

Personal Identity and Civic Responsibility: “Rising to the Occasion” Narratives and Generativity in Community Action Student Interns

Jefferson A. Singer*

Connecticut College

Laura A. King

University of Missouri—Columbia

Melanie C. Green

University of Pennsylvania

Sarah C. Barr

Connecticut College

Twenty-two students in a community action certificate program supplied “rising to the occasion” narratives during summer-long internships. They also filled out measures of generativity. Twenty-one students in an international studies certificate program that also included a summer internship served as a comparison group. Both groups reported equal personal growth from rising to the occasion experiences and no differences on measures of optimism, self-esteem or generativity. However, the community action students linked their personal growth experiences to future community service; a regression analysis also revealed that the best

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predictor of their stress-related growth was their level of generative concern. No comparable links emerged for the comparison group. Implications for cultivating connections between personal identity and civic responsibility through service-learning are discussed.

One day the staff arrived and learned that classes were cancelled because the director organized a gang crisis intervention. The directors had learned that many of our students were being recruited by gangs. After a presentation by the founder of gang peace, the staff was supposed to be available to talk to the students. Things started to fall apart. Some of the students were quite upset. Then some of the staff members began to cry. It was hard to be there for the students while the staff was upset themselves. I rose to the occasion by keeping my cool and being there to support the students. I walked with one student and talked to her about her fears of her friends joining a gang. It was hard but I had to do all I could to be there for her. Once the students left, the staff had a meeting. I waited for this time to let go and talk about how scared I was for our students. Thus, I was able to rise to the occasion and be there for my first priority, my students.

—Narrative written by a community action intern working with an organization focused on at-risk youth in New York City.

The words of this student intern capture dramatically a major goal of the service-learning movement (Eyler & Giles, 1999)—the integration of personal growth and direct community involvement. As Waterman (1997) articulated, service-learning courses benefit students through career preparation and enhancement of self efficacy (Bandura, 1977). However, he also identified a third dimension, the “fostering of civic responsibility” (Waterman, 1997, p. 5), which distinguishes service-learning from traditional fieldwork or applied learning experiences.

In many colleges, the current fad is to offer students “real world” opportunities through January and summer internships. However, in at least two important ways, the service-learning movement emphasizes a learning that goes beyond an academically-sanctioned work experience. First, service-learning holds the expectation that the field experience will be placed in the context of larger intellectual concerns that are the focus of reading, writing, and classroom discussion. What you do “out there” is filtered through an ethical and analytical inquiry. Second, service-learning intends to “serve.” That is, service-learning is commensurate to civic responsibility, broadly defined.

Civic responsibility entails participation in activities that seek to enhance the quality of the overall society and its diverse constituents, not simply one’s own life or the lives of one’s immediate circle. Civic responsibility extends from basic political participation and charitable donations to membership in community

organizations to the active pursuit of social justice through work in public and private institutions, non-profit organizations, and social service professions, including teaching, social work, and public health. Robert Putnam's (2000) recent book, *Bowling Alone*, about the decline of communal and civic activities in contemporary society highlights how fragile this sense of active citizenship may become in a society that increasingly prizes privacy, home-based recreation, and material consumption.

The student's quote that began this article is an example of what we have defined as a "rising to the occasion" narrative (King, Singer, & Green, 2001a). In these narratives, individuals identify a period of struggle, challenge, or novelty. They encounter obstacles and antagonists, both anticipated and unanticipated. Yet, as the narrative proceeds, they, like the proverbial phoenix, rise up and meet the challenge. They emerge from the experience with an enhanced sense of their own strengths, abilities and moral reserves.

Rising to the occasion narratives are linked to a larger genre of culturally constructed identity stories that can be characterized as "finding benefit in adversity" narratives (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Janoff-Bulman, 1992; Janoff-Bulman & Berg, 1998; King, Scollon, Ramsey, & Williams, 2000; McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, & Bowman, 2001; Taylor & Armor, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). These kinds of re-affirming narratives have the capacity to become touchstones within individuals' overall narrative identity (McAdams, 1985, 1993); they are self-defining memories that provide reassurance and guidance in subsequent situations of challenge or obstacle (Singer & Salovey, 1993).

If certain rising to the occasion narratives are drawn from community service and community activism experiences, then the possibility that individuals' ongoing personal identity will incorporate civic responsibility is greatly enhanced. A story of personal growth that finds its meaning through the service of the public good does indeed fuse personal identity with civic responsibility.

To examine this possibility, we selected a sample of students involved in an academic program focused on community work and asked them to recount a rising to the occasion narrative drawn from their recent summer internship in a community setting. They completed some rating scales and open-ended questions about their experience, and indicated how much they had grown from the incident they described, as well as how relevant the experience was to community service. They also filled out a battery of personality measures, including measures of "generativity" (Erikson, 1950), which reflected their concern with civic responsibility and leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

For comparison's sake, we selected a second group of students from the same college also involved in an intensive academic program and summer internship, in this case, focused on international studies. This second group completed the same measures. We hypothesized that the students who had selected a community focus for their academic work and then were placed in settings in

which meaningful community work is conducted would be more likely to link the “personal” and the “civic” aspects of their sense of identity. Though the other sample of students might be just as likely to rise to the occasion and grow from the rigors of an intensive summer internship, the quality of their experience was more likely to remain personal and less likely to be linked to the domain of civic responsibility.

