Manifestations of Generativity During the Last Stage of Life

by

David Hauser

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved August 2013 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Richard Kinnier, Chair
Judith Homer
Guillermo Arciniega

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

December 2013

ABSTRACT

Generativity was first described by Erikson (1963) as an adult's concern for and commitment to promoting the welfare and development of future generations. Generativity is juxtaposed by stagnation in Erikson's stage of midlife (35-65 years old). The developmental hurdle faced at this point in the developmental cycle is whether a person will produce something of real value, both in the present and impacting future generations. Generative adults seek to give something back to society, generally behaving in a way to make the world a better place for others with no personal gain attached. The goal of the current study was to assess differences in levels of generativity at the final stage of adult life, and the potential functions that generativity can serve individuals. Results suggest that lowly generative individuals in older adult life tend to experience doubts about the impact they have had on the world and the lack of legacy they are leaving behind. Themes of highly generative participants included having felt they lived a purposeful and meaningful life, along with feeling fortunate and lucky in their lives. Also highly generative participants seemed to feel confident in the legacy they will leave behind after death. Results are discussed in light of the theories and findings of Erikson and McAdams.

DEDICATION

To Katie: I love you. We're here! I love you for your resilience, toughness, and
determination throughout this process. I look forward to seeing where the next chapter
takes us; may it be filled with love, fun, purpose, and meaning!

To Rusty (and GM): For being the greatest companion(s) a man could ever ask for.

To Mom: Who taught me everything I know about compassion and empathy for others.

To Jim: The "OG" PhD, who helped me find perspective to run this "marathon."

To Dad: For teaching me about honesty, redemption, and the Buffalo Bills.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Richard. You have been a tremendous mentor to me throughout my graduate study. I am so grateful for your patience and attention in working with me throughout the last five years. My ability to communicate ideas through writing, which I hope to continue to grow and expand throughout my career, is significantly enhanced since I began working with you. I could not have asked for a better advisor.

I want to warmly thank my committee for taking the time and effort to sit through numerous meetings, proposals, and defenses. Dr. H, I enjoyed working with you throughout many different aspects of my PhD, including clinical work, my thesis, dissertation, and even the collection of a couple Tempe City Softball Championships. Dr. A, thank you so much for sharing in this dissertation experience and offering me guidance and support via literature review recommendations and research design ideas.

To John Stein, your referrals and connections made my data collection possible and your support provided me strength in order to finish this project. To Annette Satterfield, who was so gracious in helping me with finding participants. To my advisors and supervisors along the way who helped me develop and become passionate in studying lives: Linda, David, Melba, Tim, and especially Dan, whose thoughtful recommendations helped me stumble on to this fascinating topic. To Liz K., the finest research assistant a grad student could ever ask for.

Lastly, to the participants in this study: thank you for having the courage to share your stories with honesty and depth.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1892, famed oil magnate John D. Rockefeller, was on what at the time he believed to be his deathbed. According to his biographer, John Winkler, he was 53 years old. He had spent the last several decades accumulating more wealth than the world had ever seen (Lubin, 2011). However, worry and tension for maintaining and expanding his wealth wrecked his health. He was attacked by unexplained digestive and sleeping symptoms that mystified doctors. They diagnosed him with a type of baldness associated with sheer nervousness. He was advised to live on acidulated milk and crackers and to retire; as a reduction in worry was the only remedy doctors could construct to salvage his fading health (Winkler, 1929).

In a great twist of fate, Rockefeller's maladies forced a difficult transition upon him pivoting from the role of power broker, to the role of giver, becoming one of world's great philanthropist. Rockefeller's biographer Winkler (1929) wrote, "during the period of his apparent decline it was noticeable to those around him that John D. sought to cultivate the sunny side of his nature" (p. 23). He began to think of other people. He stopped thinking for once, of how much money he could get; and he began to wonder how much that money could buy in terms of human happiness. After worrying about money for 53 years, John D. Rockefeller decided to give all of his money away (albeit he left plenty of inheritance). Rockefeller gave millions away to fund education, churches, colleges, medical research, and more. It was John D. Rockefeller's contributions that aided the invention of penicillin and saved The University of Chicago (Weiss, 2010).

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This story provides an apt metaphor for the current study's focus: For those who live a generative life, giving and providing for future generations, what effect does this have for them in the final stage of life?

