

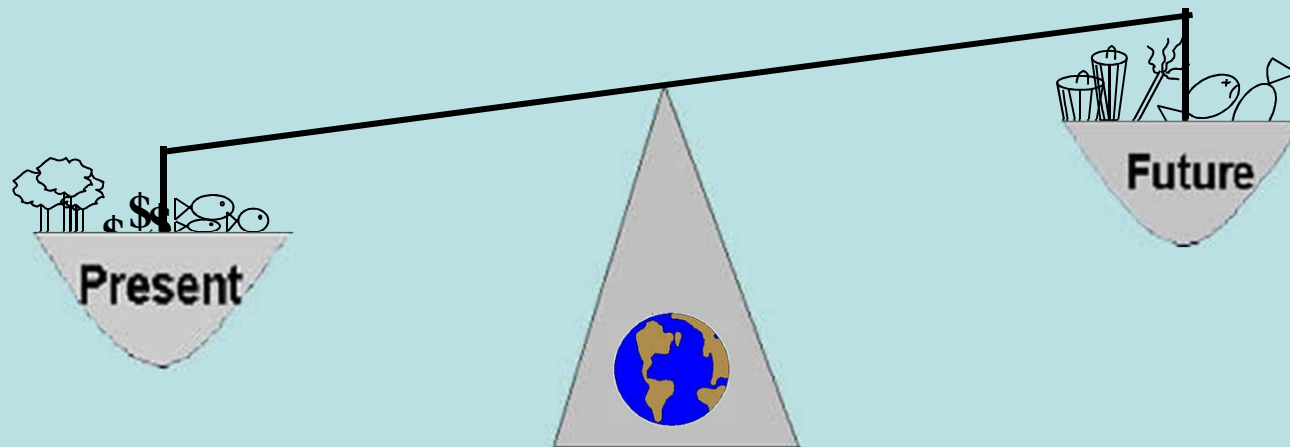
Legacies, Immortality, & the Future: The Psychology of Intergenerational Decisions

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Intergenerational Dilemmas

People are faced with a choice between self-interest & the interests of future others.



Key Features

- Unilateral decision making power
- Actors are removed from the social exchange context over time
- No opportunity for future generations to reciprocate

Intertemporal & Interpersonal Components

- *Intertemporal*: Behavior affects the future
- *Interpersonal*: Behavior affects other people

**“Why would anyone ever act
on the behalf of future generations
when there is nothing in it for them?”**

Legacies & Intergenerational Behavior

- Intertemporal + interpersonal = special significance
- Combination makes it possible to leave a legacy

Legacies

(Fox, Tost, & Wade-Benzoni, 2010; Wade-Benzoni & Tost, 2009)

- A legacy is an enduring meaning attached to one's identity and manifested in the impact that one has on others beyond the temporal constraints of the lifespan.
- When an individual leaves a legacy, that individual has established an impact that lasts beyond his or her living existence on this planet.
- Legacies are vehicles for personal life meaning that extend into the future to outlive the physical self.

Legacies & Generativity

- Legacy concept highly related to the notion of generativity.
- Generativity = Life stage when people begin to pursue actions that benefit their communities and relationships, and that promote their continuity across generations (Erikson, 1963).
- Generativity is understood by contemporary scholars as a constellation of thoughts, motivations and behaviors that combine to produce an investment of one's substance in forms of life and work that will impact and guide future generations (Kotre, 1984; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992).
- Legacy motive = personal motive to engage in generative action in order to achieve a sense of self-extension and affiliation with other individuals, institutions, and value systems that will outlive oneself.

The Legacy Motive

- Humans desire to be part of the larger progression of life, to leave the world a little better off for our presence in it, and to feel as though one has mattered (Becker, 1973).
- The motivation to leave a positive legacy is rooted in a fundamental desire to feel that one's life has meaning. The legacy itself functions as the carrier of that meaning, extending the self into the future through impacts on future others.
- Intergenerational beneficence is enhanced when individuals are motivated to leave a positive legacy.

What Enacts a Legacy Motive?

