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Worldview commitment and narrative foreclosure among older Dutch adults: Assessing the importance of grand narratives

Nienke P. M. Fortuin, Johannes B. A. M. Schilderman, and Eric Venbrux

Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT
Grand narratives offered by religion and other worldviews provide a background against which people can narrate their personal life stories. Therefore, the extent of commitment older adults experience toward their worldview is expected to influence the narrative openness of their life story. Regression analyses based on a survey study among 356 older Dutch adults demonstrate that reconsideration of the commitment toward their worldview is associated with “narrative foreclosure”: the premature sentiment that their life story is actually over. Moreover, the association we found between age and narrative foreclosure toward the future emphasizes the lack of vital cultural narratives of aging.

KEYWORDS
Aging; cultural narratives; narrative gerontology; religion; worldview

Introduction
Geriatric spiritual care and pastoral counseling focus on the individual life stories of older adults and on the connections of these individual stories with the stories offered by religious tradition (Ganzevoort, 2014). In recent decades both gerontology and the study of religion have experienced a heightened interest in narrative approaches (Bohlmeijer, Westerhof, Randall, Tromp, & Kenyon, 2011; Ganzevoort, de Haardt, & Scherer-Rath, 2014; Kenyon, Bohlmeijer, & Randall, 2011; Kenyon, Clark, & de Vries, 2001; Laceulle & Baars, 2014). Such approaches stress that human identity has a fundamentally narrative structure: we “have some “authority” over our identity,” namely “through the stories we continually spin for ourselves inside of ourselves” (Kenyon & Randall, 2001, p. 4). Individual life stories are characterized by contingency: the experience that everything could have been different and could develop contrary to our plans and expectations (Scherer-Rath, 2014; van den Brand, Hermans, Scherer-Rath, & Verschuren, 2014). Due to the continuous accommodation of life events, our life stories are open to new meaning and even to “restorying”: “the literary process of re-composing the stories we have ‘made up’ about who we are, where we have come...
from, and where we are headed” (Kenyon & Randall, 1997, p. 1). Bruner (1999, p. 9) emphasizes the importance of the willingness or eagerness to story our lives by stating that this willingness is tantamount to the desire to live—even when the story is flavored with disaster.

When people encounter a situation they cannot meaningfully interpret in terms of their life story, the resulting interpretative crisis may result in “narrative foreclosure” or “the premature conviction that one’s life story has effectively ended” (Freeman, 2004, p. 83). Bohlmeijer et al. (2011, p. 364) describe narrative foreclosure as “the conviction that no new interpretations of one’s past nor new commitments and experiences in one’s future are possible that can substantially change one’s life-story.” When comparing one’s life story with a book, narrative foreclosure means that one is convinced about the ending of one’s life story and does not add new chapters anymore, but also refrains from enjoying, rewriting, and editing previous chapters (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011). Narrative foreclosure implies that no development of identity will be possible anymore (Bohlmeijer, Westerhof, & Lamers, 2014). The risk of narrative foreclosure may increase in later life due to the lack of cultural narratives that provide older adults with adequate narrative resources to sustain a satisfying life story throughout their entire life course (Baars, 1997; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Freeman, 2004, 2011; Laceulle & Baars, 2014).

Society offers different narratives of aging or “value-laden stories which social policy tells about what it means to age and how aging is experienced” (Kesby, 2017, p. 372). Previous research indicates two cultural narratives of aging that are offered by contemporary Western societies. The first is one of aging as decline (Andrews, 2009; Biggs, 2001; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Freeman, 2004, 2008; Gullette, 2004; Jacobsen, 2015; Kesby, 2017; Laceulle & Baars, 2014). This is coupled to a political narrative focusing on increasing dependency as adults age (Biggs, 2001; Jacobsen, 2015; Kesby, 2017), envisioning older adults as a burden on society (Baars, 1997; Biggs, 2001; Kesby, 2017). When older persons are defined in terms of illness the complexities of aging are reduced to the “pathologies” of aging (Kesby, 2017). The second cultural narrative emphasizes “successful,” “positive,” “active,” or “productive” aging (Andrews, 2009; Biggs, 2001; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Freeman, 2008; Jacobsen, 2015; Kesby, 2017; Laceulle & Baars, 2014; Liang & Luo, 2012). Although the second narrative seems to stimulate the potentials of living a good life that older people possess, due to its frequent failure to take into account disparities in the circumstances of older people it may also lead to marginalization of those older people who cannot or do not wish to live up to these standards (Biggs, 2001; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Kesby, 2017; Laceulle & Baars, 2014; Liang & Luo, 2012). Furthermore, approaches that focus on “successful,” “positive,” “active,” or “productive” aging have been criticized due to their connection with economic capitalist concerns about population aging and their suggestion that older persons mainly have “value” to society
because of their productivity and the economic opportunity they represent in the field of “grey marketing” (Andrews, 2009; Biggs, 2001; Kesby, 2017; Laceulle & Baars, 2014; Liang & Luo, 2012). The coexistence of these dual narratives of aging in shared political, moral, and economic stories (Andrews, 2009; Baars, 1997; Biggs, 2001; Jacobsen, 2015; Kesby, 2017) may result in ambivalence in self-narratives of aging individuals (Freeman, 2008).