In this review I will focus on the initial origins of the generativity construct, developed by Erik Erikson in his crisis stage model of development. I will then explore how the literature on generativity has expanded during the past two decades, specifically a burgeoning literature on generative adults in middle adulthood. Findings from initial attempts to study generativity outside of the middle stage of life will then be explored. Research on happiness in the final stage of life will be presented. Finally, a void that exists in the generativity research, that which connects the final two Eriksonian stages "generativity vs. stagnation" and "ego integrity vs. despair," will be described. As Levinson, Darrow, Lein, Levinson & McKee (1978) found, "[Erikson's] work on childhood has been more widely understood and appreciated than his work on later adulthood" (p. 5). The purpose of this dissertation is to begin to fill that void and broaden the field's understanding of development later in life.

Chapter 2

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Development of Generativity Construct

Erik Erikson first defined generativity in the psychology literature in his stage

model theory of development. Erikson (1963) described generativity as an adult's

concern for and commitment to promoting the welfare and development of future

generations. The polarity of generativity vs. stagnation was the defining struggle of the

middle adulthood stage for Erikson. Erikson used such contrasting polarities to define

the different stages of development.

Erikson saw development as a series of stages, each with a set of tasks that need

to be achieved in order for the individual to advance to the next stage. It is also important

to note that he studied development largely through a social lens; determining how

people grow and develop through the relationships around them. While the ideas that

life's stages are so cleanly demarcated and Erikson's assertion that one must develop in a

precise staged order have been challenged and disputed by developmental psychologists,

Erikson's model of development has held up relatively well over time (McAdams & de

St. Aubin, 1992). His theory gives a set of broad themes and tasks that are met at

different periods of the life cycle for the average human being.

Erikson formed his theory of development based on a series of case examples

from his own clinical work, elaborating upon and expanding on Freudian theory, and an

acknowledgement to the importance of viewing life as a series of cycles or processes

(Erikson, 1963; Erikson, 1968). Erikson was trained in the Vienna Psychoanalytic

Institute in the late 1920's where Freud's methods and theories reigned supreme. In this

era, theory was developed based upon theorists' observations of patterns within their patients. Erikson came to be known more as neo-Freudian in that his academic work was based on psychoanalytic underpinnings; however, he steered his study of humans away from simply looking at them through a series of sexual drives and impulses. It was in his work with his patients that he began to identify a pattern of psychosocial stages across the life span.

Erikson (1963) proposed that life's first task is developing some level of trust in others. He states, "the infant's first social achievement, is his [*sic*] willingness to let the mother [*sic*] out of sight without undue anxiety or rage" (Erikson, 1963, p. 247). Erikson characterized the second stage of development as a crisis between autonomy vs. shame and doubt. Once some level of trust is established in the world, the next step is to have some level of faith in one's own ability to control or exert will on one's surrounding environment. This faith of "outer control" is the seedling for eventually being able to develop free choice or free will in adult life (Erikson 1963; Erikson, 1968).

Erikson's third stage of initiative vs. guilt is typically associated with the pre-school years of a child. Erikson describes initiative in this stage as, "[adding] to autonomy the quality of undertaking, planning and "attacking" a task for the sake of being active and on the move" (Erikson, 1963, p. 255). Rivaling this construct of initiative is the idea that guilt can arise when embarking on new endeavors as a child. These new endeavors inherently place toddlers in environments where they are taking resources from others, which may cause a child to feel bad about taking something from someone else.

The next three stages of Erikson's theory can be seen as an entrance into adult life. The fourth stage, industry vs. inferiority, is centered on the idea of competence. A child must learn to have a belief that they can do certain tasks and be good at them. Specifically in a time when most children go to school for the first time, they must take what they learn and develop a level of mastery over what knowledge they begin to consume. Erikson viewed these elementary school years as critical for the development of self-confidence (Erikson, 1980). In Erikson's fourth stage of development, he highlights a crisis between identity vs. role confusion. The core theme of this stage is developing a sense of self and a greater idea of where one is going in the world and eventually what he or she might contribute to society. If the goals of previous stages are met, according to Erikson, then a person can advance into the sixth stage of development centered on intimacy vs. isolation. In this stage, Erikson stated, "the young adult, emerging from the search for and the insistence on identity, is eager and willing to fuse his [*sic*] identity, with that of others. He [*sic*] is ready to commit himself [*sic*] to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments, even though they may call for significant sacrifices and compromises" (Erikson, 1963, p. 263).