- Various aspects of one's social context can impact (activate or enhance) the legacy motive.
 - Death awareness (Wade-Benzoni, Tost, Hernandez, & Larrick, 2011)
 - Resource valence (Wade-Benzoni, Sondak, & Galinsky, 2010)
 - Allocating burdens (as compared to benefits) intergenerationally
 - Greater intergenerational beneficence
 - Increased concern with one's legacy
 - Heightened ethical concerns
 - Feelings of greater responsibility for and affinity with future generations
 - Power Asymmetry (Wade-Benzoni, Hernandez, Messick, & Medvec, 2008)
 - Power priming
 - Led to greater stewardship
 - More generous allocations of resources to future generations

Transcending Death

- Death awareness reminds individuals of the inevitability of death and their desire to live.
- People strive to transcend death by finding meaning for their lives.
- Central to this meaning is that effects of one's existence persist into future.
- People can gain psychological security in the face of death by feeling part of something that will "live on" after them.
- Such a connection serves as a symbolic extension of their own existence.
- Intergenerational beneficence can enable people to have a meaningful impact on a future social entity.
- Acting on the behalf of future others helps to fulfill legacy building needs.

The Effect of Death Priming on Intergenerational Resource Allocations

- Death priming activates legacy motivations, thus leading to more beneficence to future generations (in the form of beneficial allocations of resources).
- When legacy motivations are activated, time delay can increase (rather than decrease) beneficence towards others.
- Predict interaction between death priming and recipient (present versus future other) such that death priming increases generosity in the allocation of beneficial resources to others in the future, but does not increase generosity in the allocation of beneficial resources to others in the present.

Experiment 1

Introduce Death Prime

- Develop practical death prime with ecological validity
- Demonstrate that death priming increases individuals' concern for their lasting impact

Experiment 1 - Methods

Between-participants design

Death Prime vs. Control

Procedure:

Read a newspaper article and write briefly about author's writing style.

Word completion task

20 word fragments

6 could be completed as either death-related or neutral (e.g., "COFF_ _")

16 others unrelated to death (e.g., paper, salad)

Generativity scale ($\alpha = .84$)

It is important to me to leave a positive legacy for future generations.

I have made and created things that have had an impact on other people.

I feel that I have done something that will survive after I die.

Death Prime Manipulation

Death Prime

“Person killed in aircraft brake failure accident.”

Article described an airplane that had killed an individual after careening onto a highway in a mid-sized urban area. The article explained that the deceased individual was a passenger on the plane who had been burned to death during the accident.

Control

“Has Russian math whiz solved \$1M puzzle?”

Article described a reclusive Russian mathematician who had posted on the internet a solution to one of the world’s toughest math problems.

Experiment 1 - Results

Death prime evoked thoughts of death

→ Participants in death prime condition used death-associated words to a greater extent ($M=1.80$ $SD=1.15$, $n=44$) than participants in the control condition ($M=1.28$ $SD=0.83$, $n=46$) ($F(1,88)=5.88$, $p=.017$).

Death prime increased concern for lasting impact

→ Participants in death prime condition reported significantly greater concern for their lasting impact ($M=4.97$ $SD=1.57$, $n=44$) relative to participants in control condition ($M=4.33$ $SD=1.49$, $n=46$), ($F(1,88)=3.98$, $p=.049$).

Experiment 2

Death x Recipient Interaction

- Death priming increases beneficence to future others (in the form of more generous resource allocations).
- Death priming interacts with time to influence the extent to which people act on the behalf of others.
- Tendency to favor the present over the future will be reversed when death is primed, such that people engage in greater beneficence to future rather than present others.

Experiment 2 - Methods

2 x 3 between-participants design

Death Prime vs. Control

Present-other vs. Future-other vs. Future-self
(Manipulate temporal and social distance independently)

Procedure:

Read a newspaper article and write briefly about author's writing style.