Portrayed in stories and symbols, rituals and moral guidelines religions offer grand narratives: big, overarching stories that explain the world we live in (Ganzevoort, 2014; Kellehear, 2017; Prickett, 2002). These may be especially salient for older adults approaching death since they offer eschatologies that describe the ultimate fate of human beings after death (Kellehear, 2017). Although for older adults the lack of vital cultural narratives of aging may complicate the continued storying and restorying of their life, these grand narratives can provide alternative narrative resources, offering their own views on aging and death. However, nowadays the grand narratives of traditional religions are being jostled and mixed by global diversity and competition (Kellehear, 2017). Therefore, contemporary individuals can no longer rely on self-evident cosmic frameworks with unquestioned significance and normative influence (Laceulle & Baars, 2014; Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Scherer-Rath, 2014), which may increase the personal uncertainty at the end of life (Kellehear, 2017). Although older adults may tend to preserve and maintain the worldview and beliefs they grew up with (Atchley, 1989, 1999), this commitment can be threatened by the interpretational diversity inherent in modern society.

Although religious stories—especially when considered “Holy Scripture”—are expected to have particular interpretative authority (Koster, 2014), we assume that both religious and non-religious worldviews can play a major role in the assimilation of contingent life events into individual life stories (Scherer-Rath, 2014; van den Brand et al., 2014). Therefore, we expect that the commitment older people experience toward their worldview—whether religious or non-religious—will help them retain a vital life story throughout their lives. Accordingly, this article evaluates the association between the extent of commitment older people experience toward their worldview and the extent of experienced narrative foreclosure.

**Theoretical framework and hypotheses**

The contingency of life implies that events are characterized by chance: things could have been different and could develop contrary to our plans and expectations (Scherer-Rath, 2014; van den Brand et al., 2014). The interpretative crisis that may result from the experience of contingency can lead to narrative foreclosure, which extends both to the past and the future: one does not see possibilities to repair what has gone wrong in the past and the present life story does not seem to allow actions that may change the
story for the better in the future (Bohlmeijer et al., 2014). On the basis of this
distinction Bohlmeijer et al. (2014) have developed a two-dimensional instru-
ment that evaluates narrative foreclosure toward the past (NF-Past) and
toward the future (NF-Future) separately. Now the expected relationships
between narrative foreclosure and other characteristics will be expounded.

Commitment toward religious and non-religious worldviews

The grand narratives symbolically presented by religion have the power to
explain the world we live in in such a convincing way that they allow for the
interpretation of apparent ambiguities, puzzles, and paradoxes in human experi-
ence (Geertz, 1973, p. 108). Freeman (2011) refers to this in the context of the
narrative foreclosure experienced by Primo Levi, a non-religious concentration
camp survivor. Levi notes that believers generally fared better throughout their
ordeal in the camps because they experienced “the saving force of their faith”
which made their universe “above all more comprehensible” (Freeman, 2011, p.
10). Because of their interpretative potential, religious and non-religious world-
views can play a major role in the process by which people story and restory their
life. As religious stories—especially when considered “Holy Scripture”—have
existential authority (Koster, 2014), it is expected that religious worldviews in
particular enable people to meaningfully integrate unexpected, unwanted, and/
or unfathomable events into their personal life story (Scherer-Rath, 2014),
thereby counteracting narrative foreclosure.

Although identity formation remains important throughout the lifespan, it
is commonly assumed that a narrative identity is first constructed in late
adolescence and young adulthood (Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Crocetti,
Schwartz, Fermani, & Meeus, 2010). In line with the continuity theory of
aging (Atchley, 1989, 1999) we expect that many older adults, who grew up
in a more traditional society in which religious grand narratives still had
most of their authoritative power, will experience an ongoing commitment to
the religious worldview they grew up with. However, because of the con-
temporary decline of self-evident religious interpretative frameworks
(Kellehear, 2017; Laceule & Baars, 2014; Mellor & Shilling, 1993; Scherer-
Rath, 2014) the personal uncertainty at the end of life has increased, poten-
tially threatening the commitment of older adults toward their worldview.
Because of the interpretative potential offered by grand narratives we expect
that a higher commitment of older adults toward their worldview will be
associated with less narrative foreclosure.

In this study the commitment older adults experience toward their world-
view is evaluated by the Utrecht-Management of Identity Commitments
Scale (U-MICS), a model of identity formation comprising three structural
dimensions (Crocetti, Rubini, & Meeus, 2008). The first dimension is com-
mitment, referring to “enacting enduring choices with regard to various
developmental domains and to the self-confidence individuals derive from these choices.” The second dimension is in-depth exploration, referring to the extent to which individuals “think actively about the commitments they have enacted, reflect on their choices, search for additional information about their commitments, and talk with others about them.” The third dimension is reconsideration of commitment, referring to “the comparison of present commitments with possible alternatives because the current commitments are no longer satisfactory” (Crocetti et al., 2010, p. 173). Whereas commitment and in-depth exploration represent attempts to develop and maintain a sense of self (i.e., identity coherence or synthesis), reconsideration, on the other hand, implies questioning and rethinking this sense of self (identity confusion) (Meeus, van de Schoot, Keijsers, Schwartz, & Branje, 2010).