The final two stages of Erikson's theory span roughly from age 40 until death. Over half the life span is accounted for in these final two stages compared with the initial six stages. Based on Erikson's theory of development, once individuals are able to develop trust, autonomy, initiative, a certain level of industriousness, establish an identity, and create and maintain intimate relationships they arrive at the stage in life where generating money, offspring, products, and ideas for current and future generations

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becomes the paramount developmental goal. As Erikson conceived it, adults have developed a sense of identity and solidified lasting and bonding relationships, they are then ready to launch into the largest and longest stage of life which is comprised of contributing to the larger sphere of society as a whole and hopefully improve upon it (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). Erikson refers to this middle adulthood stage as generativity vs. stagnation. On the developmental timeline, this stage usually occurs when a person is between 35 to 65 years old. Erikson seemed to believe that at this stage adults are faced with the question of whether they will produce something of real value, both in the present and impacting future generations.

Adults in the beginning of this age range are often faced with the prospect of reproducing and rearing children. Parenthood is perhaps the most obvious and natural expression of generativity in one's life (Erikson, 1980; McAdams, 2006). Successful parents are inherently generative in that they provide for their children so they can survive and hopefully thrive as a part of the next generation.

Generativity includes the acts that one may undertake to ensure some continuation of self after death, such as having children, passing along traditions or skills, investing in one's community, or creating artistic works. In generativity, an adult teaches future generations, leads people to see issues and problems larger than themselves, nurtures and tends to infants and the elderly, and propels the next generation forward through generating life products and ideas that benefit the entire social system and ensures this cycle will continue on for future generations (de Medeiros, 2009; Erikson, 1980; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; McAdams, de St. Aubin, Diamond, & Mansfield, 1997).

McAdams' Development of Generative Adult Profile

The majority of research on the construct of generativity has focused on mid-life, which is consistent with the stage model developed by Erikson (e.g., McAdams, 1985; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992; Peterson & Stewart, 1990). McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) stated, "in suggesting that generativity belongs in a particular stage in the human life cycle, Erikson alerts the reader to the fact that generativity is an issue for adults, not children. One of the reasons generativity emerges as a psychosocial issue in the adult years is that society comes to demand that adults take responsibility for the next generation, in their roles as parents, teachers, mentors, organizers, and creative ritualizers" (p. 1004).

The initial phase of generativity research began as a means of developing a broader conceptual theory of generativity. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) crafted a generativity theory stating that generativity is unlike personality traits or developmental stages that can be construed as a single, structured concept located "within" the individual. Generativity is more like the construct of attachment or the more complex socially contextualized ecological systems theory, from Bronfenbrenner (1979), that requires a consideration of the particular relation or fit between the person and the environment. McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) discovered this broader understanding of generativity by first surveying 149 adults from ages 19 to 68 on a series of generativity items that they eventually narrowed down into a 20 item quantitative scale of generativity that became known as the *Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)*. This scale was developed by drawing from similar scales on social desirability, a sub scale on generativity from a broader scale on Eriksonian developmental stages, a previously used generativity scale

(Hawley, 1985), and a newly created 39-item version of the *Loyola Generativity Scale*. Data from participants filling out these scales were then used to delineate the best 20 items to compose the final and current version of the *LGS* (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1992).

Erikson's construct of generativity has been expanded by the literature to incorporate any facet of one's adult life that is aimed toward bettering the world for future generations (McAdams, 2006; McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). A prototypical generative adult tends to have a job or volunteer record that consists of contributing a large amount of their time to helping and giving to others. McAdams (2006) suggested that, "generative adults seek to give something back to society. They work to make their world a better place, not just for themselves but for future generations, as well" (p. 5). Professions that tend to exemplify generativity include teachers, social workers, clergy, counselors, scientists, artists, and nurses. Of course not everyone in these fields is a highly generative person, but these fields tend to embody generative principles. Generativity can also be achieved outside of these typical generative fields through acts such as mentoring younger generations in any career field or anything that might involve the betterment of others. Yet for it to be a truly generative act it must be done for another person or future generations and not done in some fashion as a roundabout means to advance one's own goals or desires.

An example of an authentically generative act was that of medical researcher Jonas Salk's discovery of the polio vaccine and the fact that he did not try to sell his vaccine to the world for financial benefit. Instead he gave it away for the betterment of

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public health. Ultimately as McAdams (2006) put it, "generativity is fundamentally about passing it on" (p. 45).

