

5 Generativity and Adult Development: Implications for Mobilizing Volunteers in Support of Youth

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In 1950, the psychologist Erik Erikson introduced the concept of generativity as the seventh of eight stages in his theory of human development and the life cycle. Erikson, a Danish art student, came to the United States in the early 1930s after studying with Anna Freud in exploring ways to apply psychoanalytic methods to children. Erikson's affiliation with the Institute for Human Development at the University of California at Berkeley, where he followed the lives of 50 children, in combination with his own cross-cultural studies, provided the data to propose a perspective on human development suggesting that psychological growth occurs throughout the life cycle and is not limited to the early years. In writing *Childhood and Society* (1950), he became the first social scientist to articulate adult development in the context of growth potential rather than diminishing capacity; he described this potential in terms of an adult's "widening social radius" and "generativity" (Vaillant, 2002). Generativity refers to the capacity of adults to care for family, community, and institutions; to preserve and pass on cultural traditions; and to produce products, outcomes, and ideas that will survive the self and become a legacy for future generations. Generativity is the "concern for establishing and guiding the next generation" (Erikson, 1968, p. 138), and, as Erikson and colleagues later described it, generativity is "I am what survives of me" (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). Although the first edition of *Childhood and Society* devoted only two pages to generativity, Erikson's later work focused much more on generativity, reflecting both a change in our social conscience and Erikson's personal journey as he aged.

Erikson's landmark work identified eight developmental stages of human growth from infancy to old age, and each was described in terms of both syntonic and dystonic elements. The syntonic supports growth, expansion, and goal achievement, while the dystonic implies dissatisfaction, failure, and

dysphoria (1950, 1968). Thus, individuals confront issues of basic trust–mistrust, autonomy–shame and doubt, initiative–guilt, industry–inferiority, identity–identity confusion, intimacy–isolation, generativity–stagnation, and integrity–despair. The stages, however, are not completely rigid; tasks, or crises, may not be fully resolved from one to the next, but appear in some form, with the potential for resolution, throughout development (Newman, Ward, Smith, Wilson, & McCrea, 1997).

Erikson associated “generativity vs. stagnation” with the middle adult years. In his view, the tasks of young adults are to establish a sense of identity (Who am I?) in stage five and achieve intimacy through marriage and/or friendship (Who do I love?) in stage six. Successful resolution of these tasks prepares adults, emotionally and socially, to make a commitment to the next generation and, ultimately, the larger society as a whole (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1998). The tension of the seventh stage pits care against reactivity; failure to participate “generatively” can result in “stagnation,” which manifests as self-absorption, isolation, and disappointing personal relationships and, ultimately, affects the resolution of the eighth stage, in which the task is to develop a sense of integrity and wisdom strong enough to withstand the physical decline and challenges of old age. Research suggests that nurturing, giving to, and serving others contribute to greater ego integrity, personal happiness, and overall well-being (Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). In Vaillant’s (2002) longitudinal study of adult development, generativity in midlife contributed significantly to joy and satisfaction of study participants when they reached their 70s and 80s.

Generativity has its expression in procreativity, productivity, and creativity (Erikson et al., 1986). While generativity often begins in the child-rearing years, it is not limited to parenthood but, ideally, leads to the desire and commitment to provide care, nurturing, and guidance outside of the family (“maintenance of the world”). Thus, in addition to parenting, generative activity entails mentoring, teaching, coaching, and volunteering—in the workplace, schools, faith communities, or other community organizations. Generative activity involves voting, citizen advocacy, and political involvement. Some generative individuals may be less inclined to nurture their personal circle but leave a legacy through the arts, scholarship, or the creation of social movements that affect the lives of millions of people and change the course of history. Mohandas Gandhi, the subject of a psychobiographical study by Erikson (1969), was a distant, sometimes even cruel, parent to his own children and the young people around him, but in freeing his country from British rule, he was highly generative in the public arena (Freedman, 1999).