Since the community program students we chose to study were a self-selected group who made a choice early in their college education to join this program, we could make no claim that their overall program involvement or their summer experience transformed their orientation to social contribution. Rather our intention was to document the existence of this more socially conscious narrative identity within college students, and perhaps to extract some insight into how service-learning experiences can be constructed to maximize the building of a sense of identity that includes a sense of civic responsibility.

Rising to the Occasion Narratives

Influential theorists and researchers in personality have argued that the narratives individuals construct of their lives play a critical role in the individuals' overall sense of identity and personal meaning (Bruner, 1990; McAdams, 1985, 1993; Sarbin, 1986). These narratives can take the form of specific memories, elaborated fantasies, and even full-scale autobiographies (Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Singer, in press; Singer & Bluck, 2001; Singer & Salovey, 1993). McAdams (1985, 1993) has suggested that beginning in adolescence and early adulthood, individuals in modern societies commence the construction of a “life story” that weaves together themes of relationship, achievement, and power into a coherent whole that provides unity and purpose to their lives. These life story constructions are continually re-shaped both by the individual and by the extant cultural narratives that help to give structure and coherence to the developing story. The emphasis in studying these narratives is not on their objective truth, but rather on how individuals incorporate these accounts into a subjective vision of the self.

In recent years, researchers have turned their focus to specific types of life story narratives that may correlate with other aspects of personality. McAdams et al. (2001) found that individuals' life stories could be coded for “redemption” (begins badly, ends well) or “contamination” (begins well, ends badly). Individuals high in redemption displayed higher levels of well-being and generativity in their lives, while individuals high in contamination showed the opposite pattern. McAdams et al. (2001) linked these results to other research on individuals' capacity to find benefit despite adversity (Affleck & Tennen, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). McAdams et al. argued that individuals who can discern the good in situations of struggle or disappointment have an overall greater confidence not only in

themselves, but also in society in general; they have “a faith in the worthwhileness of the human enterprise” (McAdams et al., p. 483).

King et al. (2000) obtained similar findings when they examined the narratives of parents who discussed the birth of their children with Down syndrome. Parents who recounted stories about their children that concluded with happy endings showed greater subjective well-being. An additional and equally important finding was that parents who expressed a sense of struggle and accommodation to their changed life circumstances (e.g., raising a Down syndrome child), but still ended their narratives with a positive perspective, displayed the greatest levels of psychological maturity, as measured by Loewinger and Wessler’s (1970) sentence completion task.

Whether the individual is overcoming a difficult childhood, coping with illness, or recovering from substance abuse (Singer, 1997), their ability to emerge from the experience with insight and optimism is a sign of what Park, Cohen, and Murch (1996) termed “stress-related growth.” Stress-related growth (SRG) may be defined as the subjective experience that one has grown as a person as a result of some important life challenge. After a stressful life encounter one might feel renewed determination or a fresh sense of gratitude for one’s family or friends. Park et al. (1996) demonstrated that SRG is related to greater optimism, as well as higher levels of social support and acceptance coping. King et al. (2000) found that the parents whose narratives reflected the most realistic adjustment to their children’s condition displayed the highest levels of SRG.

Rising to the occasion narratives are related to these forms of “benefit from adversity” narratives, but they may be distinguished from them in two important ways. First, when someone rises to the occasion, he or she may face a challenge that is not necessarily negative or unpleasant, but that still demands heretofore untapped strengths. For example, an athlete may reach a new level of accomplishment in a sport she loves; one would characterize this rising to the occasion experience as “meeting a challenge” rather than overcoming adversity. Second, rising to the occasion narratives, by definition, require the experience of enhanced personal insight and agency. Benefits from adversity might include an enlarged social support system, a deeper faith in God, or a commitment to take each day as it comes. In rising to the occasion narratives, individuals must discover a personal reserve of strength or virtue that they had not previously fully expressed or tapped. Many of the “I learned . . .” statements in Park et al.’s (1996) stress-related growth measure emphasize this aspect of enhanced personal agency and mastery.

Since summer internship experiences are likely to contain moments of positive challenge and personal mastery (not to mention some adversity as well), a request for rising to the occasion narratives seemed particularly well-suited to capturing the experiences of these certificate program students. Faculty and staff involved with these programs who have listened to students’ accounts of their summer internships over the years (Mary Devins, associate director, Center for International

Studies and the Liberal Arts [CISLA], personal communication, January 2001; Tracee Reiser, associate director, Program in Community Action [PICA], personal communication, January 2001) claim that their stories almost invariably follow a “rising to the occasion” structure. It was expected that both groups would generate rich narratives that were high in personal insight and stress-related growth.

Generativity

Erikson (1950) first introduced the term “generativity” to refer to the stage in middle adulthood in which individuals begin to look beyond their own preoccupation with building a personal identity and turn to consideration of the legacy they will leave for future generations. Although raising one’s own offspring may be regarded as the prototypical generative act, generativity extends far beyond parenting. Individuals may contribute a legacy to society through their work, volunteer activities, artistic pursuits, and all forms of community and political activism.

McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) initiated a current wave of empirical research on generativity that has allowed for its measurement and for the investigation of its correlations with well-being, self-esteem, and an overall sense of coherence in life. From this work, McAdams and his colleagues (McAdams, 1993; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998) proposed a model of generativity that illustrates how individuals develop generative concerns, commitments, actions, and ultimately, life narratives that include generative stories.

Although Erikson located generativity in middle adulthood, McAdams, de St. Aubin, and Logan (1993) found that young adults (ages 22–27) report virtually the same number of generative concerns as mid-life adults (37–42). However, young adults’ translation of these concerns into action was markedly less common than the middle adult cohort. Still, Van De Water and McAdams (1989) theorized, and Peterson and Stewart (1996) demonstrated that individuals high in generativity were more likely to possess an active political consciousness and favor movements that promote social justice. Considering the idealistic qualities of the certificate program students, and the above finding of relatively high levels of generative concern in young adults, it should be expected that both groups would score reasonably high in their level of generative concern.

However, what should distinguish the community action group from the international studies group is the degree to which the community action students associate the personal growth from their summer experiences (i.e., their “rising to the occasion” narratives) with an explicit orientation to making social contributions and improving society for future generations.

Predictions in Present Investigation

We predicted that both community action and international studies students would rate their “rising to the occasion” experience as high in stress-related growth

and important in their lives. Although we did not expect differences in self-esteem, optimism, or generativity between the two student groups, we did predict that the community action students would be more likely to select personal growth narratives that related to helping others, and that their discovery of new personal strengths or skills (as measured by the Stress-Related Growth scale) would be correlated to an overall concern with generativity and social contribution. These predicted findings would help to define more clearly how students reach the sense of internalized civic responsibility that educators seek to sustain in students who participate in service-learning work.

Method

Participants

The participants were 43 Connecticut College seniors (12 males, 31 females, M age = 21.39) drawn from the two certificate programs in community action (PICA; 6 males, 16 females) and international studies and the liberal arts (CISLA; 6 males, 15 females). Twenty-two of the 23 PICA seniors (96 percent) and 21 of the 26 CISLA seniors (81 percent) participated; the overall participation rate was 88 percent. The PICA sample consisted of 16 Whites, 3 African Americans, 2 Hispanics and 1 international student, and the CISLA sample had 16 Whites, 1 Asian American, 1 Hispanic, and 3 international students. (One PICA participant conducted her summer internship in the year prior to all of the other students and, therefore, was removed from all subsequent analyses for sake of consistency.) Participants' overall GPA, based on a 4.0 scale, was 3.42 (CISLA, 3.5; PICA, 3.3; $t(1, 39) = 1.87, ns$). Between the two programs, there were 20 academic majors represented; CISLA scholars spanned 12 different majors and PICA, 8. The most popular majors for the CISLA students were government (4) and international relations (4), and for the PICA students, psychology (9) and sociology (5). All participants had conducted their internships in the summer of 2000 and completed the questionnaire materials in the first and second weeks of February 2001.

Participants were recruited by an e-mail announcement sent by the directors of each certificate program, requesting their participation in a research study focused on their summer internship experience. Participation was voluntary; participants received no academic credit or monetary compensation for the completion of the questionnaires.

Background of the Two Student Groups—PICA and CISLA

PICA. The Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy oversees three major areas—service-learning grants to faculty, community partnerships

that address concerns of the New London, Connecticut, area, and the Program in Community Action (PICA). PICA seeks to integrate the core educational activities of students with community work and activism. Students select courses and workshops that supplement their major. They conduct a full-time, eight to ten week summer internship after their junior year. When they return for their senior year, they conduct an individual study or honors thesis in their major that integrates their community concern into their project.

Students join PICA in their sophomore year by filling out an application that includes a personal essay documenting their interest in and previous commitment to community work. By the time of their summer internship after their junior year, students have already accumulated an impressive history of community outreach. The summer internship allows them to build on their previous work and to step up to a new level of community and personal responsibility. After graduation, PICA students gravitate toward community activism, social services professions, and public policy work.

CISLA. The Toor Cummings Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts's (CISLA) goal is to prepare students for an increasingly global society by adding an international emphasis to any liberal arts major offered at the college. Students select a set of courses, in addition to their major, that incorporates their interest into an international theme. They conduct a summer internship in a country outside the United States after their junior year. When they return, their senior individual study or honor thesis connects to their international focus.

Although CISLA endorses an awareness of global interconnectedness and social responsibility, its central thrust is an enhanced internationalized liberal arts education without an overt emphasis on service-learning or community activism. After graduation, college records show that CISLA students are likely to end up in a variety of settings, including graduate programs in the humanities, work in the corporate and public sectors, international academic think tanks, and social service. Accordingly, their summer internships are more likely to range widely in topic and less likely to place an explicit emphasis on community change or social activism.

Measures

Demographic information sheet. Participants filled out a brief cover page, indicating their age, gender, ethnicity, certificate program, major, the location of their summer internship, a brief description of their activities, and their overall certificate focus.

Rising to the occasion narrative request (King, Singer, & Green, 2001b). Participants were asked to write about their summer internship experience according to the following instructions:

Think back over your summer internship experience and try to recall a situation or circumstance in which you weren't sure you could handle a challenge that was presented. Faced with this challenge, you "rose to the occasion" and tapped a strength, value or ability in a way that you had never quite done before. You may or may not have been aware of this quality before the experience, but after the experience you gained a new appreciation or insight about this aspect of your self-definition. Though the experience itself may have been positive, negative or mixed while you were undergoing it, you now look back at it as a moment of growth and enhanced clarity about who you are and the potential you possess.