A large body of generative research has focused on identifying components of lives that construct the prototypical generative adult (Bradley & Marcia, 1998; McAdams, 2000; McAdams, 2006; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997). McAdams (2006) proposed that highly generative adults tend to have some kind of early advantage (i.e., social adaptability or self-confidence) and have a heightened awareness of identifying and empathizing with the suffering of others. McAdams also suggests that highly generative adults tend to have some kind of moral depth or steadfastness, in some cases led by a deep religious faith. Highly generative adults tend to experience and describe redemption within their lives when they were faced with negative events and scenes in their lives. Highly generative adults seem to struggle with motivations for love and the motivation for power, as two conflicting drives and forces in their lives. Finally, highly generative adults believe that future growth is always possible and that growth is never complete.

Bradley and Marcia (1998) administered several different generativity instruments to 100 adults to confirm that both new theories on the construct of generativity were accurate and that new generativity scales were measuring what they said they measured. Their results suggest that McAdams (2006) model of generativity was accurate.

McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) used a narrative framework in their research on generativity. They explored the internalized life stories of 40 highly generative and 30 less generative adults using a semi-structured qualitative interview that they called the "life story interview." In finding participants for the highly

generative group they used the *Loyola Generativity Scale* as a screening device and recruited from both a pool of teachers recognized for excellence in teaching and from adults who had made "substantial contributions to children, families, and students in unpaid volunteer work" (p. 681). In adopting this methodological framework, they learned a lot about highly generative adults that deepened the understanding of the generativity construct.

Generativity in Other Life Stages

Another body of generativity research has addressed the question of whether the development of generativity occurs before middle adulthood as Erikson proposed. Peterson and Stewart (1993) proposed that males and females begin to experience generative themes in their lives perhaps before adulthood. They used previously collected survey data about teens to discover social motives of young people. Their study suggested that young males express generativity in terms of agency (in school or work) and outside of their relationships, whereas young woman tend to experience generativity within relationships and bonding with others. McLean and Pratt (2006) using both the *Loyola Generativity Scale* and qualitative interviewing, attempted to loosely replicate McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield's (1997) methodology with 896 adolescent participants. They found that young adults who are able to make meaning of their experience or life at this young age tend to show some signs of generativity. McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten, and Bowman (2001) surveyed college undergraduates about the experience of redemption in their lives, which is frequently associated with generativity. They found that redemption sequences in life narrative

accounts were positively associated with self-report measures of psychological well-being.

While these studies show some signs of the existence of generativity in young adults and even in adolescence, full-fledged generativity does not seem to appear until individuals are in middle adulthood. Perhaps, older individuals have more power through either relationships or careers to participate in generative acts and behaviors. These findings seem to be consistent with the Erikson development stage model, in that people do not yet have the efficacy (through developing trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity and solid relationships) to be generative until later in life.

Among the elderly, there has been much less research on generativity. The generativity literature seems to stop once individuals go much past middle adulthood. There are a few notable exceptions. Black and Rubenstein (2009) studied the effect of suffering on generativity among elderly African-American men. Using a grounded theory qualitative approach, they studied six African-American men who were highly generative from a broader research study on "The Meaning of Suffering in Later Life." The study's findings were consistent with the McAdams (2006) model of the prototypical generative adult, in that suffering in these individuals' lives was discussed through a lens of redemption and overcoming hardship, and also that moral depth and steadfastness were important in assuaging suffering.

In general there appears to be a dearth of research connecting the final two developmental stages of Erikson's model: the middle adulthood stage of generativity versus stagnation and the final life stage of ego integrity versus despair. In a study related to the later stages of Eriksonian development, Torges, Stewart, and Duncan

(2008) found that women who had let go of their regrets at age 53 achieved higher levels of ego integrity at age 62, and those who had let go of their regrets at age 62 also had higher concurrent levels of ego integrity. Sneed, Whitbourne, and Culang (2006) using a longitudinal data set of 172 participants over a 34-year period used multilevel analyses on an ego integrity vs. despair measure. They found support for Erikson's stage development structure, including support for the stage of ego integrity versus despair. According to Sneed, Whitbourne, and Culang (2006), "Ego Integrity versus Despair followed a curvilinear trajectory with an increasing trend in middle adulthood, the unique trajectories of each of the psychosocial crisis stages were expected on the basis of Erikson's theory. In addition there was also significant variability in either the mean or slope of each stage demonstrating individual differences in change, a central tenet of Erikson's life span development approach" (p. 148).

The Final Stage of Life

In studies focused on life reviews, those attempting to "look back" and trying to glean what is important in life, several different features appear to stand out. Kinnier, Tribbensee, Rose, and Vaughan (2001) interviewed adults who had faced some form of a life threatening illness. Using qualitative grounded theory and discovery-oriented techniques, they found that participants became more spiritual and wanted to care for and help others more after facing death. Grof and Halifax (1977) studied people who experienced near-death experiences as well and found that participants became more appreciative of the simple things in life, and cared more about others, especially loved ones.