In his later years, Erikson despaired that our society was losing generativity as a cultural value, and he strongly believed it was imperative to restore generative perspective and commitment in order to promote positive values for the next generation (Goleman, 1988), a sentiment echoed by others who have suggested that we are in need of far greater numbers of generative individuals who demonstrate a more caring approach to environmental, family, and societal

concerns (Browning, 1975; Snarey, 1993). Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1991) suggested that Americans were more concerned about their accumulated wealth and personal success than about the welfare of future generations, and they called for a “politics of generativity” to help narrow the chasm of inequality that characterizes the United States. The apparent decline of generative activity has also been articulated as the unraveling of the “social compact” (Achenbaum, 1999; Cornman & Kingson, 1999; Reich, 1999). The social compact, essential for human development and progress, is based on the reciprocal ties that hold families, governance, and society together over time. A successful social compact rests on the exchange of knowledge and resources across generations within families and age groups, and across cohorts within societies (Cornman & Kingson, 1999). A strong and pervasive social compact was first described by Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* (1835). He noted that Americans, regardless of blood ties, cooperated with one another and helped each other out when necessary. Altruism, according to Tocqueville, was not the motivation. Rather, given the contingencies of life, doing “good” was a wise investment in the future (Achenbaum, 1999). Despite the evidence that society benefits from such an investment, we are, for many reasons, now experiencing a marked decline in civic engagement, which can be defined as the manifestation of generativity outside of one’s family. According to sociologist Robert Putnam (2000), post-World War II America has seen a steady decrease in political activity, religious affiliation, volunteering, and membership in a community club or organization. While the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign appears to have stimulated interest in civic participation and even resulted in increased voter registration in some states (Fessenden, 2004), it remains to be seen whether this will have an enduring effect that might begin to reverse the current declines.

As researchers and practitioners, we have a far better understanding of child and adolescent development, which is shorter and more clearly defined and observable, than we do of the long and complex period known as “adulthood” (Snarey & Clark, 1998). Erikson’s seventh stage lasts longer than any other, but only in the past two decades have researchers begun to examine the complexity and nuance of generativity, with regard both to individual development and to the implications for society (Kotre, 1984). The United States is currently poised on the edge of an unprecedented demographic shift as the baby boom generation (born 1946–1964) moves into mid- and late life (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Consequently, there is a significant population of adults who could be available as resources for youth. Researchers have concluded that the need to be generative is a powerful motivator for people at this stage of life because they are looking for productive roles and want to provide leadership and guidance that will foster the development of the next generation (Freedman, 1988; Henkin and Kingson, 1999a; Newman et al., 1997; Taylor & Bressler, 2000; Taylor, LoSciuto, Fox, & Hilbert, 1999). In light of this assumption, it is the goal of this chapter to explore generativity theory, with its tensions and ambiguities, and provide a better understanding of the social, psychological, and emotional dynamics of midlife and older adults. It is anticipated that a review of this research will both

enhance our understanding of generativity in midlife and inform practice in the area of increasing adult participation in youth development activities.

A Generativity Framework

McAdams and his colleagues (1998) have proposed a generativity sequence, incorporating seven elements that provide a useful framework for understanding the principles and progression of generative behavior. In their view, adults are motivated to be generative based on (1) agentic and communal *desire to act* with regard for the future and (2) *cultural demand*, the societal expectation that they will take responsibility for the next generation. Desire and demand combine to promote (3) *concern* for the next generation and (4) a *commitment* to act on the concern. Generative commitment occurs in the context of (5) *belief*, a conviction that human beings are fundamentally worthwhile and, therefore, it is important to protect, nurture, and advance humankind. Erikson (1963) described this as “belief in the species,” without which adults may find it impossible to articulate generative goals. Concern and belief lead to (6) *generative action*, which is given meaning by the seventh feature of the model, (7) *narration*. Narration allows adults to describe their lives in a way that provides purpose and identity; narration helps make sense of generative actions by focusing on what has been created (children, products, social movements) that will live on and become a legacy (Charne, 1984; Kotre, 1984; Ricoeur, 1984). Generative individuals tend to articulate their life stories in terms of *redemption*, in which negative experiences are transformed into positive outcomes. In contrast, those who are less generative often tell their stories in terms of *contamination*, in which the negative events supersede all other experiences. Among other things, the importance of the redemption sequence is that it reinforces Erikson’s notion of “belief in the species” and allows people to maintain their faith in humankind, affirming hope for the future and the conviction that their own lives have had meaning (McAdams & Logan, 2004).

How Is Generativity Assessed?

