The Psychology of Worth IV: Generativity and Deep Caring

William Bergquist, Ph.D.

> *When you ask people what it is like being part of a great team, what is most striking is the meaningfulness of the experience. People talk about being part of something larger than themselves, of being connected, of being generative. It becomes quite clear that, for many, their experiences as part of truly great teams stand out as singular periods of life lived to the fullest.*
> *— Peter Senge*

Peter Senge is noted for his work on new ways of thinking (the fifth discipline) and differing modes of collective learning (the learning organization) (Senge, 1990). At the heart (and mind) of Senge's perspective is the concept of being connected. Of being generative. Of finding collective as well as personal sources of Worth. I would broaden the perspective offered by Senge. I believe that interpersonal connection and generativity are founded in a commitment to deep caring. We discover what we care about and then care deeply about this matter in collaboration with other people who share this commitment.

I further propose that deep caring, intertwined with interpersonal connection and generativity, is a choice we make repeatedly throughout the life we live. Many choices are available to each of us during a lifetime. Multiple priorities emerge at different times during specific developmental periods. These choices and priorities can lead us to a self-renewing life or to stagnation and decline. Many decisions we make concern the way and extent to which we care about other people. These decisions concern how we take care of our heritage. We also must decide if and when we will engage in caring actions on behalf of our community. We repeatedly make choices and set priorities that impact the enhancement of Personal and Collective Worth. This essay focuses on these critical matters. What are the decisions we make about deep caring?

Our life is rarely free of challenge. We may suffer from the wounds of betrayal and alienation—in some ways, the violation of our aspirations and dreams. Our life covenant. However, we still have a chance to turn toward new purposes. We can shift from the wounded leader to the generative teacher. We can be transformed from the person who was left behind to the person who is helping a new generation lead the way into the future. Though we may have lost the opportunity to play an active role in parenting a child, a second form of parenting is available in abundance during late midlife.

We can be parents to our organizations, people we serve as mentors, and young people in our community. We can savor the joys of caring for our grandchildren and become valuable volunteers in nonprofit organizations. We can "parent" an idea, a collective aspiration, a vision of the future. Just as life seems to take away opportunities for active leadership, public recognition, and parenting, it offers a second opportunity for new forms of parenting. Erik Erikson (Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick, 1986, p. 37) describes this expanding notion of parenting and generativity as "a vital strength of care [and as] a widening concern for what has been generated by love, necessity, or accident; it

overcomes the ambivalence arising from irreversible obligation. Thus, [it] attends to the needs of all that has been generated."

Modes of Generativity

In essence, our need for generativity and deep caring concerns two primary factors. First, generativity is about extending our presence and influence with our children, the next generation, our heritage, and our community. We become gardeners who tend the flowers, trees, and plants. We want them to live long. We want our garden to represent, in some important and tangible way, how we make an appearance on this earth. We want the garden to reassure us and the world that we have made a difference. We live on through our garden. It is our legacy. It is where we find Personal Worth. And to the extent that other people enjoy our garden or are nourished by what we raise in our garden, there is also Collective Worth.

There is a second primary factor in understanding the path to generativity. *Generativity is about caring for that about which one truly cares.* We can't attend equally to every flower in the garden; we must determine which flowers we care about most and then devote deep, caring attention to them. So, in life, we must identify those few things about which we truly care. This is what generativity is all about. This is how we build the bridge between Personal and Collective Worth

We seek to enjoin these two factors in several ways. Each way enables us to build the bridge between Personal and Collective Worth. Specifically, we express and experience generativity through the enactment of four different, though interrelated, deep caring roles.

Parenting a Child or a Project

First, there is the generativity that we experience as parents, even when our children are grown up and we are no longer their primary caretakers. Indeed, caring about our children does not fade away as we grow older; rather, it takes on a new form and is accompanied by the delight that comes with seeing our children succeed in their own lives and finding their own distinctive identity. We even are inclined to feel a greater sense of Personal Worth, coupled with pride in our parenting, as our children have matured and grown into loving, capable adults.

The expression of this first mode of generativity need not be limited to the care for children we have raised from birth. We all know of extraordinary men and women who have taken care of children via foster care, adoption, or by serving as a nurturing uncle or grandparent. One of our dear friends joined with his gay partner to raise a boy from a broken home—a dramatic example of this first type of generativity.

A sense of Personal Worth is often vested in a special project rather than (or in addition to) the Worth associated with successful parenting. We spend a portion of our life creating and maintaining a business, becoming a superb craftsman, learning how to operate a large loom to produce beautiful tapestry, or starting a garage band that has recorded a couple of albums. We wrap at least part of our identity around this project and are pleased that other people also recognize its benefit (Collective Worth).