The increased awareness of the value and importance for caring for others found

in studying subjects of near-death experiences is in sync with the wisdom of the Dalai

Lama, who frequently stresses the importance of helping others in cultivating one's own

self-development and maturity. In a speech titled "Eight Verses of Training the Mind

given in Washington, D.C., the Dalai Lama extolled, "by going beyond your own

problems and taking care of others, you gain inner strength, self-confidence, courage, and

a greater sense of calm" (Dalai Lama, 1998). In an article he added, "when we are

motivated by wisdom and compassion [for others], the results of our actions benefit

everyone" (Dalai Lama, 1991, p. 52). These teachings from the Dalai Lama suggest an

intrinsic health and psychological benefit from giving to and helping others.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle posited that there are two different types of

"happiness" in life. According to Aristotle, "eudemonic happiness" is fundamentally

different than "hedonic happiness," which tends to be a short-term and fleeting happiness,

more associated with eating a good meal, watching an entertaining movie, or rooting for a

winning sport's team. Eudemonic happiness is more associated with engaged,

meaningful, and purposeful activity. Ryff and Singer (2008) have explored Aristotle's

different types of happiness in older aged populations. Happiness in its hedonic or lay

meaning—the experience of pleasure or positive feelings–has been found to be less

important to physical health than the type of well-being that comes from engaging in

meaningful activity. Raising children, volunteering, or going back to graduate school

may be less enjoyable from day to day, but Ryff and Singer (2008) suggest that these

pursuits give a sense of meaning and fulfillment that provides eudaimonic well-being.

Their evidence suggests that people who focus on living with a sense of meaning and

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purpose are more likely to remain cognitively intact, have better mental health, and even live longer than people who focus on achieving feelings of hedonic happiness (Wang, 2011).

For the past 72 years, researchers at Harvard have explored what features of life are most important for living "the good life" in the longest longitudinal study yet to date in the social sciences. The Harvard Study of Adult Development began measuring 268 white undergraduate men at Harvard in 1938. They were assessed on many medical and psychological variables (Shenk, 2009). Arlie Bock began the study with the goal of learning what it means to "live well." This was in contrast to the medical research of his day that he believed paid too much attention to "sick people" and the deconstruction of human beings into a series of symptoms (Heath, 1945).

In describing Bock's method of study, Shenk (2009) wrote, "the study began in the spirit of laying lives out on a microscope slide. But it turned out that the lives were too big, too weird, too full of subtleties and contradictions to fit any easy conception of "successful living." If [the study] was to come to life, this cleaver-sharp science project would need the rounding influence of storytelling" (p. 2). Thus a mixed methods approach was adopted as the longitudinal study evolved, with a heightened focus on qualitative interviewing of participants.

At the outset of the research project, the goal of the study was to analyze men whom researchers would expect to be naturally successful (given they were successful enough to enroll and thrive at an Ivy League University) (Vaillant, 1977). However, this research question changed over time, when to the surprise of the researchers, the participants met all kinds of obstacles and hurdles like depression, alcoholism, and

marital discord. The shift in analysis changed from examining what degree of trouble these men faced in their lives, to how participants responded to the hardship and obstacles that the initial research team assumed they would not face (Vaillant, 1977). Similar to the theme of redemption found by McAdams (2006) in highly generative people, Vaillant found that the men who had developed the capacity for the most "mature adaptations," such as altruism, humor, anticipation (looking ahead and planning for future discomfort), suppression (a conscious decision to postpone attention to an impulse or conflict), and sublimation (finding outlets for feelings, such as placing aggression into sport) found the greatest success in life (Shenk, 2009). Vaillant described the importance of the ability to adapt through a parable told by one of the participants, "On Christmas Eve a father put into one son's stocking a fine gold watch, and into another son's, a pile of horse manure. The next morning, the first boy comes to his father and says glumly, "Dad, I just don't know what I'll do with this watch. It's so fragile. It could break." The other boy runs to him and says, "Daddy! Daddy! Santa left me a pony, if only I can just find it!" (Shenk, 2009).