Measuring generativity is a complex and challenging task, as is assessment of almost any aspect of an individual’s psychosocial makeup. Although the following examples are not exhaustive by any means, they should serve to illustrate the types of assessment strategies that have been used. Two of the most frequently used instruments are the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) and the Generative Behavior Checklist (GBC). McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) constructed and validated the LGS, a 20-item self-report checklist that measures individual differences in generative concern. The LGS focuses on concepts, cited in the literature, such as teaching and passing on knowledge, making positive contributions to society, caring for and taking responsibility for others, being creative and productive, and leaving an enduring legacy. The GBC (McAdams &

de St. Aubin, 1992) assesses what a person actually does, using an act-frequency method asking how many times in the past 2 months a person has engaged in 50 different tasks, 40 of which are indicative of generativity. McAdams, de St. Aubin, and Logan (1993) developed a third tool for assessing generative commitments by collecting *personal strivings*, meaning any goals a person is trying to accomplish in daily life, which are then coded for generative ideas.

Another approach has been proposed by Bradley and Marcia (1998), who have suggested that these scales define the construct along a high–low continuum but may not be useful in considering the ways in which individuals arrive at “particular generativity resolutions” (p. 40) that are not polar opposites. They have developed a model of five generativity statuses based on two criteria, involvement and inclusivity, and the relationship of each to oneself and to others. Involvement reflects the degree of active concern one has for others and the extent to which this manifests in the sharing of skills, knowledge, and prosocial commitment, described by Erikson (1964) as a care that motivates adults to participate in the establishment, guidance, and enrichment of the present generation and the world that will be inherited. Inclusivity relates to who, or what, will be included in the caregiving provided. In Bradley and Marcia’s model, combinations of involvement and inclusivity provide the five generativity statuses: generative, agentic, communal, conventional, and stagnant. As an example, highly generative individuals are very involved in both dimensions, which manifests in their involvement in work, in promoting the healthy development of young people, and in the broader community. Conventional individuals, on the other hand, score high on involvement with others but low on inclusivity. So, while they may be involved with young people, they also believe that youth need firm guidance and must follow a clearly defined and narrow path that does not depart from established boundaries. A mentor–protégé relationship in which the mentor has strong conventional characteristics might be described as prescriptive, one in which the goals and agenda are determined by the adult rather than mutually agreed upon (Sipe, 1996). Those who are stagnant are low in both involvement and inclusivity. They have low self-esteem and self-satisfaction, are pessimistic about the future, and are negative toward the potential of the young to engage in productive roles and behavior.

Finally, personal narration is a useful tool for identifying and understanding generative themes in people’s lives, particularly important for midlife adults who describe their lives in terms of what they have been given by others and how it is their turn to “give back.” Generative ideas are often incorporated into life stories and life review and help people make peace with the inevitable conclusion that “I may die but my legacy—children, ideas, products—will live on.” The narratives of highly generative adults are much more likely to focus on redemption sequences, in which a bad experience is made better by what follows. The generative adult is able to take a negative experience and use it to create an example that will help someone else avoid the same experience (an ex-convict who can create a different scenario for a youth at risk, for example). The generative adult also tells stories that remind us that hard work and sacrifice can pay off—that generativity is about progress and improvement.

What Has Been Learned about Generativity?

It has been suggested that human development is more fluid than Erikson's stage model theory might suggest (Bradley & Marcia, 1998; McAdams, Hart, & Shadd, 1998; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998; VanderVen, 1999) and that generative activity changes over time and is a function of psychosocial development, life circumstance, and cultural roles. The body of research provides some valuable insights into understanding the construct of generativity.

Generativity Enhances Psychological Well-Being

It appears that generativity is connected to psychological well-being, self-esteem, and life satisfaction (Bradley & Marcia, 1998; McAdams et al., 1998; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998; Vaillant, 2002). In a longitudinal study of two cohorts of college-educated women, Keyes and Ryff (1998) found that generative behavior, generative norms, and generative self-conceptions were linked to well-being, and they suggest that generativity seems to be central to feeling positively about oneself and assessing one's life as meaningful and worthwhile. Generativity has been linked to extensive social networks and personal satisfaction with one's participation (Hart, McAdams, Hirsch, & Bauer, 2001). During the past decades, as the nation has experienced a steady decline in civic engagement, epidemiologists have also noted trends toward more depression, suicide, and malaise. Putnam (2000) has speculated that a possible explanation is social isolation, which supports the idea that generativity, and the accompanying socialization, contribute to overall well-being.