It is also important to note that perceived failure as a parent or the inability to successfully launch or maintain a project can crush our sense of Personal Worth. While other people might praise our persistence in remaining loyal to a disturbed teenager, we might feel like we have failed. While our business might have lasted for ten years or our band produced two albums, we feel "lousy" about our performance as a business owner or band leader. A sense of Personal Worth is often quite fragile and easily shattered when the first mode of generativity serves as a foundation for this determination of Worth.

Providing Mentorship

Second, there is the generativity that comes with caring about young men and women who are not part of our immediate or extended family. This type of generativity often is engaged when we are older and in a position of some power or influence in an organization. We care for the next generation of leaders or the next generation of craftsmen and artisans in our field. We often are generative in this second way through our role as mentors. A sense of Collective Worth often accompanies this second mode of generativity. The second mode also tends to be more robust as a source of Worth than the first mode, for we often have multiple chances to successfully mentor other people, while we usually only have one chance to succeed as a parent or only a few chances to succeed in initiating and maintaining a project. We can assist other people in many different ways. However, we tend to get frozen in a specific style of parenting or project management.

When playing this Generativity Two role, we run interference for younger people or for those who look up to us. We collaborate with them on projects, such as writing a book together with a newcomer in the field. We serve as role models that new people in our company emulate through job performance, personal values, and even lifestyle. We serve as mentors when we listen carefully to younger people talk about their problems and accomplishments. We serve as mentors when we encourage our protégés to take risks or to push beyond initial achievements. We sponsor younger people by inviting them into our world, our exclusive club, or inner group.

There are innovative ways in which this second mode of generativity is expressed. For example, we know several insightful leaders in American higher education who make effective use of senior-level executives who are on leave of absence from their corporations. They teach for a term or two in the college's business school or liberal arts program, and many of these executives are in late midlife. They thrive in educational and training settings that allow them to teach and reflect on the learning they have accumulated over the years. (Bland and Bergquist, 1998)

Often, our generative interests in collaboration and teaching are melded into a single plan. We co-teach with someone younger or less experienced. We invite a younger colleague to join with us in consulting another organization or within our own organization. These can be some of the most enjoyable and gratifying encounters that we will experience. It doesn't matter if it's teaching about woodwork with a younger colleague at a local community center, coaching boys and girls on a Little League team, coordinating a technical training program for line supervisors in a company, or conducting weekly case conferences with new associates in a law firm.

It's all about generativity and building a bridge between Personal Worth and the sense of Collective Worth we share with people we are assisting. The alternative is Stagnation and a fragile hold (at best) on any sense of Personal Worth. When in a state of generativity, we welcome the younger generation and help to prepare them for new leadership. When in a state of stagnation, we tend to isolate ourselves from the younger generation, often viewing young people as rivals and potential usurpers of the throne.

I am reminded of a trip I took to the French Quarter in New Orleans many years ago. I went to *Maison Bourbon* to hear Wallace Davenport, a legendary jazz musician. While Davenport was playing, "racket" (hard rock music) from across the street was invading the beautiful, soulful sounds of his quartet. I went up to Davenport after his set was finished and commented negatively about the quality of music coming from across the street. Davenport cut me off and declared with considerable passion that hard rock music was the future. He was glad the new music was there, across the street. Davenport could have resented the intrusion and competition. Instead, he chose to be generative and embrace and support the new music. I was the curmudgeon. Davenport was fully generative. We find much of the same generative attitude among the New Orleans musicians portrayed in the remarkable post-Katrina TV series called *Treme*. Collective Worth was being rebuilt by them through their music: New Orleans was once again "alive and well." No hurricane can beat a Lagniappe of diverse music.

Guardian of Heritage

There is a third way generativity is expressed. George Vaillant (2012, p. 155) identifies it as guardianship: "Guardians are caretakers. They take responsibility for the cultural values and riches from which we all benefit, offering their concern beyond specific individuals to their culture as a whole; they engage a social radius that extends beyond their immediate personal surroundings." The domain of concern is no longer just family, organization, or even community. Collective Worth is expanded by acknowledging, providing a context for, and maintaining the heritage of a society.