In contrast with Crocetti et al. (2008, 2010), who applied the U-MICS to the identity domains of education and relationships, in this study it was applied to the domain of worldview. Karás and Cieciuch (2018) studied the salience of identity processes in several identity domains (personality; past experiences; family; friends and acquaintances; worldview; hobbies and interests; aims and plans; occupation) in a sample of 1,329 participants aged 19 to 35 using W-MICS, a modification of U-MICS (with a different response scale for the commitment subscale). In the identity domain of worldview they found that both commitment and exploration were significant positive predictors of well-being, but they did not find a significant association between reconsideration and well-being. However, in other domains (personality; past experiences; aims and plans) reconsideration of commitment was a significant negative predictor of well-being. Moreover, they found that for their young sample identity formation in the personality domain was the most important predictor of well-being. For older adults worldview is expected to be an important identity domain. First, older adults have been socialized in a more traditional society in which the grand narratives offered by religion still possessed most of their authoritative power. Second, worldviews can play a major role in the resolution of the interpretative crises induced by the bafflement, suffering, and moral paradox that may accompany the experience of aging and the approach of death (Geertz, 1973; Kellehear, 2017; Scherer-Rath, 2014). Third, in contrast with other identity domains to which this scale has been applied (Crocetti et al., 2008, 2010; Karás & Cieciuch, 2018), worldview is the sole identity domain that offers an overarching interpretational framework.

Although the research by Crocetti et al. (2008) is based on a population of adolescents instead of older adults and evaluates the identity domains of education and relationships instead of worldview, we will shortly discuss their main results. They found that, as commitment is positively associated with a clear and stable self-concept, extroversion, and emotional stability and negatively associated with depressive and anxiety symptoms, it appears to be a strong indicator of positive identity development. Moreover, they found
that in-depth exploration has a twofold meaning. On the negative side, it is negatively associated with self-concept clarity and emotional stability and positively associated with depression and anxiety. However, on the positive side, it is positively associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Finally, they found that reconsideration of commitment, being negatively associated with self-concept clarity, extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience and positively related to depressive and anxiety symptoms and even delinquent behaviors, represents the troublesome and crisis-like aspect of identity formation.

Considering the salience of the grand narratives offered by religious and non-religious worldviews for the interpretation of life events and taking into account previous research (Crocetti et al., 2008), which indicates that commitment is a positive, in-depth exploration is an ambivalent, and reconsideration of commitment is a negative indicator of identity formation, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: NF-Past of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with commitment toward their worldview and positively associated with reconsideration of the commitment toward their worldview.

Hypothesis 2: NF-Future of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with commitment toward their worldview and positively associated with reconsideration of the commitment toward their worldview.

Well-being and general self-efficacy

Karás and Cieciuch (2018) found that in many identity domains commitment and in-depth exploration are positively associated with well-being, whereas reconsideration of commitment is negatively associated with well-being, as measured with the Mental Health Continuum-Short Form scale (MHC-SF), which evaluates positive mental health, consisting of emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Moreover, Bohlmeijer et al. (2014) report a significant negative association between narrative foreclosure and positive mental health (also measured with the MHC-SF). As well-being is related both to narrative foreclosure and identity commitment, to evaluate the relationship between the commitment older adults experience toward their religious or non-religious worldview and narrative foreclosure, the influence of well-being should be considered.

Crocetti et al. (2008) found in their regression analyses that commitment is positively associated with extroversion and emotional stability, in-depth exploration is negatively associated with emotional stability and positively associated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, and reconsideration of commitment is negatively associated with extroversion,
agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience. Moreover, in their regression analyses Bohlmeijer et al. (2014) found significant negative associations between NF-Future and extroversion and openness and a significant positive association between NF-Past and neuroticism (the reverse of emotional stability). On the other hand, they also found a positive association between NF-Past and openness, which was, however, only significant at \( p < .05 \). Since both identity commitment and narrative foreclosure are significantly associated with personality traits, to evaluate the relationship between the commitment older adults experience toward their worldview and narrative foreclosure, the influence of personality traits should be considered.

For this aim, the one-dimensional general self-efficacy (GSE) scale was used, which is positively correlated with conscientiousness, openness to experience and extroversion, and negatively correlated with neuroticism (McIlveen, Beccaria, & Burton, 2013). As the GSE scale evaluates the belief in one’s competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity in a broad range of stressful or challenging encounters (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña, & Schwarzer, 2005; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and narrative foreclosure indicates a sense of stagnation, general self-efficacy was considered a relevant measure of personality in the context of this research. This corresponds with the view of Bohlmeijer et al. (2011) that narrative foreclosure is characterized by a lack of agency in one’s story, implying a lack of hope and self-efficacy in realizing one’s goals. Relations between general self-efficacy and personality among 8,796 participants from five countries from three continents indicate the highest positive associations between general self-efficacy and optimism, self-regulation and self-esteem, and the highest negative associations between general self-efficacy and depression and anxiety. Moreover, the relations between general self-efficacy and other personality measures remain stable across cultures and samples (Luszczynska et al., 2005). Considering the results of previous research, we formulate the following hypotheses concerning well-being and general self-efficacy:

**Hypothesis 3:** NF-Past of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with well-being and general self-efficacy.