Generativity Is Motivated by Narcissism and Altruism

It has been suggested that we are motivated to be generative both because we have a desire to create something that will outlive us and because we are concerned with nurturing future generations (Kotre, 1984; McAdams, 1985; McAdams & Logan, 2004). Procreation allows us to live on through our children, but we may also leave a legacy through our professional work, or artistic or scholarly endeavors. Kotre's (1984) typology proposes that generativity is expressed in terms of the (1) biological: giving birth to a child; (2) parental: parenting a child; (3) technical: the transmission of skills and societal symbols; and (4) culture: the creation of new or transmission of existing elements of culture. Described by Bakan (1966) as agency (the tendency toward self-protection and promotion of oneself) and communion (the sharing of oneself with others), agentic and communal generativity challenge us to produce products and offspring, and then care, lovingly, and sometimes selflessly, for what we have produced. Ideally, generative adults are highly agentic and communal at the same time, but there may also be a fundamental tension between the two (Bradley & Marcia,

1998; Miller-McLemore, 2004) such that excessive expression of either may be problematic. Bradley and Marcia (1998), for example, suggest that highly agentic individuals are very involved in their own activities, and they often exclude those who are not involved in a project with them. For these people, work and legacy are paramount, and relationships may be important only within the context of career. The generativity literature has provided us with fascinating portraits of such people, including dancer Martha Graham (Lee, 1998) and architect Frank Lloyd Wright (de St. Aubin, 1998). In contrast, those with a predominantly communal style are extremely involved with other people, often subjugating their own needs and viewing themselves as indispensable to others. Excessive communality can potentially encourage dependent relationships, which can be damaging, for example, to a young person struggling to become autonomous and independent.

Generativity Is a Function of Timing

McAdams and his colleagues (1998) agree with Erikson's notion that generativity is primarily an activity of the middle adult years. In a study of adults ages 22 to 72, generative concern, commitment, and behavior were present for all three cohorts. They found, however, that middle-years adults, ages 37 to 42, demonstrated more generative concern and participated in more generative activities than either younger adults, ages 22 to 27, or older adults, ages 67 to 72. Generative commitment appears to be high for both midlife and older adults. They were unable to say whether these differences were due to developmental or historical effects. Stewart and Vandewater (1998) suggest that generativity desire appears in the mid-20s during young adulthood, the capacity for generativity increases during the mid-30s, but is really only accomplished beginning in the later 40s. Finally, Keyes and Ryff (1998) found that midlife (ages 40–59) and older (ages 60–74) adults were able to give more unpaid assistance and emotional support to more people and felt fewer familial and more civic obligations than younger adults, perhaps reflecting the pressure they experience from career and family. While these studies generally support a generativity "peak" in midlife, they do not take into account the increase in the healthy life span of older adults (65 and up) and the lack of opportunities for them to engage in productive activities in the community (Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994). If the talent and energies of older people are not valued or used, their access to generative activities outside of the family will reflect that disparity.

What about those individuals who do not follow the traditional trajectory? Research suggests that generativity is not a discrete stage in human development but follows its own course based on cultural roles and life circumstances. While society's expectations regarding the timing of midlife events still prevail, the reality is that many adults are putting off marriage and childbearing until well into their 40s, if they have children at all, and others are becoming parents while they are still in their teen years. Divorce and nontraditional family constellations

are also affecting the sequencing of midlife developmental activities (Cohler, Hostetler, & Boxer, 1998). Being “off time” does not preclude generative action. Some researchers have concluded that men who become parents later have a better sense of “self” and actually feel more comfortable with themselves in the parenting role than those who make the transition “on time” (Daniels & Weingarten, 1982; Nydegger, 1981). In recounting the life stories of gay men, Cohler and his colleagues noted the presence of generative behavior despite the absence of predictable life transitions, such as heterosexual marriage and parenthood, that usually characterize the lives of heterosexuals. This suggests that generativity may be a function of development as much as a consequence of social timing (McAdams, 1996).