The bridge between Personal Worth and Collective Worth is built by expansion. We document and protect some heirlooms that we admire so that they can be admired by many other people. Those involved with Generativity Three now care about and care for fundamental legacies in their life. They engage in deep caring through wise and often soulful reflections on the past achievements of their society. Through Generativity Three, men and women re-enact a seminal battle on behalf of liberty. Gifted filmmakers like Ken Burns produce documentaries about contributions made in the world of music, sports, or nature preservation. In her backyard, a woman filled with Generativity Three spirit sets up a display of historic quilts she has borrowed from people throughout her state. She offers stories to those coming to her display about the women who jointly prepared these quilts many years ago at weekly quilting bees.

While this third way to express generativity can be identified as a form of resistance to change, or as an overdose of nostalgia, it also can be seen as an expression of deep caring for that which remains valid in contemporary times and which continues as a source of wisdom regardless of its date of origin or the quaint way in which it is stated, painted, or sung.

Engagement in Community

Generativity is to be found in yet a fourth way. I witnessed this when helping to conduct a two-year research project on Community Sage Leadership in Western Nevada County, California. Fifty men and women (ages 25-55) were identified as emerging sage leaders and interviewed in-depth on the same set of key life questions. Another fifty men and women (ages 56-90) from the same communities (Grass Valley and Nevada City, CA) were identified as senior sage community leaders and also were interviewed on these questions.

In writing the project book (*The Sages Among Us: Harnessing the Power of Civic Engagement*), I joined with the project director, Gary Quehl, in identifying a powerful, unifying theme—especially among the retired senior sage leaders (Quehl and Bergquist, 2012). These men and women were generative in their care for the community in which they lived. Unlike many other retirees who had retreated into gated retirement communities and often stagnated there, the fifty senior sage leaders found enormous gratification in their involvement with local arts councils, environmental action groups, hospitality organizations, and many other initiatives that enhanced community development. Collective Worth was front and center for these sage leaders.

When we are generative in late midlife, we establish, support, or help to expand networking in our community. Our focus on Personal Worth is set aside. Collective Worth gains priority. We move beyond our own family and the organizations in which we have worked. We are particularly suited at this time in life to such roles as teacher, trainer, or coach to the leaders or managers of nonprofit organizations or community action forums. In many cases, as we noted in *The Sages Among Us*, the role of community-based generativity is not necessarily to start something new, but rather to support and build on that which other people have begun—and it is contagious (Quehl and Bergquist, 2012, p. 90):

> . . . as part of their generativity, many senior sages report that their "job" in working as a volunteer is to build on the accomplishments of their predecessors. Rather than starting something new, which might bring personal recognition and ego gratification, these dedicated seniors value continuity and honoring past contributions. Their passion is contagious, as is their appreciation for work already done. This enables them to generate new energy as well as re-kindled old passions. They re-interpret the existing vision of their organization so community members can see the often-unacknowledged value inherent in work already done and will continue to be done by the organization. One of our sage leaders described this way of being generative as "leading quietly."

As we noted, these community-based generative services are not just about quiet leadership; they are also about voluntary community engagement. In keeping with this spirit of Generativity Four, one of our sage leaders noted, "We don't retire, we just quit working for money." George Vaillant (2012, p. 166) offered the same observation about his Harvard grads: "community-building is a career of its own—one of the really great ones."

Insofar as men and women are serving in generative roles when working with other people, with an organization, or with their community during senior years, they are likely to be more inclined than

ever before to exert authority in a collaborative and nurturing manner. Collective Worth requires a spirit of interdependence. And as they teach and mentor, Generativity Four men and women are also willing to take less credit and be less visible as they age. They have already acquired whatever power and recognition they are likely to get in their lives. They have had their "day in the sun." These men and women now gain more gratification from watching their organizational, communal, or cultural "children" succeed than from succeeding themselves. They have shifted from a primary focus on their own success to a focus on significance—making a difference in the world. They care deeply. Collective Worth has truly taken precedence over Personal Worth

Choices to Make

We have choices to make. Do we choose generativity or stagnation? Do we undertake the risk of teaching and learning? Or do we accept the *status quo* and refuse to take a risk? When we are stagnant rather than generative, we continue to do the same old thing. We settle for mediocrity, allowing our dreams and personal aspirations to wither away. We come to resent and even block the ideas and achievements of younger people. We dwell on the past while abandoning the future. Typically, stagnation sets in because we are afraid of change. For some reason, we don't believe we can keep up with the next generation. To secure some sense of stability and safety, we are willing to sacrifice any sense of Personal Worth or participate in any activity that generates Collective Worth.