V.P. of operations of a subsidiary of an energy company in possession of an energy source

Dependent variable:

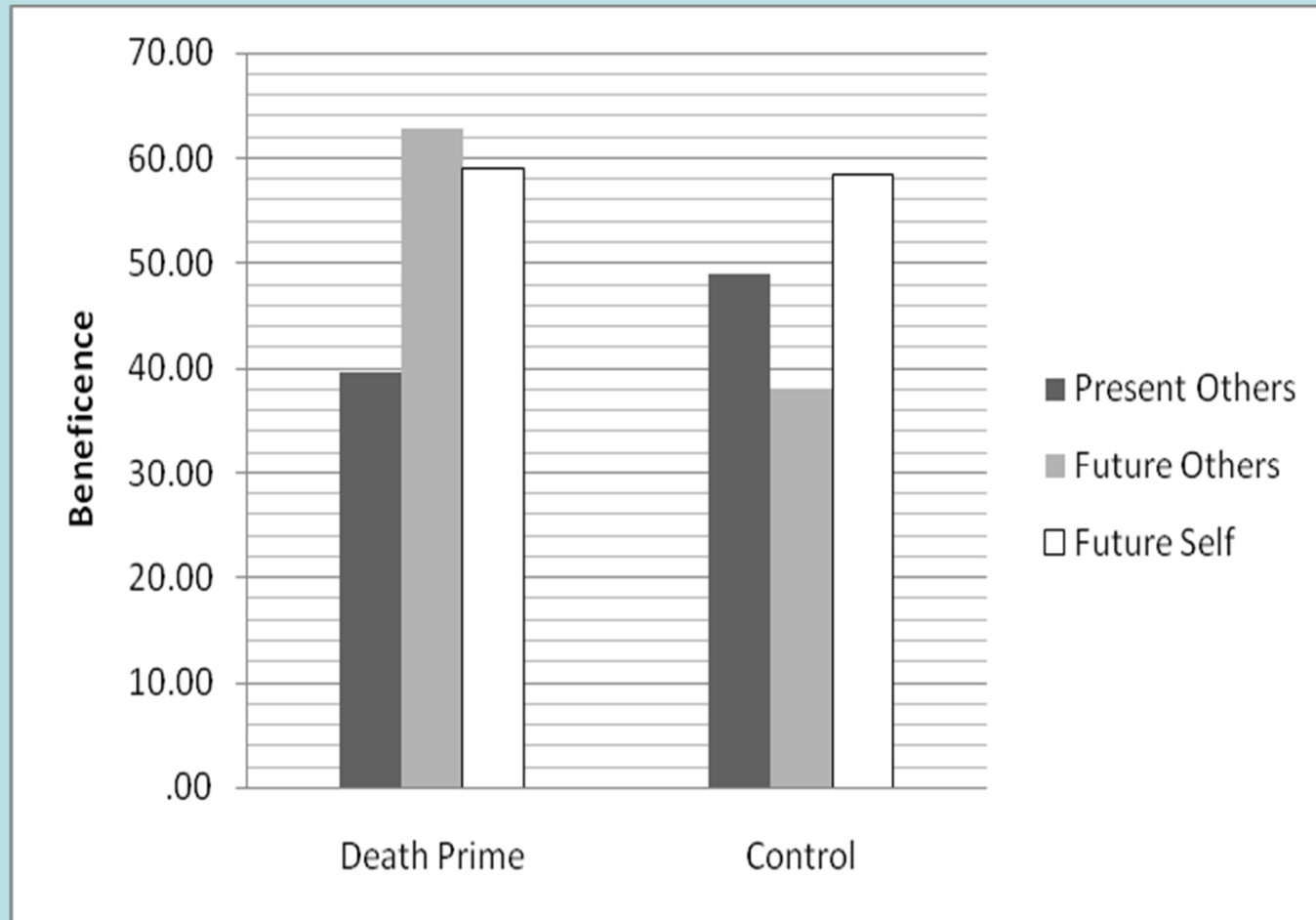
How much of the energy source to consume today? %

Other-present = another subsidiary wants access to the energy

Other-future = another subsidiary with 5 year delay

Self-future = own subsidiary with 5 year delay

Experiment 2 - Results



Experiment 2 - Results

- No main effects.
- Significant death x recipient interaction ($F(2, 65) = 3.17, p=.049$).
- Participants primed with death allocated a greater amount of resource to future ($M=62.90, SD=21.13$) as compared to present others ($M=39.64, SD=24.92; F(1,45)=5.48, p=.024$).
- Significant effect of death prime among individuals allocating to others in the future, such that individuals exposed to death prime allocated significantly more to future others ($M=62.90, SD=21.13$) than did individuals in the control condition ($M=38.09, SD=22.07; t(20)=2.22, p=.038$).
- Death priming did not affect allocations to the self in the future.
- Participants in the control condition exhibited greater beneficence to themselves in the future ($M=58.42, SD=18.49$) than to others in the future ($M=38.09, SD=22.07; F(1, 39)=4.73, p=.036$), but this tendency was eliminated in the death prime condition.