Generativity Is Influenced by Culture

Different cultures have different expectations with regard to generative practices but share the generative goal of promoting the physical survival and psychological well-being of their children (Kotre, 2004). Generative adults, therefore, must operate within the social, political, and economic context of their societies (de St. Aubin, 2004). A study of generativity and culture in Japan and the United States provides an illustrative example. Japan is a society in which women’s expressions of generativity focus primarily on the household and raising of children. Child rearing in Japan would seem to us to be excessively permissive and encouraging of children’s dependence, especially on their mothers, but is in keeping with the cultural value of collectivism that exists in Japanese society. In contrast, American mothers encourage independence and exploration, behavior that is in line with the value of autonomy and individualism that predominates in the United States. In the United States, effective mentoring relationships are characterized by reciprocity, whereas in Japan the knowledge resides with the mentor and must be sought out by the protégé (de St. Aubin, 2004).

While most societies have clear expectations regarding generative activity, the timing can vary from one society to the next. There are societies in which parenting is expected to begin in the teen years, which would be considered “off time” in the United States, where it is generally expected that parenting will be delayed until adults are at least in their 20s. By the time U.S. adults are in their 30s and 40s, however, they are expected to assume generative roles—to become parents, to form careers, to be engaged in the civic life of the community (Cohler et al., 1998; McAdams et al., 1998).

In many societies, historically, generativity means passing along cultural traditions and values that inform the ways in which members engage in the civic and religious life of the community, and, often, the well-being of future generations is tied to an understanding of the past (McAdams et al., 1998). In this current period of rapid social change there is often a tremendous disconnect between tradition and the expectations of modern society, also described as a “generativity mismatch”; elders not only are underappreciated but also are

unable to provide the kinds of resources and guidance the young may need in order to address the challenges of 21st-century societies.

Even in the United States, understanding cultural differences with regard to generativity has become even more crucial as the country has become increasingly diverse. For example, are communities motivated by collectivist or individualist values, and how might this affect the ways in which people act, or do not act, on their concern for youth?

Generative Action Differs by Gender

It has been argued that agency and communion may be influenced by conventionally defined gender roles still present in our society (Miller-McLemore, 2004). The paired components of narcissism and altruism have been identified by McAdams (2001) as power and love, agency and communion, self-expression and self-surrender, and public–private expressions. In Miller-McLemore’s (2004) view, women have been pushed toward the second component of each pair and bear an inordinate responsibility for nurturing and maintaining the next generation, while men are more able to abdicate their caregiving responsibilities in favor of occupational relationships. In a study of generativity in adult lives, Keyes and Ryff (1998) found that women felt more obligated than men to assist social institutions as well as individuals and to extend their emotional support to more people. In their study, they found comparable levels of generative concern as men and women age, but that did not necessarily translate to generative action. Education was a particular enhancement of women’s generative self-conceptions but seemed to have the opposite effect in men. In a study assessing adults’ motivation and behavior regarding involvement in the lives of children other than their own, women were more likely than men to consider it important (Scales, 2003). These findings, while not conclusive, suggest that women might be more disposed to participate in activities with nonfamilial youth that involve personal relationship development. Assessments of volunteer recruitment in youth mentoring programs, for example, indicate significantly greater numbers of female mentors (Taylor, LoSciuto, & Porcellini, 2005).

Generative Adults Engage in a Range of Social Involvement

As we have noted, generative adults are engaged in a variety of activities. Parenting within the family is one of the first forms of generative behavior we see, and highly generative adults who are parents appear to be more effective in this role than those who are less generative. The research suggests that generative parents prioritize education and prosocial values, enjoy and value their relationships with their children, and take advantage of parenting to pass on lessons and traditions to the next generation (Hart et al., 2001; Nakagawa, 1991). Effective parenting has also been linked to an authoritative style, parents who

strike a healthy balance between encouraging autonomy and enforcing reasonable rules and standards (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritarian parents, on the other hand, appear to impede their child's developing competence by being too strict and viewing their behavior as something negative that must be controlled (Pratt, Danso, Arnold, Norris, & Filyer, 2001). Bradley and Marcia (1998) found that an authoritative style was linked to greater inclusivity in caregiving activities with regard to who or what will be included, consistent with Erikson's view that more mature and generative adults have a "greater tolerance of tension and diversity" (1968, p. 82).

Second, more public expressions of generativity include involvement in religious institutions, volunteering in the community, and participating in the political process (Hart et al., 2001). Snyder and Clary (2004) have pointed out that volunteerism is not always directed at future generations, and some people may be generative in the type of paid work they do, but there appears to be enough of an overlap to suggest that volunteerism is an expression of generativity. Hart and her colleagues found that high levels of generativity were associated with extensive social networks and greater levels of satisfaction with social relationships, both of which occur in the context of participation in religious and civic institutions. Finally, in a nationwide survey of 3,000 adults ages 25 to 74, generativity was the strongest predictor of socially responsible behavior, including volunteerism (Rossi, 2001).