There is a somewhat different dynamic operating in the lives of many people that requires a difficult choice. In my work as a coach and consultant, I find that my clients often speak of personal fears associated with confiscated dreams of the future. They have sacrificed to realize personal aspirations and to fulfill dreams about family, career, and even retirement. What happens to so many during late midlife? They no longer have a future, for the future is right now. They have lost their aspiring horizon and must now either savor the present day or create new plans for the future. A new future, accompanied by new sources of Personal Worth and Collective Worth, requires that we engage in new generative processes in one or more of the four modes. New project? New forms of mentoring? Honoring heritage for the first time or in a different way? Engaging in community projects for the first time or in a new way? What do I do next in my life?

Alternatively, we can choose to live primarily in our past, preoccupied with old dreams. We look at old scrapbooks of our children rather than visiting them as adults. We get our retirement watch at work and look forward to retreating from demanding involvement with other folks at work. We are not the generative guardians that Vaillant identified. Instead, we are regressive defenders of a past that sometimes never really existed. We don't want the past to be incorporated into the present. Our community doesn't need us, because we are getting old and don't have the energy anymore to be of assistance to other people. We find a way to retreat into a rabbit hole that leads us to a distorted world of Serenity (Bergquist, 2025). This is a world of stagnation.

Ironically, men and women who have spent most of their lives planning and saving for the future often find the creation of a new future to be terrifying. Many of us yearn for Isolation, Security, and Serenity during our Senior years. Yet, the creation of a new future is critical if we are to be generative. If we are to recreate ourselves for the final acts of our lives. If we are to build the bridge between Personal and Collective Worth. Appropriately named, my colleague Bill Bridges (1980,

2001) associates this time of rebuilding with his concept of the “neutral zone.” This is a state of limbo residing between the old realities and new possibilities. While the neutral zone is a difficult place in which to dwell, it is also a place that is filled with special bonuses: mentors, spiritual guides, new loves, rediscovered old loves, and new dreams.

Furthermore, the new future is often joyfully and insightfully created jointly with the younger people whom we have mentored or with whom we have collaborated on a project. All of this new generativity work can be done with other members of one’s organization. We can remain engaged with them even after retirement. As I learned from a group of older leaders in a utility company, the retirement years are often the most liberating. We can take risks because we can no longer be fired or demoted! We volunteer to teach new employees about the history of our organization. We help to organize a volunteer corps of employees (and other retirees like us) to spend time with struggling teenagers. These are moments and extended opportunities for us to try out new roles. We work with our local community on behalf of a new future. We help to build this future by volunteering to lay bricks at the town square, paint a community-history mural on the wall of a repurposed factory, or chair a committee that is costing out the renovation of an abandoned school building so that it might become a center for arts and theater.

Setting the Stage: The Four Roles of Deep Caring and Generativity

We are ready to "set the stage" for our more in-depth analysis of each deep caring role of generativity in the following three essays of this series.

I begin this stage setting by turning to the word "stage" itself. This is a word that has several different meanings when the nature of deep caring is being addressed. *Stage* is most often embraced by developmental psychologists as a phase in a person’s life, like the stages of launching a rocket into space. I propose that each of the four deep caring roles of generativity is prominent at a particular stage in our lives. Furthermore, we look for different forms of Personal and Collective Worth at each stage in our life.

In taking this stance, I am diverging from the primary focus that most developmental researchers and theorists take regarding deep caring and generativity. It is usually conceived as a specific developmental stage occurring in mid-life. However, a major researcher on generativity, Dan McAdams, suggests that generativity can occur at any point in the life cycle, depending primarily on the culture in which a person lives. He concludes, nevertheless, that generativity is primarily a mid-life phenomenon. Furthermore, McAdams focuses on this point in life when conducting research on generativity. According to McAdams, Hart, and Maruna (1998, p. 17):

> Rather than viewing generativity as a discrete developmental stage in the life cycle, we prefer to conceive of it as subject to developmental expectations and assumptions about time and timing that vary somewhat from one society to the next. . . . Nevertheless, we believe that Erikson was right in situating generativity, in a general fashion, in the middle of the human life span.

It is interesting to note that Cohler, Hostetler, and Boxer (1998, p. 275), at the same time, indicated that McAdams and colleagues might be considering a broader perspective on generativity:

> McAdams and his colleagues, while remaining somewhat committed to the idea of midlife salience of generativity, have recently recognized the difficulty of differentiating between generativity as a personal attribute, which may become particularly salient in middle adulthood as a consequence of social timing, and generativity as a relatively distinct developmental stage . . . To this end, they have begun an intensive study of adults characterized as generative, irrespective of age.