Please describe the experience on the following page in a few paragraphs and as clearly as possible, **state exactly what strength, value or ability was revealed when you rose to the occasion.**

A second blank page followed the request with the brief instructions on the top that participants could use the back of the page, if necessary, and that they should limit themselves to 20 minutes in thinking about and writing down the experience.

Rising to the occasion narrative rating sheet (King et al., 2001b). After writing the narrative, participants answered several questions about their response. They indicated how frequently they had thought about the experience on a 4-point scale (once a day, once a week, once a month, less than once a month). They described with whom they had shared the experience and in what circumstances they were likely to draw on the memory. They indicated, through an open-ended response, in what way they saw their rising to the occasion experience as connected to community activism or community service work. Finally, on two 7-point scales, they indicated how important the experience was to them (7, not at all important; and 1, very important) and how much they relived it in recounting it during the study (7, did not relive experience; 1, relived experience).

Stress-Related Growth (SRGS; Park et al., 1996) is a 15-item scale measuring self-perceived positive outcomes resulting from a stressful life experience. Items are rated on a 3-point scale with higher scores indicating more perceived growth. Sample items include "I feel freer to make my own decisions" and "I learned that it's okay to ask others for help." The instructions were revised to indicate that participants should respond to questions as they pertained to their summer internship experience and specifically to the event described in their rising to the occasion narrative. Alpha coefficients for the SRGS have averaged .95 (Park et al., 1996). The alpha in the current investigation was .84.

Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) is a 20-item self-report scale that assesses individual differences in one's concern with making contributions that extend beyond the self. It employs a 0–3 scale with 0 indicating

the statement never applies to you and 3 indicating the statement applies you very often or nearly always. Sample items include “I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences,” and “I think I would like the work of a teacher.” The LGS has previously yielded an alpha coefficient of .83 (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992), and reached .73 with the current sample.

Modified Generativity Behavior Checklist (MGBC; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) is a list of 11 generativity-related behaviors drawn from the original 50 items used by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992). These selected items manifest the strongest correlation between the total score summed across these 11 items and the LGS ($r[74] = .75, p < .001$). For our study, we excluded one item from these 11 (“performed an act of community service”) since all PICA students were so heavily involved in community service, they could not be expected to show any variability on this item. Participants used a 0–2 scale with 0 meaning they had not performed this behavior in the two months prior to their summer internship and 2 meaning they had performed the behavior more than once. Sample items included: “Drew upon my past experiences to help a person adjust to a situation” and “Taught somebody a skill.” We asked for their estimate of generative actions *before* their internship in order to obtain a rough measure of generative involvement prior to the influence of the summer experience. The alpha coefficient for our sample was .64.

Personality Measures

To establish a basic similarity between the groups of students, we administered the following battery of personality measures—*The Life Orientation Test* (LOT; Scheier & Carver, 1985), an eight item instrument measuring dispositional optimism on a 5-point scale with strongly disagree on the high end (this sample $\alpha = .79$); *The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (RSES; Rosenberg, 1979), a 10-item scale measuring global self-esteem on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) scale (this sample $\alpha = .72$); *The Satisfaction with Life Scale* (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), a 5-item measure of general life satisfaction with a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale (this sample $\alpha = .78$).

Content Coding of the Rising to the Occasion Narratives

Recently, researchers interested in positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) have emphasized the identification of strengths, as opposed to deficits in human personality. Peterson (2001) has developed a framework of six fundamental virtues that may be examined for individual differences—wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Using Peterson’s preliminary work as a guideline, we reviewed the transcripts of the rising to the occasion narratives.

Our review of the narratives suggested that the identification of fundamental strengths/virtues may be highly influenced both by the type of task assessed and by the participants' developmental stage in the life cycle. Accordingly, not all of Peterson's categories seemed relevant for this particular sample and their internship concerns. Consequently, based on our reading of the narratives, we developed a new set of strengths that were most germane to the current sample.

The strengths that were most salient for these college students focused particularly on issues of competence and emotional maturity. Self-reliance, persistence, compassion and courage also emerged as salient themes. We provided raters with phrases and terms from the narratives associated with each of these six strengths.

For competence, these terms and phrases included: faced challenge, overcame obstacle, achieved task that I was not sure I could do, grew in self-confidence, developed professionalism.

For emotional maturity, the terms and phrases included: learned to control my emotions, stayed calm under pressure, showed good judgment and wisdom, asked for help when needed, stood up for myself in conflict or confrontation.

For self-reliance/self-sufficiency, the terms and phrases included: lived independently; handled responsibilities on my own; mastered new language, culture, or setting; showed I could do it on my own.

For persistence, the terms and phrases included: not giving up, finding sense of duty, hard work, effort, sticking with task, hanging in despite fear of failure.

For empathy/compassion, the terms and phrases included: showed kindness, learned to be good listener, was caring, reached out to others, developed trust.

For courage, the terms and phrases included: survived in dangerous situation, took risk, overcame fear and did something for the first time, put myself to a test, went into completely novel or unfamiliar circumstance despite fear.

