided support for both of these notions. Both friendship stories and

romantic stories that focused on "relationship-defining" issues were quite readily told by the large majority of our participants (90% or more in each case). Romantic intimacy (but not friendship intimacy) as coded from themes in the relationship narratives at age 26 was positively correlated with subjective well-being. This might suggest that romantic intimacy is slightly more important in terms of predicting subjective well-being in a primarily young adult sample. Moreover, generative concern was positively correlated with subjective well-being and optimism, and negatively correlated with depression. Together, these support our first hypothesis, and provide convergent evidence with similar findings in prior research (e.g. Ackerman et al., 2000; Lawford et al., 2005; McAdams et al., 1993).

Both romantic intimacy and friendship intimacy contributed uniquely to the prediction of generative concern over and above sex, current relationship status, subjective well-being, depressive symptoms and optimism, supporting our second hypothesis. Interestingly, in the final model, only optimism and sex emerged as significant predictors among our covariates. Among our psychological adjustment variables then, it would appear that a more trait-like, positive outlook on life in general (i.e. dispositional optimism) is more important than more transitory feelings of subjective well-being or depressive symptoms when it comes to predicting generative concern. It also appears that current relationship status does not predict generative concern over and above our measures of psychological adjustment. Regardless, the results suggest that a narrative approach to intimacy has predictive qualities over and above these various covariates.

Finally, a prototypical story arose in each domain; stories of true love (i.e. realization of a future with the partner, that the partner is "the one") and true friendship (i.e. giving or receiving support through a tough time) occurred in over half of all stories told, suggesting that these stories may represent the cultural ideals for each type of relationship, at least in young adulthood.

These prototypical stories were the most highly intimate stories in our analysis, and were associated with higher levels of generative concern in our quantitative analyses.

This pattern of results makes sense developmentally. Within an Eriksonian (1950; 1963) framework, close interpersonal relationships with others are of paramount importance during young adulthood. Nevertheless, very little past research has looked at the relationship between intimacy in multiple contexts and generative concern in young adults. The dearth of research in this area likely comes from the notion that generativity only becomes important during midlife (a notion contested by some researchers, e.g. McAdams, 2001a; Pratt, Arnold & Lawford, 2009), and from the relative methodological difficulties that arise when measuring relationship intimacy. The current research helps fill this gap in the literature by showing a positive, co-relationship between romantic relationship intimacy as well as friendship intimacy within narratives and generative concern on a standard questionnaire measure in a young adult population, even when controlling for key covariates. Moreover, the relationships between generative concern and psychological adjustment observed in the current study also underscore the importance of studying generativity at developmental periods other than midlife (e.g., Lawford et al., 2005).

The themes that arose when analyzing the content of "relationship-defining" moments for both romantic partners and same-sex friends were surprisingly congruent. Both types of narratives had a positive "prototype" theme that was rated as highly intimate. Interestingly, both types of narratives also contained stories with "relationship-building" themes, which were stories that appeared to occur early in the developing relationship, and focused primarily on the forward progress of that relationship. There were also broad parallels between "romantic breakup" and "friendship conflict" themes; in both cases, the narrative focused on how the relationship became

less strong (usually as a result of an interpersonal conflict) and often dissolved altogether. On the other hand, "independence" themes in romantic relationships and "task-oriented" themes in friendship stories tended to be more different from each other than similar. Romantic stories with independence themes tended to focus on the partner needing more space and freedom in a relationship. On the other hand, friendship stories with task-oriented themes tended to focus instead on a shared activity with friends, such as playing games, camping or going on a road trip, but provided little, if any, information on the emotional quality of the relationship.

Participants had higher levels of generative concern when they told narratives with "true love" and "true friendship" themes – the most highly intimate stories within our narrative coding schemes. These two types of intimacy contributed to the prediction of generative concern in an additive way, suggesting that experiences of an intimate nature in each of these relationship types may be meaningful contributors to the growth of generativity.

Our qualitative analysis provides additional understanding of the joint influence that romantic and friendship intimacy have on generative concern by explaining the key similarities and differences between the most highly intimate stories within our conceptualization of intimacy. In case it is not entirely clear how these two constructs can each contribute uniquely to generative concern within the life of a single individual, consider the following example. Sarah<sup>5</sup> is a 26 year old, female, Serbian immigrant to Canada from our sample who told both a true love and a true friendship narrative. In her true love story, she focused on meeting her future husband's family, and discovering that he was "the one:"

*“...I’ll use an example on me with my husband and I, when we kind of went into the direction towards marriage and I realized he’s the one and stuff, [...] we went ...*

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<sup>5</sup> Not her real name.

*overseas to meet his family and all his grandparents that he wanted me to meet for so long [...] we stayed there a month with them, and that was beautiful you know, having all of them really nice and accept you and you know, just started feeling part of the family then, so, that made me feel great, I mean I realized this is the person that I want to spend the rest of my life with, and he felt the same way.”*

In this story, it is not only the strong positive feelings of love for her partner, but also the feelings of social connectedness to her future family-in-law that are salient. This is perhaps noteworthy, given that caring for family plays a large role in generativity within Erikson's (1963) framework. In contrast, Sarah's true friendship story focuses on a time when she gave emotional support to a friend whose father had just passed away:

*“... Um, she went through a really bad time, so I was there for her, and it just I think made our relationship strong, a lot stronger [...] she had only a few exams left, and I was there to support her and to go through it with her, so, that was you know, you realize this is one of your best friends and it's her dad. [...] I value friendships and B's been my friend since [12 years ago] when we came to Canada, so this is, and it's always been like that, best friends, so we have friendships, like the real friendships, and it's not, we just filled it, filled in more and more ...”*