While this predicted broadening of perspective on generativity was offered more than 25 years ago, we see little evidence of it appearing in the subsequent literature; we believe that the four role models of generativity offered in this essay begin to fulfill this prediction and potential.

The second way we use *Stage* comes from the world of theater. The “stage” is where drama takes place. There is the front of the stage and back of the stage. There are actors in the spotlight and other actors operating outside the spotlight. And there are some actors off stage. We make extensive use of this meaning of “stage” in part because Erik Eriksen, the psychologist who was one of the first to write about adult development stages, was himself an actor. He was fully aware of this second way the word “stage” can be used.

Throughout this essay, I will draw on this analogy to theater and describe four roles of generativity that anyone can play at any point in their life, ultimately on behalf of Personal and Collective Worth. While, as McAdams has suggested, a specific expression of generativity and search for Worth might be more commonly found at a particular point in our life because of societal expectations ("social timing" in the words of McAdams) (cf. Neugarten and Associates, 1968). I suggest that anyone can be generative in one way or another at any time in their life. Multiple forms of Personal and Collective Worth are available to us throughout life.

The Four Deep Caring Roles

In keeping with our use of the theatrical metaphor, I make extensive use of the term "role" in describing four closely related parts that people play when they care deeply and are being generative. The term “role” is being used because I believe generativity is not just about a particular way of thinking, or a specific kind of maturation (e. g., a change or improvement in one's needs, feelings, or beliefs). While many developmental researchers focus on thinking or cognitive maturation, I focus on the role played by generativity as an activity or set of activities, for we ultimately gain a sense of Personal and Collective Worth through the actions we take and the outcomes we achieve. A generative role is played not just when we think about caring or when we need to be more caring; the role of generativity is enacted when we *actively participate in deep caring*. The bridge from Personal Worth to Collective Worth is built through the engagement of deep caring activities.

The "stage" is the setting in which we engage the generativity role. This role is undoubtedly influenced by changes in the way we think and feel, and the emerging needs and motivations in our mature life. However, generativity is more than this. It is about playing a role in a relationship with other people. The bridge between Personal and Collective Worth requires that we play a deep caring role. It is about engaging in good action, not just thinking good thoughts. It is about feeling gratified in having done something that tangibly benefits people and the setting in which they live and work.

With this articulation of our perspective on the roles of generativity as active engagements in the world, I return to the four modes of generativity. I now identify them as four roles we play in our lives:

> *Role One*: raising children or enacting a project [enhancing Personal Worth].
>
> *Role Two*: mentoring and assisting other people inside an organization or community [enhancing Personal and Collective Worth].
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> *Role Three*: fostering and ensuring the maintenance of a tradition and/or preserving heritage [enhancing Collective Worth].
>
> *Role Four:* working on behalf of a community or broader society, ensuring the welfare and prosperity of people living in this community or society [enhancing Collective Worth].

While I devote four of the subsequent essays in this series to these roles, I begin with a simple illustration: The first role of generativity is tangibly demonstrated in offering food to our family. We have engaged in a project (cooking a meal) that will benefit our children and other family members by providing nutrition, gratifying their senses, and creating a setting for family conversations. Meals often provide sanctuaries in which certain kinds of words can be stated and in which nonverbal communication is prominent. Many religious leaders use food and special meals to portray, honor, or invoke spiritual presence in a family setting. We increase Personal and Collective Worth when we prepare or participate in a commemorative feast (such as Thanksgiving or a Birthday party).

So, what happens when we want to convey to the next generation what we have learned about cooking? We prepare and distribute recipes. If we are particularly ambitious and are skilled and knowledgeable cooks, we write cookbooks or even host a cooking show on a cable channel. The goal is to spread and sustain our knowledge by teaching the next generation or our current generation. This is the second role of generativity. Collective Worth is enhanced.

Deep caring can move even further and deeper. We not only write our own cookbook; we honor other great cooks and seek to preserve their recipes, cookbooks, and even previously recorded cooking shows. This is the third role of generativity. It concerns heritage and tradition. Say the public library in our town has decided to throw away or sell at a greatly discounted price older books to make room for newer ones. Among them are some old cookbooks that seem out of date and are among the first books to be discarded. You find out about this decision and petition to keep the outdated books, noting that great recipes remain eternally valid and vital. It would be a shame to discard this enduring culinary wisdom and dishonor the wonderful women and men who carefully prepared these books. This is Generativity Three at its height. Our sense of Personal Worth increases as we serve as a guardian of enduring culinary wisdom. Collective Worth is sustained (perhaps even enhanced) when we help to preserve culinary heritage.