**Hypothesis 4:** NF-Future of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with well-being and general self-efficacy.

**Sociodemographic characteristics**

Because of the perceived lack of cultural narratives that provide older adults with adequate narrative resources to keep a satisfying life story going throughout their entire life course (Baars, 1997; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Freeman, 2004, 2011; Laceulle & Baars, 2014), the risk of narrative foreclosure may increase in later
life. Indeed, in previous research Bohlmeijer et al. (2014) found a strong positive association between NF-Future and age, but a small or absent association between NF-Past and age. This conforms to the expectations, because cultural narratives of aging frame future prospects but do not affect the evaluation of the past. Therefore, to evaluate the relationship between narrative foreclosure and the commitment of older adults toward their worldview, their age should be taken into account. In addition, to evaluate the effects of the membership of and participation in a religious group, we accounted for religious affiliation and church attendance. Moreover, we took into consideration the effects of gender (for which Bohlmeijer et al. did not find a significant association with narrative foreclosure), civil state (which was not considered by Bohlmeijer et al.) and education (which Bohlmeijer et al. found to be negatively associated with NF-Future in one study and with NF-Past in the other study). Considering previous research concerning sociodemographic characteristics (Bohlmeijer et al., 2014) we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 5:** NF-Past of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with education.

**Hypothesis 6:** NF-Future of older Dutch adults is positively associated with age and negatively associated with education.

**Methods**

The formulated hypotheses have been evaluated in a survey study among older Dutch adults.

**Research ethics**

The research protocol was first assessed by the research ethics committee of the Radboud university medical center (CMO Arnhem-Nijmegen), which judged in October 2015 that because the research does not entail health risks or other notable burdens, it does not fall within the remit of the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO) (registration number: 2015–2040). Subsequently, it was assessed by the Ethics Assessment Committee Humanities of Radboud University, which gave consent in November 2015 (registration number: 8903).

**Sample**

The sample was drawn by the Dutch agency Cendris, which owns a large database of addresses of Dutch consumers. They randomly selected 3,000 addresses from an address pool of 269,160 addresses of Dutch adults estimated
to be between 75 and 79 years old, which was an address pool representing 21% of the total Dutch population of 75 years and older. The selected people received a written questionnaire by post in January 2016. Of the selected people, 56 were reported to have died and 67 to have moved. Although the estimated age range of selected people was expected to contain only 1% to 2% errors, 114 selected people reported they could not participate because they were younger than 75, and 52 of the 356 respondents were older than 79. Some respondents wrote their exact age on the questionnaire (which had not been requested); the oldest of these was 96 years old. Of the selected 2,763 people that could, in principle, participate, 356 returned the survey, giving a response rate of 13%. Table 1 presents the sample characteristics, where possible compared with the Dutch population of 75 years and older. It shows that, compared with the general Dutch population of 75 years and older, in our sample men, people younger than 80, married people, people born in the Netherlands, higher educated people and religiously unaffiliated people were over-represented. Conversely, widowed

<table>
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<th>Dutch 75+ population</th>
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people, people with lower education, Protestants, people with a religious affiliation other than Catholic or Protestant and institutionalized people were underrepresented. When considering the mean values of the scales as reported in Table 1, the biases in the sample should be heeded. As the aim of our study is not descriptive but correlational we expect these biases in the sample not to over-influence the study results. The data set has been deposited at the Dutch data archive DANS (https://doi.org/10.17026/dans-xgz-qaft).

**Dependent variable**

Narrative foreclosure was measured with the narrative foreclosure scale consisting of a factor referring to narrative foreclosure toward the past (NF-Past; five items such as “(10) the expectations I had about my life have not been met”) and a factor referring to narrative foreclosure toward the future (NF-Future; 5 items such as “(5) the story of my life is finished”) (Bohlmeijer et al., 2014, p. 884). A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) was performed on our data \(N = 320\) to test the reported factor structure. This analysis indicated that three instead of two factors had eigenvalues above Kaiser’s criterion of 1. Moreover, the scree plot revealed ambiguity about the number of factors that should be extracted (two or three). If only two factors were extracted, item 4 (which should load on the NF-Past subscale) had a low factor loading (.34) on this subscale. Moreover, reliability analysis indicated that reliability of the NF-Past subscale would increase (from .77 to .79) should item 4 (“I am satisfied about how my life has developed until now”) be deleted, which was therefore done for our data. After deletion of item 4, performance of a new principal axis factor analysis \(N = 323\) now indeed indicated two factors with eigenvalues above Kaiser’s criterion of 1, that together explained 58.56% of variance. Moreover, the scree plot now showed inflexions that would clearly justify retaining two factors. All items had loadings > .51 on their own factor and loadings < .14 on the other factor. Reliability of the NF-Past and the NF-Future scale (Cronbach’s \(\alpha\) of both subscales = .79) was found to be respectable (DeVellis, 2012). We found a Pearson correlation of the subscales of .27 (significant at \(p < .001\)), which is comparable with the values reported by Bohlmeijer et al. (2014) (.26 in study 1 and .25 in study 2).