Generative Action Is Moderated by Social Status and Education

Education and income appear to have an effect on generativity action, but not necessarily generative concern or commitment. Studies conducted by McAdams (1996) and his colleagues found that higher levels of generativity were modestly related to income and social class. In a study of African American and White adults ages 35 to 65, Hart and her colleagues (2001) found that there appeared to be no differences between the generativity levels of African Americans and Whites with regard to social supports, involvement in religious activities, political participation, and parents emphasizing prosocial roles and seeing themselves as role models. The Whites in the sample were better educated and had higher incomes; when income and education were employed as covariates, African Americans scored significantly higher than Whites.

More education is often an indicator of higher social status, and Putnam (2000) suggests that education appears to be one of the strongest predictors of altruistic behavior. College graduates are more likely than people with a high school education to volunteer (71% compared to 36%) or to be blood donors (13%–18% compared to 6%–10%). Financial resources, however, are not the most important predictors of altruism—poor people who are active in their churches give approximately the same percentage of their income as those who are wealthy (Schervish & Havens, 1995). Keyes and Ryff (1998) found that women with more education felt they had valuable skills and experience, felt more

committed and obligated to society, and were more likely to engage in generative activities. Finally, in assessing whether adults felt it was important to interact with young people to enhance developmental assets, Scales (2003) found that Americans with less education and lower income considered engagement with young people more important than did better educated and affluent Americans. When income, education, and race were considered together, race had the most significant impact on whether adults considered the actions important. None of these variables, however, had an impact on whether adults were *actually* engaged.

Erikson described *self-preoccupation* as one of the failings of generativity (1968), but self-preoccupation is very much reflected in cultural and economic issues. People who are very poor must focus on survival and do not have the time or luxury to worry about the next generations. It would seem logical, therefore, that most of the studies of generativity have been conducted with middle- and lower-middle-class adults (Cohler et al., 1998). It has been suggested, however, that more racially and economically inclusive studies would contribute to a broader understanding of generativity across social class (Cohler et al., 1998).

Generativity Varies within and across Birth Cohorts

It has been established that generative adults are civically engaged in their communities. In this era of declining civic engagement, it is therefore essential to address the differences in participation in generative activities between and among birth cohorts. Cohler and his colleagues (1998) have noted the influence of historical events, especially during adolescence, on generative behavior in later life. For example, the cohort born between 1925 and 1930 attended grade school during the Depression and was in high school, or the military, during World War II, established households during the early 1950s, and did not see their first television until their late 20s. World War II united the country and produced a generation whose personal narration resonates with hard work, self-sacrifice, and hope for the future (Kotre, 2004). Called the “long civic generation,” this cohort showed extraordinary interest in the civic life of the community and acted by voting, joining, reading, and volunteering at twice the rates of postwar birth cohorts (Putnam, 2000). Baby boomers born just after World War II experienced adolescence during the 1960s, a time of tremendous social upheaval marked by a search for identity and personal meaning. They were raised watching television, which has had a significant impact on people’s leisure time and has greatly reduced the informal visiting and conversations of the prewar decades. They came of age during a period of social unrest marked by the assassinations of political leaders, Watergate, and Vietnam. Despite unprecedented educational achievement, they are less knowledgeable about politics than their parents’ generation, less involved in the political process, and avoid their civic duties more. Even when their children were in school, the baby boomers were less likely to be involved in the generative activities typically associated with the parenting

years, such as affiliations with parent-teacher associations or coaching sports teams. There are also differences between those born in the late 1940s and those born, for example, in the early 1960s. The early boomers came of age in the 1970s, when boundaries and role definitions were being challenged to an even greater extent, and while they demonstrate an increased tolerance toward racial, sexual, and political minorities, they also show less trust and assume less responsibility for community life.