Along with the ability to be adaptive and flexible, Vaillant found that education, stable marriage, not smoking, not abusing alcohol, moderate exercise, and healthy weight throughout middle adulthood were predictive of success throughout the lifespan. However, the final predictive finding that was harder to categorize than these "adaptations," was how healthy, loving, and successful relationships were a cornerstone of successful lives. Vaillant explained the paradoxical nature of relationships and deep personal connections as being both positive in the long term, but difficult and challenging in the short-term. He described how fear and sadness have immediate payoffs, through

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protecting individuals from attack or attracting resources at times of distress, however gratitude and joy will yield healthier deeper connections over time. The difficulty of relationships was captured in Vaillant's description of one participant's 70th birthday/retirement party, "when he retired from the faculty of medicine, his wife got hold of his patient list and secretly wrote to many of his longest-running patients, 'Would you write a letter of appreciation?' And back came 100 single-spaced, loving letters. Eight years later, when sitting with [Vaillant for another qualitative interview], he proudly pulled the box down from his shelf. "George [Vaillant], I don't know what you're going to make of this," the man said, as he began to cry, "but I've never read it." "It's very hard," [as Vaillant added], "for most of us to tolerate being loved" (Shenk, 2009, p.3).

This finding helps to clarify what might be challenging about living a life full of generative acts. The acts of giving, showing love and compassion for others, and even the act of receiving love, all of which are at the core of the generativity construct, leaves a person vulnerable and at risk. However as Erikson has suggested such generative acts are of significant importance for living a meaningful and "actualized" life.

A Void in the Generativity Literature

While there is a dearth of research on later life Eriksonian stages, there is a more salient void in constructing a connective link in the final two stages of Erikson's theory. A tenet of the Erikson theory is, for individuals to develop in a healthy and successful process, they need to resolve earlier developmental crises in order to advance to the next stage of development (Erikson, 1963). There is currently no study in the literature that tries to demonstrate the relationship between success in the generativity versus stagnation

stage and the effect that has in moving into the ego integrity versus despair stage. Since the final two stages of the Erikson model consist of roughly 45-50 years, more than half the human lifespan, it is important to investigate the relationship between these final two long stages.

Furthermore, as McAdams, Vaillant, and others have pointed out, it is critically important to develop a greater understanding of what constitutes a meaningful life. This area of the literature is by no means new to science, as scholars going all the way back to Socrates have been asking questions about what it means to live a full life. I believe the expansion and broadening interest in the generativity construct over the last twenty years allows for a new chapter in the continued pursuit of answers within this domain of the literature. The study of generativity within human life offers an opportunity to deconstruct and better understand how and why giving is of paramount importance in human behavior.

Of additional importance, for those making many sacrifices and giving of themselves in middle adulthood, the question arises as to whether giving is beneficial for the "giver." There are many contemporary philosophers, such as Michael Onfray, who argue a contrasting viewpoint, suggesting that hedonism and doing whatever is in one's own best interest is the only logical way to live. For those dedicated teachers, nurses, researchers, doctors, or mental health practitioners focused on helping others, it would be useful to discover whether there are hidden and intrinsic benefits in spending a lifetime in a "helping" or "giving" career.

It is evident from some of the previously discussed literature that these types of "giving" are critical for the well being of society at large. Part of the rationale and

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purpose of the current study is to learn what function giving has on individual lives, not just for society at large. For the subset of individuals who are committing their lives to the pursuit of helping others and developing future generations, I believe it is important to collect more data about the impact that such giving has on individuals over the lifespan.

The central question being investigated in the current study is: How does generativity manifest itself during the final stage of life? The primary research question is: what are the specific and tangible effects of living a generative life when the individual enters the final stage of life? Does living a highly generative life make the last stage of life more fulfilling and make facing death any easier? These questions are posed with the intent of developing a greater scientific understanding of the benefits of giving, especially the effects that giving throughout one's life has for individuals when they arrive at the end of the life.

Data from these years of reflection at the end of life will hopefully broaden the understanding of how generativity affects one's life story. The goal of the current study is to expand the understanding of Erikson's and McAdams' theoretical constructs of generativity as it impacts the final stage of life.

Using a qualitative approach similar to the methods used by McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) and McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) in their research on generativity in middle adulthood, the current study will examine the effect of generativity in the last stage of life.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Approach to Studying Generativity

Qualitative research has been a primary method used in studying generativity. Gathering narratives and interview data allows for a bottom up approach especially useful in areas where little or no previous literature body exists. As Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie (1999) explain, "qualitative research includes such diverse approaches as empirical phenomenology, ethnography, qualitative discourse analysis, conversation analysis, ethnomethodology, grounded theory, and social action research. These approaches have all developed their own, somewhat different, traditions of rigor and of communication with readers. They also work within differing explicit and implicit philosophies" (p. 216).