Experiment 2

The Role of Affinity

- The effect of death priming on allocations to future others is mediated by participants' feeling of affinity with those future others. (Death priming did not have an impact on affinity with present others because it is only connection with future others that can function as a form of self-extension into the future and thus fulfill legacy needs.)
- Pattern of moderated mediation in which death priming increases desire to connect with others, but only in the future condition. (Edwards & Lambert, 2007)
- Significant effect of death prime on affinity, but only among those who were allocating to future others ($p < .001$).
- Significant indirect effect of death prime on beneficence through affinity, but only for those allocating to future others ($p < .001$).

Experiment 3 - Methods

2 x 2 between-participants design

Death Prime vs. Control

Present vs. Future recipient

Procedure:

Read a newspaper article and write briefly about author's writing style.

Dependent variable:

Participants entered in a lottery to win \$1000 as compensation for participation in study. Asked if they would like to donate a portion of it to charity. Indicate the amount that they would like to donate.

(DV not transparent to participants.)

Experiment 3 - Manipulations

MS

“Person killed in aircraft brake failure accident.”

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Control

“Has Russian math whiz solved \$1M puzzle?”

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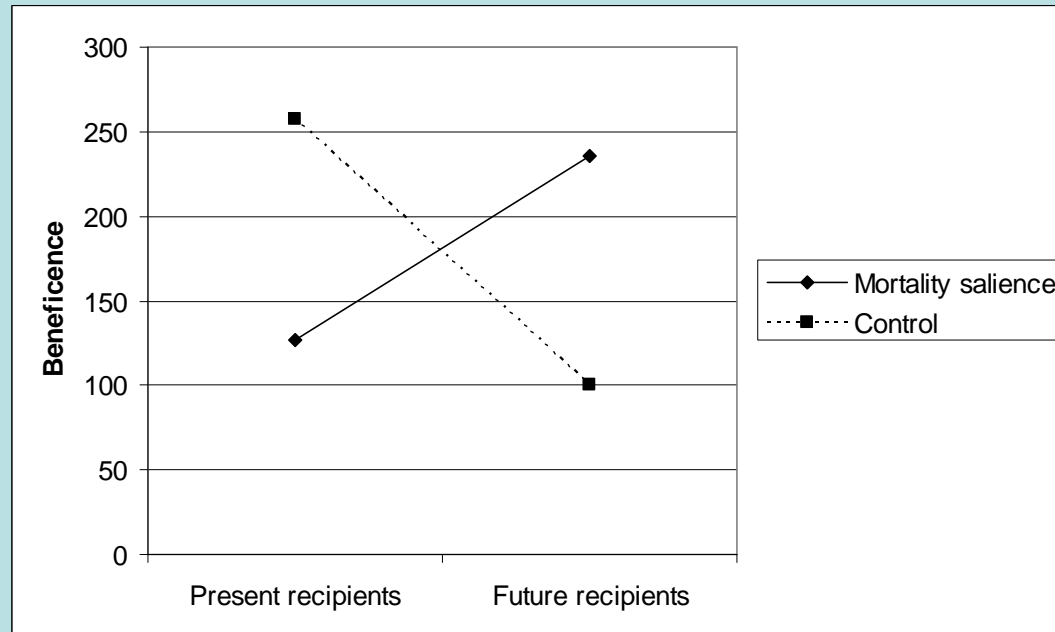
Present

Food for the Poor: An organization that provides direct, immediate relief assistance to the poor by purchasing and distributing food in impoverished communities. The organization strives to meet pressing immediate needs in society today.