This third role of generativity can also be acted out when we seek to honor a person who has won the most baking contests at the annual county fair over the past 30 years. We collect baking recipes from many people in our community and assemble them in a cookbook named after the baking champion. Researchers in many fields have been doing this for many years. They honor a colleague who has made

major contributions to their field by assembling a series of essays focusing on the themes and findings for which their honored colleague is noted. These assembled essays are given a fancy, Germanic name—they are called "Festschrifts." This is big-time Generativity Three. The Personal Worth of someone who has been honored is enhanced, and we are likely to feel a bit better ourselves when helping to prepare the festschrift.

There is a fourth way in which generativity is enacted on behalf of the culinary arts. We can engage our community in the enhancement of these arts. We begin a recipe-sharing club. We ask a chef in town to come to one of our homes and cook a meal for members of this newly formed club. The chef offers some tips about cooking and shares her recipe at the end of the meal. We pay for the food and compensate the chef. The chef, in turn, donates the money to a charitable cause. The chef finds the event to be personally gratifying. Her restaurant gets some publicity. She gains a sense of Personal Worth. Her restaurant gains some Collective Worth. Our role in starting the club leaves us feeling a bit more “worthy.”

Generativity Four is also enacted when we start, manage, or advocate for a program that provides leftover food from restaurants and grocery stores to homeless families in our community. Called by many names (often "Urban Harvest"), these food-sharing programs are a "godsend" for many destitute people and local shelters. In some large cities, it is estimated that food not used by restaurants and not sold by groceries could meet all the nutritional needs of every homeless person living in this city. It is only a matter of legal protection (the so-called "Good Samaritan" laws) and finding the right people and distribution networks to get out the food. Typically, the distribution costs are offset by restaurant and grocery store savings in reduced garbage services. It is a matter of providing generative services on behalf of community welfare. It is a thoughtful enactment of generativity’s fourth role. Ultimately, it is about recognition that Personal Worth and Collective Worth are generated in abundance for all concerned.

Generativity in Four Acts: Expanding and Extending Our Region of Care and Worth

Generativity is clearly a multi-dimensional concept with many different manifestations; nevertheless, we propose that each of the four roles tends to be center stage at a specific time in our lives. Similarly, as I have already noted in this series of essays, Worth is multi-dimensional at both a Personal and Collective level. I offer a preview of the prominent role generativity plays and principal sources of Worth found at specific times in our adult life.

Early Adulthood

There is a period early in adulthood when we attempt to balance a commitment to both love and work. It’s a time of life when the generative role includes parenting our children or parenting a specific project or job in an organization. We tend to focus on Personal Worth. Everything is a bit intimate and “close to home.”

This generative role and concern for Personal Worth often continues to show up in our life through continuing and changing relationships with our children and through the shifting nature of the projects

or jobs we engage in organizations. The prevailing motivations are based in Generativity One: a focus on direct and sustained care for someone or something that is intimate (close to us in terms of both space and time).

Early Middle Adulthood

The Generativity Two role tends to be played out during the middle years of our life when we are moving into a position of experience, expertise, or influence in an organization. This generative role focuses on being a mentor to younger or less experienced members of the organization. This role also involves us as monitors, mobilizers, and motivators. This is the original notion of "generativity." In some sense, we become a grandparent in our organization and frequently become an actual grandparent in our personal life.

Much of the gratification comes not from personal achievement and advancement; rather, it comes from fostering the growth and achievement of other people. We help the next generation (including our own children) be successful. Our sense of Personal Worth is intertwined with our sense of Collective Worth. As in the case of the first generative role, this second role of generativity frequently remains salient later in our life. With the prevailing motivations of Generativity Two, we expand our caring to people outside our family. We mentor and lead. We move from individual success (Personal Worth) to broader significance (Collective Worth), at least within our own sphere of influence and control.

Late Middle Adulthood

We find that the third role of generativity is often assigned to the later years of mid-life, as well as our senior years. This generative role is what developmental researcher George Vaillant (2012) identified as "guardianship". It is the time when we are helping to maintain traditions and values. We are focused primarily on Collective Worth.

We are storytellers. Chair of the board rather than CEO. "Old timers" who like the way things have been and should continue to be. We are in the business of preserving heritage and honoring those who have contributed much to our society. We are legacy leaders. Generativity Three prevails alongside concern for maintaining and even enhancing the Collective Worth of our society. We expand our caring in time and expand our attention and action to caring about objects and traditions, not just people. We become holders and promoters of heritage. We are guardians of a world that is in jeopardy of passing away or being ignored.