The use of qualitative methodology in this study seems most fitting, as there is a paucity of empirical data in this literature. The spirit of qualitative research caters toward "observing in detail what people do, by listening to their words, and by observing the artifacts they produce" (Morrow & Smith, 2000, p. 199). In trying to develop a theoretical understanding of the link between Erikson's final two stages, the qualitative approach was chosen to more fully inform how to construct such a link. Morrow and Smith (2000) stated, "whereas conventional research in counseling psychology aims to develop universal and generalizable principles of behavior, qualitative research aims to understand participants' actions within a particular social context. From this understanding, the investigator develops theoretical constructs that may serve as principles or models that will contribute to the knowledge base about the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 200).

A grounded theory approach was chosen for the treatment of this qualitative data set. As Henwood and Pigeon (2003) described, "generating theory that is grounded in semi structured interviews, fieldwork observation, case-study notes, or other forms of textual documentation is one important principle of much qualitative social science today" (p. 131). Grounded theory is ideal for areas of research where there is very little prior research, specifically allowing for a purely inductive and bottom up approach (i.e., the data drives the theory) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Henwood and Pidegeon, 2003). Grounded theory was chosen over other qualitative approaches such as discourse qualitative analysis (discursive psychology) as this approach is more tailor fit to analyze data from observations of everyday interactions, rather than interviews (Potter, 2003). A traditional phenomenological approach was considered for analyzing the data but rejected as it is more useful when utilizing a biographical approach in qualitatively data collection (Creswell, 1998).

The grounded theory analytical approach was selected for this study because grounded theory aims to discover factors, impacts, and influences of relatively unknown constructs or phenomena from an explanatory level (Creswell, 1998). Grounded theory stresses an exploration of how people construction actions, meanings, and intentions (Charmaz, 2003). Henwood and Pidgeon (2003) noted that, "grounded theory indicates an intertwining of research process and outcomes—where the process involves the detailed, systematic but flexible interrogation of a range of initially unstructured data selected for its close relationship to the problem under investigation and the analytical outcomes" (p. 136).

Phase I Data Collection

  Sample. The sample (n=89) consisted of participants all 65 or older. The mean age of the sample was 70.34. Fifty-six percent of the participants were female (n=50), 42% of participants were male (n=37) and two participants chose not to report their demographics information. Ninety-one percent of participants identified as Caucasian (n=81), 6% of participants self-identified as African-American (n=5), and one participant self-identified as Native-American.

  Recruitment. Snowball sampling procedures were used for recruitment. The snowball sampling consisted of targeting senior groups in the community, building relationships within these community groups, and gaining further access to potential participant pools. Participants were then acquired through reaching out at community meetings/activities, emailing senior group listservs, and also through word of mouth. The sample was recruited from a population of individuals 65 and older as Erickson's theory roughly outlined this age as an emergence into the final stage of life, ego integrity vs. despair. Most frequently, the age of 65 has been labeled as a marker of being firmly within this final stage (Torges, Stewart, & Duncan, 2008; Wagner, Lorion, & Shipley, 1983; Woods, & Witte, 1981).

  The sample was drawn from a variety of church, community, and philanthropy groups. Participant responses were collected both by hand and by electronic survey. The hand and electronic survey were identical in form. Hand surveys were collected from senior church groups and distributed by the researcher at times of their groups' weekly meetings. Additionally, a primarily African-American community senior group was targeted and reached out to in an effort to increase the diversity within the sample of

participants. Lastly, a philanthropy group, affiliated with a large state university in the Southeastern United States, was identified and the leader of this group agreed to send out an email to the listserv of the group requesting survey participation.

Measure. The *Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS)* (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992) is a 20-item, 4- point likert-scale measure that includes questions aimed at assessing an individual's level of generative concern (how much a person focuses on giving to others and contributing to future generations). Examples of items on this scale are "I try to pass along knowledge I have gained through my experiences," "I feel as though I have made a difference to many people," "If I were unable to have children of my own, I would like to adopt children," and "Others would say I have made unique contributions to society." McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) conducted several validity studies of the *LGS*. In two validity studies, one with a sample of 149 undergraduate college participants and another 165 undergraduate college participants the scale's validity was assessed. The Cronbach's alpha was .83, indicating good internal consistency. In a separate 3-week test-retest reliability study of 71 subjects, the correlation coefficient was .73 suggesting moderately high temporal stability. According to McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992), "the Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS) exhibited good internal consistency and retest reliability and showed strong positive associations with reports of actual generative acts (e.g., teaching a skill) and themes of generativity in narrative accounts of important autobiographical episodes" (p. 1003).