In this story, the focus is on providing emotional support for her friend, as well as the positive feelings she has for her friend. This caring behavior could easily be seen as a generative act, or at the very least, a precursor to caring for children and/or aging parents in midlife. We can also see a clear example of agency, or power-related themes (e.g. helping her friend with exams) within Sarah's story, which is consistent with research which suggests that the need for intimacy predicts generativity particularly well when combined with the need for power (e.g. McAdams et

al., 1986). By means of Sarah's example narratives, we can see that these narrative themes are conceptually distinct from each other, and how both types of intimacy can uniquely contribute to generative concern, as suggested by our quantitative analyses. Within our conceptualization of intimacy, true love and true friendship stories can be considered the most highly intimate types of stories. However, it is worth noting that the way an overall narrative is constructed and the way that personal meaning is derived from these narratives may differ somewhat from the way intimacy is typically conceptualized. These narrative structures may also be a form of relational self-concept or identity (see McAdams, 1995), which may be somewhat distinct from the construct of relationship intimacy as it is typically defined.

The current study has limitations, the foremost of these being the lack of longitudinal data to test these aspects of personality development. It would be useful in future research to see if relationship intimacy in the narratives of young adults could predict subsequent levels of generativity later on. We also did not measure other aspects of generativity, such as inner desire, generative commitment or generative action (McAdams, 2001a) in the current study. Generative concern as measured by the LGS can only be considered one facet of the overall generativity construct (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), so our results remain somewhat limited in that regard. Finally, the sample used in this study consisted of primarily English-speaking, well-educated 26-year olds, so a more heterogeneous sample in future research might help provide more generalizable results.

Despite these limitations, we believe that the current research provides a significant contribution to the literature on intimacy and generative concern and suggests an interesting methodological stepping point for using narratives to measure relational forms of self-concept and intimacy experience. First, our results here demonstrate considerable construct validity for

the “relationship-defining” narrative assessment of the personality qualities of young adults in two important interpersonal contexts, romantic and friendship relations. Second, they also show how qualitative analyses can be used to extend and clarify quantitative analysis of the development of the life story during this period (e.g., McLean & Pratt, 2006). Most importantly, they provide support for the general Eriksonian framework on personality development during the period of emerging adulthood, suggesting that more successful experiences within the domain of two key contexts of intimate personal relationships might facilitate the growth of the succeeding stage of generativity within the human life cycle.

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Table 1

Cross-tabulation of frequencies comparing story theme to a 5-point scale of intimacy as coded from narratives

Romantic Stories					
	No intimacy (0)	Little intimacy (1)	Moderate Intimacy (2)	High intimacy (3)	Very high intimacy (4)
True Love	0	8	11	25	10
Relationship Building	0	2	4	6	0
Independence	6	2	2	4	0
Breakup	8	2	0	0	0
Friendship Stories					
	No intimacy (0)	Little intimacy (1)	Moderate Intimacy (2)	High intimacy (3)	Very high intimacy (4)
True Friendship	0	6	10	25	5
Relationship Building	0	2	5	5	2
Task- Oriented	0	12	6	1	2
Friendship Conflict	6	7	0	0	0

Romantic Stories:  $\chi^2(12, N = 90) = 59.33, p < .001$

Friendship Stories:  $\chi^2(12, N = 94) = 72.90, p < .001$

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for quantitative variables, and frequencies of romantic and friendship story themes

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Frequency (valid %)</b>
LGS	114.55	19.77	
LOT	44.04	10.30	
CES-D	11.74	8.66	
SHARP	35.57	7.81	
<b>Romantic Themes</b>			
True Love			54 (60%)
Relationship Building			12 (13%)
Independence			14 (16%)
Breakup			10 (11%)
<b>Friendship Themes</b>			
True Friendship			49 (51%)
Relationship Building			14 (14%)
Task Oriented			21(22%)
Friendship Conflict			13(13%)

Note. Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), Life Orientation Scale (LOT), Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), and the Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP)

Table 3

## Zero-order correlation matrix

	Roman Int.	Friend Int.	LGS	LOT	CES-D	SHARP	Relation Status
Romantic Intimacy	1						
Friendship Intimacy	.09	1					
LGS	.38***	.36***	1				
LOT	.19	.11	.45***	1			
CES-D	-.20†	-.09	-.28**	-.48***	1		
SHARP	.34**	.09	.36**	.63***	-.64***	1	
Relation Status	.63***	-.02	.27**	.14	-.10	.32**	1

†  $p < .06$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Note. Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), Life Orientation Scale (LOT), Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), and the Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP); Current romantic relationship status (Relation Status).

Table 4

Hierarchical multiple regression predicting generative concern

Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$	R <sup>2</sup>
<b>Step 1</b>				
Sex	9.05	4.40	0.21*	
Relationship Status	10.33	4.53	0.24*	.12**
<b>Step 2</b>				
Sex	10.60	4.06	0.25*	
Relationship Status	7.91	4.33	0.18	
SHARP	-0.16	0.37	-0.06	
LOT	0.79	0.23	0.41**	
CESD	-0.30	0.28	-0.13	.31***
<b>Step 3</b>				
Sex	9.24	3.78	0.22*	
Relationship Status	2.64	4.95	0.06	
SHARP	-0.22	0.35	-0.08	
LOT	0.73	0.21	0.38**	
CESD	-0.22	0.26	-0.10	
Friendship Intimacy	4.85	1.53	0.28**	
Romantic Intimacy	4.22	2.07	0.23*	.42***

\* p < .05 \*\* p < .01 \*\*\* p < .001

Note. Life Orientation Scale (LOT), Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), Short Happiness and Affect Research Protocol (SHARP), Current romantic relationship status (Relationship Status).