



# Generativity and Agency: Do Gender and Age Matter?



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## Introduction

Social role theory states women tend to develop traits that are more generative or expressive, such as being friendly and unselfish, while men tend to develop traits that are agentic, meaning they are more independent and assertive (Eagly, 1987). Generative traits (also called communal traits), tend to focus more on compassion, and benevolence, and the overall maintenance of relationships and social aspects, while agentic traits tend to focus on being goal oriented, assertive, and competent (Abele & Wojciszke, 2013). Research has shown that age is positively correlated with generativity and that age is negatively correlated with agency (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999).

We hypothesized that age and agency would have an overall negative correlation (H1) and that age and generativity would have an overall positive correlation (H2). We also explored whether the correlation between age and generativity was different for males and females (RQ1). We further explored whether the correlation between age and agency was different for males and females (RQ2). This study explores gender differences between men and women in the correlations between age and generativity, as well as between age and agency.

## Method

**Participants.** A total of 150 individuals participated in the study, ages 18-70 ( $M = 45.18$ ,  $SD = 14.40$ ). 49.4% of the sample was female and 50.6% was male.

**Procedure.** Participants completed an electronic survey through Qualtrics.

### Materials

**Personality.** Big Five personality traits and Agency were assessed using the Midlife Development Inventory (MIDI) Personality Scale, created by Lachman and Weaver (1997).

**Generativity.** Generativity was assessed using the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), created by McAdams and St. Aubin (1992).

## Results

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and correlations between study variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	45.18	14.40									
2. Sex	1.51	0.50	.01								
3. Agency	12.67	3.75	-.20*	-.08	(.80)						
4. Generativity	32.56	9.65	.10	-.05	.49**	(.83)					
5. Conscientiousness	15.57	2.84	.23**	.05	.35**	.53**	(.65)				
6. Neuroticism	9.52	2.59	-.23**	.16	.11	-.33**	-.24**	(.60)			
7. Openness	20.31	4.48	.00	-.09	.65**	.55**	.57**	-.10	(.83)		
8. Agreeableness	15.96	3.12	.17*	.15	.34**	.46**	.61**	-.11	.62**	(.83)	
9. Extraversion	14.29	3.51	-.08	-.06	.69**	.56**	.49**	-.13	.70**	.61**	(.81)

Notes: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$  two-tailed tests. Reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$  unless otherwise noted) are shown on the diagonal.

This sample demonstrates the expected correlations between the Big 5 and age. We included the Big 5 personality traits to determine whether established relationships between Big 5 traits and age were reflected in our sample. Aligned with previous research, Conscientiousness was positively correlated with age ( $r = .23$ ,  $p < .01$ ), as was Agreeableness ( $r = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Additionally, as expected, Neuroticism was negatively correlated with age ( $r = -.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Lastly, Openness and Extraversion did not show significant correlations with age.

H1: Age and agency were significantly correlated with each other ( $r = -.20$ ,  $p < .05$ ).

H2: Age and generativity were not correlated with each other ( $r = .10$ ,  $p = .20$ ).

RQ1: Age and generativity for males had a correlation of .14 ( $p = .23$ ) and age and generativity for females had a correlation of .07 ( $p = .53$ ). The correlations for men and women were not significantly different ( $z = .41$ ,  $p = .68$ ).

RQ2: Age and agency for males had a correlation of -.21 ( $p = .06$ ) and age and agency for females had a correlation of -.19 ( $p = .11$ ). The correlations for men and women were not significantly different ( $z = -.15$ ,  $p = .88$ ).

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## Discussion

The correlation between age and agency was statistically significant and had an overall positive correlation, which means that H1 was supported. Age and generativity, however, were not found to be significantly correlated, meaning that H2 was not supported. However, the direction of the relationship, though it was not significant, was in the expected positive direction. The significance of difference tests both revealed that the correlations between age and agency as well as between age and generativity, did not differ significantly between men and women.

Though our experimental design did not enable us to examine change over time, based on the cross-sectional nature of the study, the results suggest that the age-related changes in agency and generativity are not unfolding differently for men and women.

### Future Research

Future research could examine these questions using a larger sample size and longitudinal methods in order to measure change in agency and generativity over time.

## References

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