**Independent variables**

The commitment older adults experience toward their worldview was evaluated with the Utrecht Management of Identity Commitments Scale (U-MICS), a three-factor identity model evaluating the dynamics of identity formation, evaluation, and revision (Crocetti et al., 2008, 2010; Meeus et al., 2010). This scale was applied to the identity domain of worldview,
which we described as “your personal outlook on life: on the value and nature of life and how it should be lived. Your worldview can be religious (for example: Christian, Islamic, or Jewish) but also non-religious (for example: humanist, agnostic or atheist).” In order to evaluate the content of this worldview, further in the questionnaire respondents were asked to describe their worldview. Of all respondents, 59% described their worldview as Christian, 10% as humanist, 9% as atheist, 2% as agnostic, 2% selected another category (anthroposophical, holistic, Buddhist, or Jewish), 5% described it as “different,” and 14% did not know or respond. A principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) on our data (N = 330) confirmed the three-factor structure of the U-MICS scale: three factors (representing commitment, reconsideration, and exploration of commitment) had eigenvalues above Kaiser’s criterion of 1 and together explained 68.50% of the variance. Moreover, the scree plot showed inflections that would justify retaining three factors. In line with Crocetti et al. (2008, 2010) our data show a strong positive relation between commitment and exploration (Pearson correlation of subscales = .47; p < .001), a positive relation between in-depth exploration and reconsideration of commitment (Pearson correlation of subscales = .24; p < .001) and no significant correlation between commitment and reconsideration of commitment. Reliability was found to be very good for the commitment and exploration subscales (Cronbach’s α = .91 and .82) and respectable for the reconsideration subscale (Cronbach’s α = .78) (DeVellis, 2012).

General self-efficacy was measured with the general self-efficacy scale (GSE), which consists of 10 items using a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 4 (exactly true) (Luszczynska et al., 2005; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). A principal axis factor analysis (N = 332) confirmed the reported one-dimensional factor structure since one factor had an eigenvalue above Kaiser’s criterion of 1 (explaining 51.31% of variance) and the scree plot showed inflections that would indeed justify retaining one factor. Reliability of the GSE scale (Cronbach’s α = .89) was found to be very good (DeVellis, 2012).

Well-being was evaluated with the ICECAP-O scale (Coast, Peters, Natarajan, Sproston, & Flynn, 2008; Grewal et al., 2006; Makai, Koopmanschap, Brouwer, & Nieboer, 2013), a measure that evaluates general quality of life of older people grounded in a capability approach. It evaluates capability in the areas of attachment, security, role, enjoyment, and control. We used the Dutch translation of this scale that has been developed by Makai, Brouwer, Koopmanschap, and Nieboer (2012). In order to compute capability scores, because Dutch tariffs were not available, British tariffs were applied (Coast, Flynn et al. (2008). Although ICECAP-O evaluates well-being, the strength of correlation between ICECAP-O and well-being measures does not significantly differ from its correlation with EQ-5D, which evaluates health-related quality of life (Makai et al., 2013). Observing that the
differences in correlations of self-perceived quality of life and self-perceived health scales with EQ-5D on the one hand and ICECAP-O on the other hand were less than expected, van Leeuwen et al. (2015) suggest that the domains included in ICECAP-O capture some of the effects of health that are important to older adults.

Age was measured as (0) 75–79 and (1) 80+. Gender was measured as (0) male and (1) female. Education level was measured on a scale ranging from (1) “no education after primary education” to (12) “PhD or doctorate.” Civil state was measured in four groups: married or registered partnership (the reference group); unmarried (never been in marriage or registered partnership); widowed (after marriage or registered partnership); and divorced (after marriage or registered partnership). Religious affiliation of respondents was divided into three groups: Catholics (the reference group), Protestants, and religiously unaffiliated respondents. Of the 85 Protestant respondents, 67 were mainline, seven orthodox or pietistic, eight evangelical, and three latitudinarian Protestants. Church attendance was measured on a scale ranging from (1) less than once a year/(almost) never to (6) weekly or more often.

Models and assumptions

To evaluate the association between the commitment of older adults toward their worldview and the extent of narrative foreclosure they experience we performed two hierarchical linear regression analyses—one that predicts NF-Past and one that predicts NF-Future. In both analyses three models were evaluated based on forced entry of predictors. In a first model only the variables expressing identity commitment toward one’s worldview (commitment, exploration, and reconsideration of commitment) were entered as predictor. To control for the effects of well-being and general self-efficacy, in a second model general self-efficacy and well-being were added as predictors. Finally, in a third model we controlled for sociodemographic variables by adding the variables gender, age, education, civil state, religious affiliation, and church attendance as predictors. For all regression analyses variance inflation factors (VIF) of predictors are below 2.1, which is well below the cut-off value of 10 (Meuleman, Loosveldt, & Emonds, 2015), indicating that there are no problems with multicollinearity. For both regressions the Durbin-Watson statistics (1.91 and 1.94) are very close to 2, indicating that the assumption of independent errors has been met (Field, 2013, p. 311). Casewise diagnostics indicate that 98.1 (for NF-Past) and 96.2 (for NF-Future) per cent of cases have standardized residuals within ± 1.96, which is more than the expected 95%. All outliers have Cook’s distance < .06, which is well below the cut-off value of 1 (Field, 2013, p. 306). As the histograms of the regression standardized residual for NF-Past and, to a lesser extent, for NF-Future show some deviation from normality, 2,000 bootstrap samples were used to determine the 95% bias corrected accelerated (BCa)
confidence intervals and significance levels of $B$, which do not rely on assumptions of normality or homoscedasticity (Field, 2013, p. 320). None of the confidence intervals of the $B$-values that are significant at $p < .050$ cross zero, giving confidence that for these predictors there is a genuine effect in the population.