After going over these criteria, two independent raters managed 90 percent agreement for scoring the presence of each of these six strengths in the rising to the occasion protocols. All narratives were transcribed and raters were unaware of the participants' identity.

Procedure

We contacted the associate director of CISLA and asked for her cooperation with this project. She agreed to e-mail all CISLA seniors and alert them to pick up the questionnaire packet from the CISLA office. The assistant director of PICA also notified students by e-mail and distributed the questionnaires through campus mail. Students were given an additional opportunity to participate in an evening group administration. Fourteen students attended this meeting and the other 29 returned their surveys to the program offices or through campus mail. Data collection was conducted over a two-week period.

A cover letter, thanking the students for their participation and explaining that the information was designed to evaluate their internship experience and its impact, accompanied the surveys. The surveys were ordered as follows: Demographic Sheet, Rising to the Occasion Narrative Request, Rising to the Occasion Rating Sheet, SRGS, LOT, RSES, SWLS, LGS, and the MGBC.

Results

Summer Internship Settings

Table 1 displays the diversity of summer internship settings for the PICA and CISLA students. Examination of the differences in the two groups reveals the PICA students' particular emphasis on direct helping situations that involved teaching, health, or social service work. Alternatively, many of the CISLA placements also had an overt focus on social betterment, but involved more policy-oriented and research activities, including document translation, survey development, interviewing, and data analysis.

Another obvious distinction is that only one of the PICA internships was conducted internationally (Kenya), compared to the required international fieldwork

Table 1. Summer Internship Settings for Program in PICA and CISLA Students

PICA Program in Community Action	CISLA Center for International Studies in the Liberal Arts
Camp with focus on world hunger	Economic research—Mali
Educational center for creativity (2)	Bank—Germany
Enrichment program for at-risk children	Architecture firm—Italy
Coalition to stop police brutality	Development agency—France
After school initiative for public school children	Social sciences institute—Russia
Community boating project	United Nations development fund for women—Nigeria
Attorney general's office—health advocacy unit	Department of health and social affairs—Martinique
Urban landmarks and restoration	Elle magazine—Argentina
Substance abuse recovery center	Ministry of treasury—Italy
Unrepresented nations' and peoples' organization	Nanjing massacre memorial hall—China
Women's center	Office of foreign relations—Mexico
Early intervention program	Agronomy center—Mexico
Group home for adolescent boys	Cable news station—Germany
Alternative birthing program	Radio France—France
Mentoring program for at-risk teens (2)	Academy of Sciences—Russia
Children's museum	Japanese Bolivian Association—Bolivia
Kenyan orphanage for children with AIDS	Center for science and environment—India
	Women for women's rights—Turkey
	Field research on plant medicine—Bali
	Center for European policy studies—Belgium

of the CISLA students. This distinction suggests that the CISLA students’ accounts of personal growth might have been more likely to reflect their efforts to achieve fluency in a second language and master basic living skills in a new country and culture. We examined this possibility through the rising to the occasion narratives.

Rising to the Occasion Narratives

Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations for PICA and CISLA students’ ratings of their stress-related growth from their rising to the occasion summer experience as well as their ratings of its overall importance, the frequency of their thought about it, and the degree to which they relived the experience in recalling the narrative account. For stress-related growth, both PICA and CISLA students provided mean ratings on the 3-point scale that were between “some-what” and “a great deal” for the degree to which they grew from their summer experience (2.32 and 2.28, respectively). On the 7-point Importance scale, PICA and CISLA students both provided mean ratings that indicated their rising to the occasion experience was in the “very important” direction (2.29 and 2.19, respectively). More moderate results emerged for the 7-point Relive scale, though they were again in the positive direction (2.95, 3.95, respectively). The 4-point Frequency of Thought scale suggests that both groups still thought about their rising to occasion narratives between once a week and once a month (2.74, 2.62, respectively).

Table 2. Ratings of the Summer Internship Experience

	Means			Standard Deviations		
	PICA (N = 21)	CISLA (N = 21)	Total (N = 42)	PICA (N = 21)	CISLA (N = 21)	Total (N = 42)
Stress Related Growth Scale (SRGS)	2.32	2.28	2.30	0.33	0.39	0.36
Importance of the Experience (IMPORT)	2.29	2.19	2.24	1.19	1.44	1.30
Frequency of Thought about Experience (FREQ)	2.74	2.62	2.68	0.83	0.99	0.90
How Vividly One Relived the Experience in Describing It (RELIVE)	2.95	3.95	3.45	1.63	1.56	1.66

Note: PICA—Program in Community Action; CISLA—Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts. There were no significant differences between the PICA and CISLA groups on all four of these summer internship experience variables. SRGS is a 1–3 scale where 1 means “not at all” and 3 means a “great deal” of perceived growth. IMPORT is a 1–7 scale where 1 means the experience was “very important” and 7 means “not at all.” FREQ is a 1–4 scale where 1 means the participant thought about the experience at least “once a day” and 4 means “less than once a month.” RELIVE is a 1–7 scale where 1 means “relived the experience” and 7 means “not at all.”

A MANOVA with type of program (PICA vs. CISLA) as the fixed factor and SRG, Importance, Frequency, and Relive as dependent variables was non-significant (Wilks' Lambda = .885, $F(4, 37) = 1.20$, *ns*), indicating no difference between groups in their overall responses to their rising to the occasion narratives or their stress-related growth from their summer experiences.