Future

Room to Read: An organization that builds libraries and schools for children in impoverished communities. The organization strives to create lasting improvements.

Experiment 3 - Results



Interaction: $F(1,51) = 4.37, p = .04$

Summary

- Intergenerational contexts create unique psychological dynamics.
- Intertemporal and interpersonal distance between decision makers in the present and the consequences to others in the future can combine to lead to the emergence of psychosocial benefits (i.e., legacy creation) that promote intergenerational beneficence.
- Intergenerational beneficence represents an opportunity to create an enduring sense of personal life meaning by establishing a legacy and thus extending oneself into the future to create a positive, ethical, and lasting impact on others.
- The desire to extend ourselves into the future and potentially beyond mortal life is a deep and strong impetus for generative action.
- Death priming increases intergenerational beneficence.
- Death priming reverses the direction in which time delay between decisions and consequences affects other-oriented behavior in the allocation of beneficial resources.
 - Under normal (i.e., control) conditions, people are more generous to contemporary others relative to future others – presumably reflecting standard time discounting.
 - When primed with death, people are more generous to future others relative to contemporary others.

Present

Self



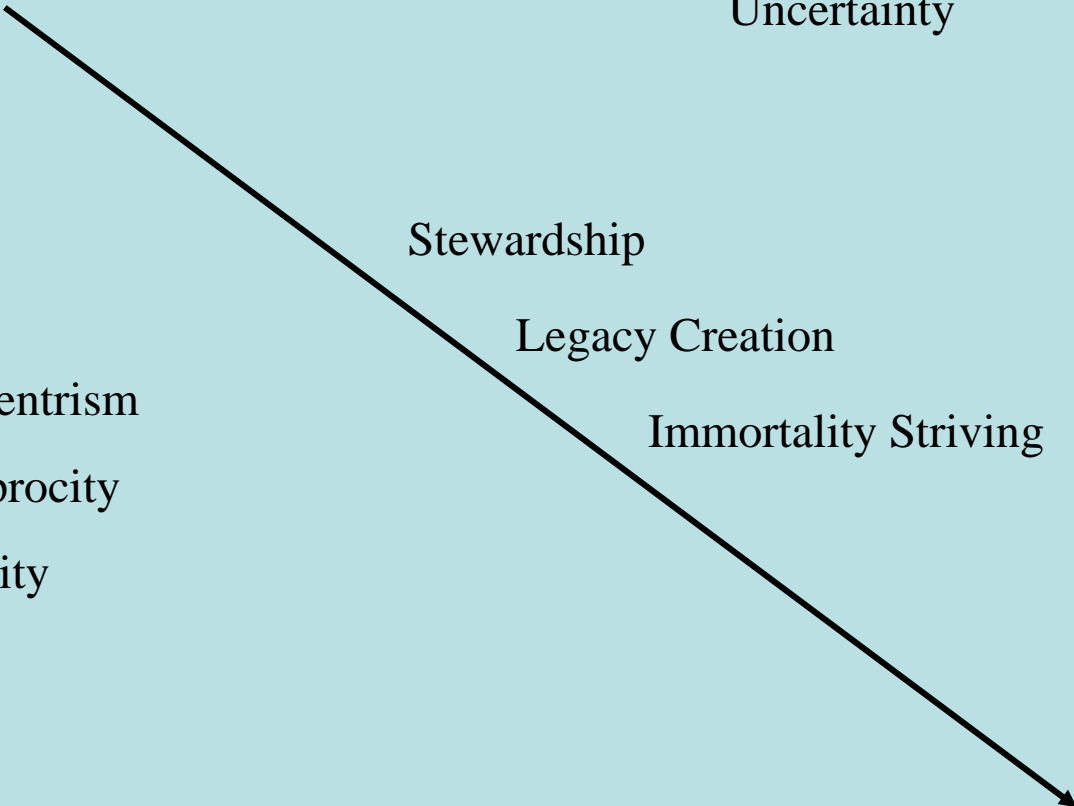
Other

Egocentrism
Reciprocity
Affinity



Future

Time Discounting
Uncertainty



Stewardship

Legacy Creation

Immortality Striving

**Future
Generations**

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