**Results**

The results of the regression analysis for NF-Past ($N = 312$) are shown in Table 2. The change statistics ($F$ change = 14.4) indicate that model 1, which accounts for 12.3% of the variation in NF-Past, leads to a significant increase in prediction of NF-Past ($p < .001$). In this model reconsideration ($p < .001$) and exploration of commitment ($p < .050$) are significant positive predictors.

Table 2. Linear regression analyses for NF-Past ($B$ and $\beta$) with 95% BCa confidence intervals of $B$ based on 2,000 bootstrap samples reported in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NF-Past ($N = 312$)</th>
<th>Model 1 ($R^2 = .123$)</th>
<th>Model 2 ($R^2 = .205$)</th>
<th>Model 3 ($R^2 = .230$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>-.23***</td>
<td>-.24***</td>
<td>-.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.35,-.10)</td>
<td>(.26,-.01)</td>
<td>(.28,-.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.01,.28)</td>
<td>(.02,.22)</td>
<td>(.06,.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsideration</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.13,.42)</td>
<td>(.12,.41)</td>
<td>(.09,.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General self-efficacy</td>
<td>-.29**</td>
<td>-.19**</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.45,.13)</td>
<td>(.43,.11)</td>
<td>(.43,.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being (ICECAP-O)</td>
<td>-1.09**</td>
<td>-1.17**</td>
<td>-1.03**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(-1.86,-.37)</td>
<td>(-1.85,-.27)</td>
<td>(-1.85,-.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (ref = male)</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>(.15,.24)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age (ref = 75–79)</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>(.34,.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>(.04,.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil state (ref = married)</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>(-0.25,.22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>(-.42,.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>.28*</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>(.01,.57)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>(-.28,.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation (ref. = Catholic)</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>(-.22,.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(-.02,.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>(-.22,.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church attendance</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(-.02,.09)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.050; **p < 0.010; ***p < 0.001.
of NF-Past and commitment to one’s worldview is a significant negative predictor \( (p < .001) \). The change statistics \( (F \text{ change} = 15.9) \) show that model 2, which accounts for 20.5% of the variation in NF-Past, leads to a significant change in explained variance \( (p < .001) \). After addition of general self-efficacy and ICECAP-O to the model exploration is no longer a significant predictor of NF-Past and the significance of commitment decreases to \( p < .050 \). Both general self-efficacy and ICECAP-O are significant negative predictors of NF-Past \( (p < .010) \). The change statistics \( (F \text{ change} = 1.0) \) of the third model, which accounts for 23.0% of the variation in NF-Past, indicate that the change in explained variance due to addition of sociodemographic control variables is non-significant. None of the sociodemographic variables are significant predictors of NF-Past, except for being divorced, of which only the \( B \)-value is significant at \( p < .050 \). Addition of sociodemographic variables decreases the significance level of the \( B \)-value of reconsideration (which becomes significant at \( p < .010 \)).

The regression analysis of NF-Past corroborates our first hypothesis (NF-Past of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with commitment toward their worldview and positively associated with reconsideration of the commitment toward their worldview), although significance levels are higher for reconsideration than for commitment. It also corroborates the third hypothesis (NF-Past of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with well-being and general self-efficacy). However, our analysis refutes the fifth hypothesis (NF-Past of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with education).

The results of the regression analysis for NF-Future \( (N = 312) \) are shown in Table 3. The change statistics \( (F \text{ change} = 8.6) \) of the first model, which accounts for 7.7% of the variation in NF-Future, indicate that this model leads to a significant increase in prediction of NF-Future \( (p < .001) \). In this model commitment is a negative \( (p \beta < .001 \text{ and } p B < .01) \) and reconsideration a positive predictor of NF-Future \( (p < .050) \). The change statistics \( (F \text{ change} = 15.5) \) of the second model, which accounts for 16.2% of the variation in NF-Future, indicate that addition of general self-efficacy and ICECAP-O leads to a significant increase in explained variance \( (p < .001) \). Addition of these predictors lowers the significance level of commitment (only \( \beta \) remains significant at \( p < .05 \)). ICECAP-O \( (p \beta < .001 \text{ and } p B < .01) \) and general self-efficacy \( (p < .050) \) are significant negative predictors of NF-Future. The change statistics \( (F \text{ change} = 3.6) \) of the third model, which accounts for 24.5% of the variation in NF-Future, indicate that explained variance significantly increases due to addition of sociodemographic variables \( (p < .001) \). After addition of sociodemographic variables the significance of the \( \beta \)-value of commitment increases \( (p < .010) \), but the \( B \)-value remains non-significant. Moreover, the \( B \)-value of general self-efficacy becomes non-significant. Further, age emerges as a highly significant positive predictor of NF-Future \( (p < .001) \). The regression analysis of NF-Future
partly confirms the second hypothesis: NF-Future of older Dutch adults is indeed positively associated with reconsideration of the commitment toward their worldview, but for the negative association between NF-Future and commitment only the $\beta$-value is significant ($p < .010$). Moreover, the regression analysis of NF-Future partly confirms the fourth hypothesis: NF-Future of older Dutch adults is indeed negatively associated with well-being, but for the negative association with general self-efficacy only the $\beta$-value is significant. Finally, our analysis partly confirms the sixth hypothesis: NF-Future of older Dutch adults is indeed positively associated with age, but it is not significantly associated with education.