We next examined the two groups' responses to the open-ended question regarding the connection of the experience described in their rising to the occasion narrative to "community activism or community service" work. PICA students were significantly more likely to see their rising to the occasion narratives as linked to community work. Nine out of twenty-one (43 percent) of the CISLA students saw an explicit community connection, but for PICA, this number swelled to 100 percent (21/21), $\chi^2 = 16.80$, $p < .001$. PICA students describing a personal growth narrative were more likely to see the connection of that narrative to their community interest (past, present, or future). To examine this difference in more depth, we looked more carefully at the actual content of the rising to the occasion narratives.

Content Analysis of the Rising to the Occasion Narratives

The raters' coding of the narratives revealed that the most common strength identified across the two groups' narratives was competence (48 percent), followed by emotional maturity (43 percent), self-reliance (21 percent), persistence (19 percent), compassion (17 percent) and courage (17 percent). The two groups of students were extremely similar in the types of strength displayed with only one significant difference for compassion (29 percent for PICA vs. 5 percent for CISLA, $\chi^2(42) = 4.29$, $p < .05$).

Given the strong similarities in the kinds of strengths identified for the two groups, we next examined the type of experience in which the strength was discovered. Specifically, we coded the experiences for the degree to which they reflected community involvement that highlighted human interaction or direct social advocacy. If participants described their rising to the occasion experience as taking place in the course of helping other people or advocating on their behalf, this counted as a community interaction strength discovery. Such activities as teaching children, helping in a social service setting, working in a women's center, or assisting refugees were all coded as human interaction community involvement.

Advocating for community change through petition drives, attendance at community meetings, and direct lobbying for human rights also qualified as community interaction strength discoveries. Academic projects, creative arts, business transactions, document preparation, and survey development did not.

Two independent raters reached a 90 percent agreement in this coding procedure. As might be expected, the highly social services-oriented PICA students

tapped their strengths during an experience of community interaction (81 percent), while only 19 percent of the CISLA students located their strength discovery in community interaction situations ($\chi^2[42] = 16.01, p < .001$). CISLA students were much more inclined to be involved in document preparation, business meetings, artistic activities, and scientific research.

These results indicate that while the overall strengths discovered by the two groups were basically similar (with the exception of more emphasis on compassion discovery by PICA students), the PICA students were much more likely to tap their personal strengths in situations involving direct care giving and community advocacy than the CISLA students.

Personality Variables and Generativity for the Two Groups

Table 3 depicts the means and standard deviations for the PICA and CISLA students' scores on the Life Orientation Test, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and the two generativity scales, the Loyola Generativity Scale and the Modified Generativity Behavior Checklist. Both PICA and CISLA students demonstrated reasonably high degrees of optimism on the Life Orientation Test (LOT; 2.58 and 2.21, respectively, on a 5-point scale with 1 indicating "strongly agree" and 5 indicating "strongly disagree"). On the 5-point Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), both groups were just above 4 where 5

Table 3. Ratings for the Personality Inventories

	Means			Standard Deviations		
	PICA (N = 21)	CISLA (N = 21)	Total (N = 42)	PICA (N = 21)	CISLA (N = 21)	Total (N = 42)
Life Orientation Test (LOT)	2.58	2.21	2.38	0.65	0.59	0.64
Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)	4.10	4.04	4.05	0.48	0.54	0.48
Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)	4.90	5.34	5.12	1.09	0.79	1.08
Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)	2.02	1.99	2.00	0.31	0.26	0.30
Modified Generativity Behavior Checklist (MGBC)	1.19	1.11	1.15	0.39	0.32	0.35

Note: PICA—Program in Community Action; CISLA—Center for International Studies and the Liberal Arts. There were no significant differences on these personality variables for the PICA and CISLA groups. LOT measures optimism on a 1–5 scale in which 1 means "strongly agree" and 5 means "strongly disagree." RSES measures self-esteem on a 1–5 scale in which 1 means "strongly disagree" and 5 means "strongly agree." SWLS measures life satisfaction on a 1–7 scale in which 1 means "strongly disagree" and 7 means "strongly agree." LGS measures generative concern on 0–3 scale in which 0 means "never" and 3 means "very often." MGBC measures generative acts on a 0–2 scale in which 0 means "not in the last two months" and 2 means "more than once in the last two months."

indicates “strongly agree” (4.10, 4.04, respectively), and on the 7-point Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), both groups scored at the “slightly agree” level (4.90, 5.34, respectively). Most interestingly, the two groups showed similar rates of generative concern on the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS; 2.02, 1.99, respectively, on a 3-point scale where 2 indicates that the statement “fairly often” applies). They also did not differ on the MGBC; both groups reported that on average they had performed each generative action once in the last two months before their internship (1.19, 1.11, respectively). A MANOVA with type of program as the fixed factor and the five personality scales as the dependent variables revealed no significant difference between the groups (Wilks’ Lambda = .80, $F(5, 35) = 1.75, ns$).