Senior Years

Like role three, the fourth role of generativity is usually engaged during later mid-life, as well as during our senior years. This generative role concerns something more than preservation of what now exists and should be valued in a specific community. Generativity Four is engaged to further enhance and enrich the Worth of this community. The generative leaders in this role want both to sustain and build anew.

The futurist, Fred Polak (1973), writes about the need for any society to have a clear sense of its own future if it is to thrive. Those engaged in this fourth role of generativity are actively involved in creating

and articulating this image of the future, as well as engaging in tangible acts that illustrate and help to animate this image. While Generativity Four operates center stage during many of the earlier years in our lives (as exhibited by many younger, emerging leaders in communities), it usually takes the form of quiet leadership that is engaged outside the spotlight during the senior years (60s-90s).

In generativity four, we expand our caring in space and expand our attention and action to caring about the welfare of people living in our local community, or more broadly, our society, or even our world. The role that generativity four plays in community leadership often builds and relies on the three other generativity roles. It is a richly textured form of generativity that is sorely needed in our contemporary world. It requires all the skills, experiences, and motivational incentives to be found in the other three generative roles. Most importantly, this fourth generativity role is founded on a commitment to enhancing Collective Worth. While we may take pride in our civic engagements, the quiet leadership we provide is all about the Collective rather than the Personal. This is one of the benefits bestowed on later adulthood: we can look beyond our own welfare and worth.

What does all of this mean about the relationship between generativity and deep caring? What does it say about the creation of conditions that lead to generativity, deep caring, and Worth? Simply stated, generativity is about expanding and extending our *region of care*. It is about building the bridge between Personal and Collective Worth. We expand this region and build the bridge by moving from a concern about our own family and special projects to a concern about people outside our family. To our organization, our community, and even our world. We expand our region of care through this expansion of space. We move from self to organization to community. We bridge the gap between Personal and Collective Worth. We also extend our region of care by expanding our temporal concerns. We look back and forward in time to preserve and propagate our core values and visions. Collective Worth is now seen as something that is “worthy”. It has deep roots and is to be sustained in the future.

Playing Many Roles on the Life Stage

In essence, we are all actors living on the stage of life. This is a common metaphor used by many writers, including William Shakespeare. Yet it continues to be a useful metaphor, given what many of us experience daily as mature adults. We live on a stage populated by many actors, all of whom represent aspects of ourselves, playing many different roles assigned to us by society, genes, and our proclivities.

This state of affairs was noted with particular insight by Erik Erikson as he moved to psychology from a career in theater. According to Erikson (1963), we are primarily playing out one of eight roles (dramas, scripts) at a particular point in life. However, the other seven role-players are also on stage. They influence and often are in dialogue with the featured player. On occasion, they even share a spotlight with the featured player.

The eight roles identified by Erikson are *trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity, and ego-integrity*. Many of these roles have received extensive attention from Erikson and his followers. However, the seventh role (generativity) has received relatively little notice. It is important to explore and write about generativity because it is potentially in the spotlight for many women and men in contemporary Western societies, and perhaps societies elsewhere in the world. It is also

important because this deep level of caring, played out in four roles, provides us with the pathway and bridge to Personal and Collective Worth.

Courageous Cognition, Generativity, and Worth

As already noted, I wish to offer an expanded perspective on generativity that goes beyond Erikson's initial description. Generativity is played out in *four* roles--not one. Each of these roles requires the actor to step into the spotlight at one or more specific times during the life play. As we enter the final stage of life, these four roles of generativity often interweave in exceptionally complex and marvelous ways.

I specifically propose that deep caring requires the capacity to see our volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, turbulent, and contradictory world (VUCA-Plus) from several different perspectives. It also requires the willingness to act courageously midst a lure toward a distorted world of Serenity (Bergquist, 2025). To understand how this capacity and willingness unfold, we turn to the remarkably insightful work done by William Perry (1998) concerning cognitive and ethical development.

Dualism

Perry conceived of a four-stage developmental process. He identifies the first stage as *Dualism* – the tendency of some men and women to place everything into one or two categories: true/false, good/bad, honesty/dishonesty, etc. This dualistic stage often remains intact for many men and women as they mature, leaving them cognitively inflexible and often unable to generate much empathy or caring toward those people who are different from themselves in terms of race, ethnicity, political attitudes, abilities, and disabilities.