Table 3. Linear regression analyses for NF-Future ($B$ and $\beta$) with 95% BCa confidence intervals of $B$ based on 2,000 bootstrap samples reported in parentheses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NF-Future (N = 312)</th>
<th>Model 1 ($R^2 = .077$)</th>
<th>Model 2 ($R^2 = .162$)</th>
<th>Model 3 ($R^2 = .245$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$B$</td>
<td>$\beta$</td>
<td>$B$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>-.21**</td>
<td>-.24***</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconsideration</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.12*</td>
<td>.13*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General self-efficacy</td>
<td>-.18*</td>
<td>-.13*</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-being (ICECAP-O)</td>
<td>-1.31**</td>
<td>-.23***</td>
<td>-1.26**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (ref = male)</td>
<td>-0.4</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>.49***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (ref = 75–79)</td>
<td>.49***</td>
<td>.24***</td>
<td>.26,.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.11</td>
<td>-.05,.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil state (ref = married)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widowed</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05,.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.31,.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.18,.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious affiliation (ref. = Catholic)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>-.15</td>
<td>-.09</td>
<td>-.33,.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.16,.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church attendance</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>-.02,.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* $p < 0.050$; ** $p < 0.010$; *** $p < 0.001$. 
Conclusion

Considering the expected interpretative potential offered by grand narratives we studied the association between the commitment of older adults toward their worldview and the extent of narrative foreclosure they experience. The results of our study show that reconsideration of the commitment toward their worldview, thus the notion that a different worldview might have been better, is positively associated with narrative foreclosure experienced by older Dutch adults. However, significance of this association is higher for NF-Past ($\beta < .001$ and $\beta < .010$) than for NF-Future ($p < .050$). This difference can probably be explained by the observation that although a past worldview cannot be changed, the future offers the possibility of finding a new worldview. Our analyses also show that the commitment of older Dutch adults toward their worldview is negatively associated with narrative foreclosure toward their past, whereas for the negative association with NF-Future only the $\beta$-value is significant. Our finding that higher commitment to a grand narrative offered by a religious or non-religious worldview and lower reconsideration of this commitment are associated with less narrative foreclosure suggests that due to their interpretative power the grand narratives offered by worldviews indeed counter the narrative foreclosure that may result from the experience of contingency. Due to the existential authority of religious stories, especially when considered “Holy Scripture” (Koster, 2014), we expected religious worldviews to be particularly salient for the assimilation of life events into one’s life story (Scherer-Rath, 2014). However, our analyses do not indicate an association between narrative foreclosure and religious affiliation or church attendance. Apparently, the commitment older Dutch adults experience toward their worldview helps them to retain narrative authority over their life story, and the view that a different worldview might have been better is associated with narrative foreclosure, irrespective of the content of this worldview (insofar as determined by religious affiliation) and the extent of participation in a religious community.

To evaluate the relationship between the commitment of older adults toward their worldview and narrative foreclosure we controlled for the influence of general self-efficacy, well-being, and sociodemographic variables. Our analyses show that general self-efficacy of older Dutch adults is negatively associated with narrative foreclosure toward their past. Thus, a stronger belief of older adults in their competence to tackle novel tasks and to cope with adversity is associated with higher satisfaction with their past life story. However, the negative association between general self-efficacy and narrative foreclosure toward the future has low significance (only $\beta$ is significant at $p < .050$). We also found that a higher capability experienced by older adults in the domains of attachment, security, role, enjoyment, and control is associated with less narrative foreclosure toward both their past
and their future. Thus, higher capabilities experienced by older Dutch adults are associated both with lower regrets about their past life story and with more possibilities envisioned in their future life story.

In contrast with Bohlmeijer et al. (2014) we did not find a significant association between narrative foreclosure and education level. This may be due to the higher age of our participants compared to those of Bohlmeijer et al. (2014), who had a mean age of 63 years (study 1) and 57 years (study 2). For the participants in our sample, who entered primary education before, during or shortly after the Second World War, educational opportunities were often constrained by external factors. The association we found between narrative foreclosure toward the past and being divorced, of which only the B-value is significant (at \( p < .05 \)), indicates that the experience of a divorce may be associated with regret or dissatisfaction concerning one’s past life story. The most significant association we found (of which both \( \beta \) and \( B \) are significant at \( p < .001 \)) is that between age and narrative foreclosure toward the future. Our finding that the older part of our respondents (aged 80+) is significantly more foreclosed in their story about the future than the younger part is in line with the findings of Bohlmeijer et al. (2014). However, respondents of Bohlmeijer et al. were aged between 40 and 95, whereas in our study all respondents were 74 years or older. Thus, our study indicates that even within a sample of older adults the older-old are significantly more likely to see no new possibilities for their future life story than the younger-old. However, although higher age is associated with less narrative openness toward the future, it is not associated with less satisfaction with the past life story.