The baby boomers are part of an especially large birth cohort and have, all of their lives, faced enhanced competition for resources, from schools to jobs to marital partners and, ultimately, health care and social services as they move into later life. It has been suggested that this type of lifelong competition takes a toll on morale, as the cohort has endured diminished expectations and economic challenges (Cohler et al., 1998; Putnam, 2000). Putnam (2000) also suggests that as a result of the uniformity of the postwar United States in which the boomers grew up, they were more likely to resist traditional social roles, including community participation. The children of the baby boomers, born between 1965 and 1980, also known as "Generation X," are even more disengaged and frustrated than their parents' generation. While they are experiencing even greater social isolation, they are also trying to enter the job market at a time of economic downturn and declining employment, which, in turn, is leading to further delay of careers to the late 20s and, consequently, postponement of expected role transitions such as marriage and family (Cohler et al., 1998). Described by Cohler and his colleagues (1998) as being "late off time" with regard to societal expectations, this generation is shaped by uncertainty and insecurity, both of which have an effect on their social and civic engagement. While the baby boomers often criticize the "Gen Xers" for their consumerism and individualism, the erosion of the social compact started long before the latter group was born.

It must also be noted that employed Americans are working many more hours than they were 20 years ago (Schor, 1991). Women, who traditionally provided most of the volunteer hours to the community, are in the labor force in far greater numbers than they were in 1960; when child rearing and housework are added to full-time employment, women work, on average, 15 hours more per week than men do (Hochschild, 1989). As Freedman (1999) states, all of this equates to squeezing 13 months of work into 12 months, and workweeks consisting of 80 to 100 hours.

In recent decades we have seen a decline in attendance at religious services and club membership, two traditional avenues for volunteer participation. Despite this, individual volunteerism in the late 1990s showed an increase among adults over 60 and young adults in their 20s, although participation in community projects did not (Putnam, 2000). It has been speculated that the increase in generative action on the part of older adults, still members of that "long civic group," is due to greater leisure time in retirement and better health. It is not totally clear why there has been an increase among the young twentysomethings, although increased public encouragement, such as service requirements for graduation, may be one of the reasons (Putnam, 2000).

Implications for Youth Development: Lessons Learned

The research cited here has created a portrait of a generative adult and provided some lessons to provoke our thinking about what makes an individual, and a society, generative. We know that generativity, in its most optimistic configuration, is motivated by both the desire to believe in a positive, healthy future for succeeding generations and by a quest for immortality. Generativity begins in young adulthood, often but not exclusively with parenthood, and increases with age as people have the time and opportunity to turn their attention to broader community affiliations. Generativity is expressed by helping others, either as a volunteer or through paid employment. Generative individuals participate in the civic life of the community and are more likely to vote, to feel trusting of others, and to have faith in a better future. Generativity is not the province of one racial, ethnic, or cultural group but is influenced by the values of the specific community from which it emanates. Generative actions, though not concern or commitment, are positively influenced by higher levels of education, affiliation with a variety of social and religious institutions, and being female. Generative individuals have broader social networks and may be more likely to attend church and belong to social clubs or civic organizations. Generativity is positively associated with well-being and self-efficacy, and it contributes to more positive attitudes in old age. For better or worse, generativity is influenced by sociohistorical events, which can have a profound impact on an entire birth cohort: "Generativity is not just a phase of adult development. It is an encompassing orientation to life" (Miller-McLemore, 2004, p. 186). If that orientation is deficient, it has a profound impact on the life of the community and the future of its children.

Our society needs a population of generative adults if it is to survive and thrive. We need people to care enough about the decisions that are made in the political arena that they are willing to vote for candidates who will best represent the interests of present and future generations. We need people to care enough about the 13 million children living without much hope for a healthy future that they will act supportively, as mentors, teachers, coaches—or just good neighbors. We need people to care enough about education that they will work to make schools safer and stronger, and advocate for the necessary resources. For these things to occur, we need to proactively engage the existing population of midlife and older adults and to motivate young people to take their place as members of a generative and engaged society. What follows are a few possible strategies.