Relationship of Rising to the Occasion Narrative Variables to Generativity

Table 4 examines the connection between ratings of the rising to the occasion narrative (including stress-related growth) and generative concern and behavior for each sample of students. As hypothesized, the PICA students showed significant relationships to generative concern for three of their four rising to the occasion measures ($r(21) = .51$ for stress-related growth; $-.45$ for importance of the experience; $-.45$ for reliving the experience while recounting it; all $p < .05$). These relationships indicate that PICA students linked their narratives of personal identity, as measured by stress-related growth, importance to the self, and enduring vividness of the experience, to their overall concern with a generative contribution to the society. The more these students claimed they grew personally from their

Table 4. The Relationship of the Summer Experience Ratings to Generativity

	SRGS	IMPORT	FREQ	RELIVE	
Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)	.51*	-.45*	-.30	-.45*	Program in Community Action (PICA) ($N = 21$)
Modified Generativity Behavior Checklist (MGBC)	.40	-.31	-.10	-.09	
Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)	.27	-.29	-.23	-.06	Center for International Studies in the Liberal Arts (CISLA) ($N = 21$)
Modified Generativity Behavior Checklist (MGBC)	.24	-.08	.10	.22	

Note: SRGS (Stress Related Growth Scale) is a 1–3 scale where 1 means “not at all” and 3 means a “great deal” of perceived growth. IMPORT (Importance of the Experience) is a 1–7 scale where 1 means the experience was “very important” and 7 means “not at all.” FREQ (Frequency of Thought about the Experience) is a 1–4 scale where 1 means the participant thought about the experience at least “once a day” and 4 means “less than once a month.” RELIVE (How Vividly One Relived the Experience in Describing It) is a 1–7 scale where 1 means “relived the experience” and 7 means “not at all.”

* $p < .05$.

community-based summer experience, the more they professed a concern for leaving a positive legacy for others in the society. There were no parallel significant relationships between the rising to the occasion variables and generativity for the CISLA students.

Although these findings suggest support for the hypothesis, the differences in these correlations between the two samples were not big enough to reach significance. With an N of 21 apiece for each group, only differences bigger than .51 between two correlations would have significance at the .05 level.

To explore further the relationship of growth from the summer experience and generativity, we conducted a stepwise multiple regression for the PICA students, predicting stress-related growth from the set of five personality variables. The regression equation was significant, $R^2 = .268$, adjusted $R^2 = .227$, $F(1, 19) = 6.58$, $p < .05$, and the only significant predictor of SRG was the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS), $\beta = 5.17$, $p < .05$. This result emerged, even controlling for the students' ratings of generative actions, prior to the summer internship (MGBC). A similar regression analysis for the CISLA students failed to identify any significant personality predictors of stress-related growth.

Discussion

The results of this investigation demonstrate that certain college students who have selected a three-year certificate program based in service-learning are more likely to connect their personal growth to a concern with social contribution than comparable students enrolled in a similar certificate program without an explicit service-learning focus. Each group of students recounted a personal narrative of when they rose to an occasion over their summer internships. Though both groups supplied narratives that indicated stress-related growth and enhanced personal mastery, and both groups indicated comparable levels of a concern for social contribution (generativity), only the PICA students made an explicit association between higher levels of personal growth and higher levels of generativity. This association was revealed not only in a correlation between stress-related growth and generativity for PICA students, but also in the relationship of the importance and vividness of their personal growth narratives to their overall concern for generativity.

This study represents the first effort to employ a request for "rising to the occasion" accounts as a way of tapping into one aspect of individuals' ongoing narrative identity. Drawing on the premise that the individual personality is more than a collection of traits or characteristic adaptations to roles, situations, or developmental stages (McAdams, 1996), this project explored how individuals construct a narrative of their emerging strengths and abilities in the face of an important challenge. Participants reported little difficulty with identifying a story that filled our request, and they indicated that they found this experience important

in their lives and still prevalent in their thoughts on a weekly to monthly basis, even five months after the experience had ended.

One reasonable concern about the design of the current study is the degree to which participants already possessed these “rising to the occasion” narratives or whether they generated these narratives solely in response to the study request. Clearly, in future studies, it would be important to include questions that ask participants to indicate how spontaneous or well-rehearsed this type of narrative is for them. Still, the fact that participants indicated that they had already been thinking about these experiences and had shared them in conversations with intimate others suggests that these “rising to the occasion” narratives were not woven out of whole cloth at the time of the data collection. Further, as addressed in the introduction to this study, staff associated with these programs had listened to exactly these types of narratives from PICA and CISLA students for years, which is a significant reason that these groups were selected for this first “rising to the occasion” study.

Not surprisingly, these college student interns placed a particular emphasis on discovering a sense of competence and emotional maturity in their rising to the occasion experiences. In our future research with other samples, we would expect different areas of ability or strength to be highlighted. For example, rising to the occasion narratives of new parents might highlight even more themes of nurturance or compassion, while rising to the occasion narratives of professional athletes might focus more on endurance or courage. What is clear from this preliminary project is that the participants were able to access a positive store of self-knowledge that is organized and recoverable in a narrative form. This narrative knowledge is available for self-encouragement and to guide the construction of goals and future plans (Moffitt & Singer, 1994).

In sum, we found this initial effort at examining rising to the occasion narratives highly encouraging and meriting of future study. Continued research along this line would benefit from more explicit questions concerning the strength or ability tapped by the rising to the occasion experience. Despite our use of bold-face lettering in the section that asked for specification of the strength or ability, participants tended to get swept up in the narrative they recounted and often forgot to identify the particular strength they discovered. It would also have helped to include a question that explicitly asked about the functions the rising to the occasion experience may serve in their current lives. That is, do they use it for encouragement, reassurance, guidance, or self-confidence?