The strong association we found between narrative foreclosure toward the future and age, even when controlling for capability, seems to confirm the observed lack of cultural narratives that help older people to sustain a vital life story throughout their entire life course (Baars, 1997; Bohlmeijer et al., 2011; Freeman, 2004, 2011; Laceulle & Baars, 2014). On the one hand, narratives embracing a decline ideology confirm the view that aging increasingly limits the remaining possibilities for the future. On the other hand, narratives focusing on “successful,” “positive,” “active,” or “productive” aging only offer narrative possibilities for the limited group of older adults that still meet the requirements of such age-defying images. Especially for the older-old, meeting these requirements may become increasingly difficult. This is illustrated in the research by van Wijngaarden, Leget, and Goossensen (2015) on older Dutch adults (mean age 82 years) who feel their life is completed and no longer worth living, whose experience was interpreted as narrative foreclosure. Van Wijngaarden, Leget, and Goossensen (p. 262) describe their research participants as pro-active, independent people who demonstrate a firm but vain attempt to resist an inevitably growing dependence and preserve their remaining independence. Meta-narratives that overly focus on “active,” “successful,” or “productive” aging may strengthen older people’s
inability or unwillingness to bear the process of deterioration and thereby complicate the search for meaning in later life when abilities for being “active,” “successful,” or “productive” decrease. This emphasizes the need for vital counter narratives of aging (Laceulle & Baars, 2014).

The perceived lack of vital cultural narratives of aging has led to the formulation of alternative narratives or discourses on aging such as “harmonious aging” (Liang & Luo, 2012), a narrative grounded in self-realization (Laceulle & Baars, 2014) and narratives acknowledging human vulnerability (Kesby, 2017). The observed associations between commitment toward their worldview and reconsideration of this commitment with narrative foreclosure experienced by older Dutch adults suggest that endorsement of counter narratives of aging by the grand narratives offered by religious or other worldviews will make them extra powerful. The counter narrative of harmonious aging as proposed by Liang and Luo (2012) emphasizes the significance of maintaining a dynamic balance in all spheres of life. It is grounded in Eastern philosophy and, in line with Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, emphasizes a holistic worldview. The counter narrative of vulnerability as proposed by Kesby (2017) emphasizes that the vulnerability of older adults is shared with all age groups. Such a notion, which emphasizes the fundamental dependence of the human condition, may well fit a Christian view on life as received from the hand of God, endorsing a view on human dignity as grounded in God’s loving acts of creation and justification instead of being determined by functionality, utility, or independence (Committee for Pro-Life Activities, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1992, pp. 34–35; Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, 2011, pp. 10–11). The counter narrative of self-realization as proposed by Laceulle and Baars (2014), which emphasizes the potential for human growth and flourishing throughout the life course, is historically grounded in the ancient Socratic ideal of “knowing yourself” and the Aristotelian concept of self-fulfillment. Laceulle (2013) argues that a narrative of self-realization, which requires a balance between striving for a “good life” and the mindful acceptance of those aspects of life that cannot be controlled, fits well within late modern spirituality. The integration of these counter narratives of aging within cultural grand narratives (either Eastern holistic, Christian or spiritual) is expected to enhance their narrative potential. The demonstrated relationship between the commitment of older adults toward their worldview and the extent of narrative foreclosure they experience emphasizes the need for pastoral counseling and spiritual care in geriatric settings. Pastors and chaplains can help older adults reflect on their life stories against the background of the grand narratives offered by religious traditions and other worldviews, thereby assisting in the formulation of vital counter narratives of aging.
Notes

1. Because we expect more people who were too young to have received the questionnaire but not to have reported this, the actual response rate was probably higher.


3. Nine respondents were still 74 but would turn 75 in the year the survey was taken; these were included in the age range of 75–79. The three respondents who did not indicate their age range did declare they were 75 years or older.


6. For religiously unaffiliated respondents, who were not requested to indicate their frequency of church attendance, frequency of church attendance was set at the lowest level.


8. Four of these described their worldview as both Christian and humanist.

9. ICECAP-O stands for ICEpop (Investigating Choice Experiments for the Preferences of Older People) CAPability measure for Older people.

10. Nine respondents who were still 74 when filling in the survey but would turn 75 in the year the survey was taken were also included in this group.

11. Due to the nature of the questionnaire, respondents who indicated being religiously unaffiliated were not asked to indicate their frequency of church attendance. For them, frequency of church attendance was set at the lowest level (less than once a year/ (almost) never).

12. Nine respondents who were still 74 when they received the questionnaire but would turn 75 in that same year were included in the study.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Nienke P. M. Fortuin http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4453-2677
Johannes B. A. M. Schilderman http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0504-0645
Eric Venbrux http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8817-0092
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