Aim Volunteer Recruitment Efforts at Midlife and Older Adults

The research demonstrates that generativity action peaks in the middle and later years (Erikson et al., 1986; McAdams et al., 1998; Stewart & Vandewater, 1998). It would make sense, therefore, that recruitment efforts for initiatives supporting youth should target midlife and older adults. Despite the aging of the

U.S. population and the significant numbers of healthy older adults available to volunteer, there remains a good deal of ageism. The biggest inducement to volunteer is being asked by someone with whom there is a relationship. Volunteering is often an extension of work, child rearing, and family and social life. After retirement, as these aspects of adults' lives change, they are less likely to be asked to volunteer and, therefore, are less likely to do so (Prisuta, 2003). Programs seeking volunteers frequently target younger adults, who may not have the time, the inclination, or a sense of their own capacity to teach youth about cultural differences, money management, or values (Scales, 2003). Midlife and older adults may be in an ideal position to help youth make the connection between the past and the future. Vaillant (2002) describes this task as being "the keeper of the meaning," the passing along of family history and cultural achievements and the preservation of past traditions. Preservation of the culture goes beyond one's family and extends to the wider community, something that is often beyond the reach of a 30-year-old, who may not yet have the experience or wisdom.

Develop Volunteer Recruitment Campaigns That Are Culturally Sensitive

As we have noted, generativity is defined by culture (de St. Aubin, 2004). While all generative societies are motivated by the desire to perpetuate and nurture the next generation, how they actualize the desire may be very different. Some cultures emphasize a woman's role in caring for children (de St. Aubin, 2004), and some, as in the case of many Native American tribes, have explicit guidelines for the ways in which youth and elders should interact and relate to one another (Jones-Saumty, 2002). Failure to appreciate these differences could result in the loss of a significant number of potential volunteers.

Capitalize on Mutual Benefits for Participants

Benefits for adults engaged in generative action appear to be psychological, emotional, and even physical (McAdams et al., 1998; Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Conversely, social isolation and shrinking social networks appear to contribute to depression and physical complaints such as headaches, insomnia, and indigestion (Diener, 1984; Putnam, 2000). It has been documented that adults participating in reciprocal and effective mentoring relationships with youth report feelings of satisfaction and excitement at having forged a relationship with a young person from whom they are also learning (Rhodes, 2002). Older adults in the mentoring role report fewer complaints about physical ailments, improved relationships with family members, and an overall enhanced feeling of well-being (Taylor et al., 1999). The essence of generativity is that generative action not only appeals to our sense of altruism but also makes us feel better because we are giving to others. This suggests that recruitment efforts to mobilize adult volunteers in support of youth should focus on the benefits to both.

Emphasize the Unique Contributions of Male Volunteers

The generative concern and commitment of men increase appropriately with age (Vaillant, 1977), especially if they have been active and engaged fathers (Snarey & Clark, 1998). This does not appear, however, necessarily to translate into generative action (Keyes & Ryff, 1998), especially in relationship to activities with nonfamilial youth (Scales, 2003). Gender differences also appear in young children and youth. Scales and his colleagues (2000) found that girls were significantly more likely to feel it was their duty to help others and to be concerned about others' social welfare. On an optimistic note, a recent national survey (Radcliffe Public Policy Center, 2000) found that men and women, parents and nonparents, ages 21 to 39, put family issues ahead of money, power, or prestige; it is still speculation, however, whether these attitudes will promote generative action among men later on. It is well documented that programs are badly in need of strong male role models (Taylor et al., 1999). Recruitment efforts, therefore, need to focus explicitly on the contributions that men can make in support of youth, and appropriate messages and campaigns aimed specifically at men must be developed.

Nurture Generative Concern in the Formative Years

One of the most profound lessons to be learned is that generativity does not just "happen" because we get to midlife. As has been demonstrated in studies of highly generative parents (Pratt et al., 2001), children who are raised in families where generative concern, care, and commitment are valued and acted upon are more likely to feel a sense of responsibility for future generations and have the skills and resources to act. Children who begin volunteering at an early age are more likely to continue this activity as adults (Putnam, 2000). As we have seen, generativity is also shaped by education (Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Keyes and Ryff suggest that the perpetuation of a healthy society depends on access to high-quality educational opportunity; education contributes to one's capacity as a wage earner and taxpayer and enhances one's investment in the future of the community.

Generativity is both a developmental task of midlife and an approach to life—a worldview that guides our actions to promote our long-term survival, described by de St. Aubin and his colleagues (2004) as the "cultural adhesive by which valued traditions and beliefs are created, maintained and revitalized through intergenerational transmission" (p. 266). When we think about acting generatively, we must think in terms of our individual responsibility to future generations: How can we make a difference to others? We must also think globally and support policies that will allow societies to thrive, that will promote access to education, health care, and decent housing, all of which will ultimately contribute to a more generative population of individuals who can act on behalf of the community and begin to reverse the disengagement of recent decades.

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