In the emerging field of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), it is critical to gain more insight into how individuals construct a healthy and adaptive sense of identity; one key component of this identity may be a life story rich in narratives of optimism, hope, and personal growth. Future studies might also seek to examine individuals’ range of rising to the occasion narratives and, in general, sharpen their distinction from “benefit from adversity” stories. Building

on McAdams et al.'s (2001) findings, individuals with more positive self-concepts might be further differentiated into those who emphasize overcoming adversity (or redemption scenes) and those who highlight growth from more positive challenges.

Given the emphasis of this issue on community involvement, we sought to explore the connection between the personal growth expressed through the rising to the occasion narratives and community-oriented students' concern for social change and helping others. As predicted, the more students seemed to grow from and value their summer community change work, the greater their overall concern with making a meaningful lasting contribution to the society. The PICA students appear to be effective models of optimal service-learning students. They see their own personal growth and discovery of individual strengths and abilities as tied to a larger civic responsibility and commitment to societal growth and improvement.

This linkage is a vital ingredient in sustaining over a lifetime the invaluable lessons that a service-learning encounter can afford. Individuals who see their service work as mostly for the benefit of others or as a sacrifice of their time and resources from more "personal" pursuits are unlikely to maintain an ethos of community commitment over the long term. On the other hand, individuals who see their own personal development as fused with community service are likely to incorporate this work into their very sense of self and personal identity for the rest of their lives. In exploring the functional explanations for volunteer work, Clary et al. (1998) identified different motivations for volunteering and argued for the importance of matching motivation with the types and conditions of the volunteer placement. Most relevant to the current study, they found that when individuals' functional needs are met through their placements, they are more likely to sustain their commitment. In the current context, it is possible that the personally relevant experiences that community-oriented PICA students underwent in their summer experiences will indeed contribute to their sustained commitment to future social contribution. Building "rising to the occasion" requests into the reflection exercises done in service-learning courses (see Eyler, this issue) might facilitate students' ability to see this connection between their personal growth and their civic engagement.

Despite the linkage between PICA students' rising to the occasion experiences and their generative concerns, it is important to restate the correlational nature of this study and to reemphasize that no claims can be made for the specific effects of the summer internship or the overall community action certificate program. As discussed in our introduction, the PICA students are a self-selected group who had a history of community service involvement dating back to high school. It is entirely possible that they might have made the connections between their personal growth over the summer and their generative concerns without the support of the Holleran Center and PICA. On the other hand, it is reasonable to suggest that PICA provides these students with resources, guidance, and a support network that is highly sustaining of their initial interest and idealism.

To improve on the current study's design, future studies should require pre- and post-test comparisons that could examine changes in generative concerns and actions over time for different and larger groups of students. Additionally, other measures of political engagement, social activism, and social responsibility might be included to distinguish levels of political consciousness from more general altruistic tendencies. Wherever possible, behavioral indices of these attitudes and concerns should be collected to verify participants' self-reports.

As educators advocate for the expansion of service-learning coursework and programs in colleges and universities, it is incumbent on them to demonstrate both the academic and personal impact they have on the students they recruit. If such studies are successful, there is good reason for optimism about the potential for social change. The combination of academic knowledge with an enhanced investment in civic activism can indeed prepare a new generation of professionals, managers, and public servants who see their personal growth as entwined with their civic duty. The result could be a more caring and compassionate societal leadership, similar to the exemplary citizens described by Colby and Damon (1992). To borrow a phrase from McAdams (2001), the goal of the service-learning movement is to create in students a social engagement that "is not so much what they do on occasion; it is rather, in a sense, who they are" (p. 89). When students see in the roots of their own life stories—of their discovered strengths—a clear connection to the lives of others in their community, their experience is indeed more than a summer's adventure, but, rather, a compelling aspect of "who they are" and an enduring message about how they might fit into and contribute to the society they are preparing to join.

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JEFFERSON A. SINGER, PhD, is Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Psychology Department at Connecticut College. He currently serves as an associate editor for both the *Journal of Personality* and *Contemporary Psychology*. He is a fellow of the American Psychological Association and Division 9. His areas of research focus on the construction of narrative identity, autobiographical memory, and personality. He is also a practicing clinical psychologist.

LAURA A. KING, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Psychological Sciences at the University of Missouri, Columbia. She recently moved from Southern Methodist University where she received numerous teaching awards. She serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (the Personality and Individual Differences Section). Her research looks at how individuals formulate stories about important life experiences and the implications of these stories for well-being and physical health.

MELANIE C. GREEN, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania. She recently co-edited the volume *Narrative Impact: Social and Cognitive Foundations* (Erlbaum, with Jeffrey Strange and Timothy Brock). Her research examines the effects of narrative (including fictional stories) on individuals' beliefs and attitudes. She also studies individual influences on the formation of social capital.

SARAH C. BARR, BA, is the Assistant Director of the Holleran Center for Community Action and Public Policy at Connecticut College. She holds a bachelor's degree from Chatham College in Global Policy Studies. She worked for AmeriCorps, assisting low income and homeless residents in Washington, DC, after graduation from Chatham.