These are people who tend to look outside themselves for any confirmation of their Personal Worth. They rarely consider engaging in any generative actions that enhance Collective Worth. Remaining caught in this rigid Dualism, these men and women stagnate later in life, often escaping down a rabbit hole that promises distorted Serenity. The Dualists find it impossible or undesirable to support and encourage the younger generation (*Generativity Two*) or provide support and encouragement to members of their community and the activities that nurture this community (*Generativity Four*).

If the Dualist is active in their community, it is likely to be focused on a "special interest" project that is narrow in scope and often self-serving (providing a Bubble of Belief that ensures Serenity). While they may be interested in preservation of traditions and heritage (*Generativity Three*), it is often at the expense of alternative traditions and heritages established by people different from themselves. The third role of generativity among *Dualists* tends to be destructive and either short-lived or enforced through violence and repression (as in the "Generativity" Three of the Third Reich).

Multiplicity

Perry proposes that *Dualism* will often give way to what he calls the stage of *Multiplicity*. In this stage of cognitive flexibility, a man or woman is likely to recognize that there are alternative claims to truth, goodness, and morality. However, in a variant on the dualistic perspective, they may also conclude that if there is no one truth, sense of goodness, or moral stance, then anything goes! When this happens, they tend not to trust any authority, since there is not one reliable source. They look to power ("Might

makes right") and expedience ("I will do whatever advances my career and life."). Any sense of Personal Worth is founded on an alignment with power—and often with authority (Weitz and Bergquist, 2024).

We are reminded of the 1960s in the United States, where multiplicity reigned among many young and old adults. Men and women of multiplicity show few signs of generativity. Little attention was given to Worth beyond that of Personal Worth. It is "all about them!" It is unfortunate if they are raising children, for they are likely to be inconsistent role models and callous in "caring" for their children. While dualists are likely to be harsh but consistent parents (Generativity One), the multiplist parent is likely to be indifferent regarding the welfare of their children.

Relativism

From multiplicity a maturing man or woman will often, according to Perry, move to greater cognitive flexibility once confronted with the complex patterns of life. They begin to see consistency in specific societies and cultures. They become convinced that there are better ideas and more consistent values existing within specific communities. Perry identifies these people as *Relativists*.

Realists recognize the differences among people in their lives. They can appreciate and seek to understand these differences. These men and women are likely to be caring and thoughtful mentors and organizational leaders (*Generativity Two*). They view their Personal Worth as intertwined with the enhancement of Collective Worth. These relativists find a way to encourage and support younger men and women, those with less experience, or those who are different in some way from themselves. They engage in diverse styles of mentoring and leadership when addressing the increasingly diverse workforce found in contemporary organizations.

Perry's relativists are also likely to be more successful than their dualist and multiplist colleagues in serving the Generativity Three role. They embrace their own heritage but also recognize the value inherent in other heritages. As Catholics, for example, they see the value of a vibrant Protestant Church, Jewish Synagogue, and Muslim Mosque in their community. As a straight man or woman celebrating the sacred nature of marriage, they honor the decision of their gay and lesbian neighbors to seek out a similarly sacred commitment to another person through marriage. Relativists are also men and women who actively engage in activities that benefit their community (*Generativity Four*).

Commitment in Relativism

Perry suggests there is a fourth stage of cognitive flexibility that can produce even stronger and sustained motivation to enact generativity. He identifies this fourth stage as *Commitment-in-relativism*. At this stage, a generative person not only recognizes the value of alternative truths, value judgments, and moral compasses if they are coherently enacted within a specific community; they also possess a strong and sustained commitment to a specific set of truths, judgments, and moral compasses of their own.

They act upon these commitments rather than just supporting them or encouraging others who share their perspectives. Collective Worth is viewed as worthy of sustained commitment and action. A compelling vision of the future is forged in collaboration with others who share similar values. Thoughtful and courageous actions are then taken on behalf of this vision.

Conclusions

It is this fourth stage that enables a full expression of deep caring. Again, *generativity and deep caring are about actions and deeds--not just words and feelings.* The bridge to be built between Personal and Collective Worth requires hard work and courage. We are worthy when caring deeply for our children and our cherished projects. We are worthy when assisting other people in our work environment. We enhance the worth of our society when honoring and preserving its heritage and values. We ultimately increased the worth of our community when we serve as quiet leaders on behalf of its sustainable future.

In the following four essays, I will have much more to say about Personal and Collective Worth to be found in each of the generativity roles. So, please stay tuned to this continuing exploration of the psychological nature of Worth.

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