Erikson did not clearly demarcate his stages by certain age thresholds. His description of ego integrity was somewhat vague in terms of operationalization; however, he described a person at this stage as someone who had "taken care of things and adapted

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himself [*sic*] to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being" (Erikson, 1950, p. 268). He went on to describe ego integrity as being "aware of the relativity of all the various life styles which have given meaning to human striving, the possessor of integrity is ready to defend the dignity of his own life style against all physical and economic threats" (Erikson, 1980, p. 104). He contrasted this description of ego integrity with the following description of despair as, "[an expression of] the feeling that the time is short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity" (Erikson, 1980, p. 104). Several studies drawing samples from the ego integrity vs. despair population have tried to identify with more concrete parameters of this stage.

Procedure. The 89 participants in phase I filled out a short demographics questionnaire and the *Loyola Generativity Scale (LGS).*

Participants were encouraged to fill out the *LGS* on their own without guidance, unless questions arose. The most common question participants had was associated with difficulty delineating between responding "1" stating "this statement occasionally or seldom applies" versus a responding "2" stating "this statement applies fairly often."

The electronic survey was created in the exact form of the hand survey using an online survey platform. On the electronic survey, my email address was listed and participants were instructed to contact me if they had questions in relation to responding to the survey. No questions were submitted from participants who filled out the electronic survey.

The *LGS* was used as a screening instrument to identify two separate groups: highly generative individuals and low generative individuals. Of these participants, 8 highly generative individuals and 8 low generative individuals were selected to participate in the

more in-depth qualitative phase of the study. These individuals were chosen based on a

cutoff established by McAdams, de St. Aubin, & Logan (1993), in which they normed the

LGS for three different age groups including senior adults (ages 67-72). Based on the

average for the older adult group (*M*=38.26*, SD*=9.59*)*, participants who scored 48 or

above were one standard deviation above the mean for this age group (in the 84th

percentile for this population) and a score of 28 or below were at the 16th percentile.

These cutoffs are consistent with the mean average score of the "highly generative

group" in a similar qualitative study on highly generative individuals in midlife

(McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield, 1997).

Phase II Data Collection

  Sample. The sample size was (n=16) as suggested by Hill, Thompson, and

Williams (1997) given the intensive and time-consuming nature of the qualitative

methodology. The mean age of the group was 71.1. Half of the participants were male

and half were female. Of the highly generative group, 3 subjects were male and 5 were

female. Whereas in the low generative group, 5 subjects were male and 3 were female.

The sample was largely homogenous despite efforts to attract a more diverse sample; 15

participants were Caucasian and one participant was African-American. *LGS* scores for

both sets of groups are listed below in the results section.

  Due to the potential declining health of this population, a final requirement for

participation was that participants were cogent enough to carry on a conversation and to

construct a reasonably coherent narrative. The researcher assessed before the interview

whether or not the participant had enough cognitive ability to construct their life story

and participate in the phase II data collection portion of the research. The researcher

asked basic questions about their background and history to assure their ability to answer

lucidly and be able to recall their past. Regarding the criterion of *lucidity*, Yalom (1980)

referred to a "golden period" with research participants at the end of life. This term

refers to the period of time when individuals have had time to reflect back on their

contributions, but before the point that they lose the ability to effectively communicate

these reflections.

  Interview. The interview structure was modeled upon *The Life Story Interview*

(McAdams, 1985; McAdams, 1993; McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, & Mansfield

1997). The Life Story Interview is a semi structured in-depth interview procedure that

attempts to elicit one's life story. This methodology was supported by Levinson, Darrow,

Klein, Levinson, & McKee (1978) who chose a similar "Life Course" qualitative

methodology to measure events, relationships, achievements, failures, and aspirations in

order to capture the essential features of older adult life.

  The interviewer began by asking the participant to think about his or her life as if

it were a book and divide it into a series of chapters (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin,

& Mansfield 1997). These chapters provided an autobiographical overview of the

participants' lives (including peak experiences, low point experiences, significant

memories, and significant people in their lives).

  Participants were then asked to look back on the telling of their story and identify

a dominant theme or message of their story. They were then asked what a future chapter

might look like for them. In addition to the framework of the *Life Story Interview*,

participants were also asked to list accomplishments they considered to be their "most

giving" or generative to future generations. This was followed by participants being

asked how they believe these listed generative acts effect the way they view their life today. The final question of the interview concerned how participants felt their generative accomplishments impact the way they feel about death, dying, and the final stage of life.

In the final portion of the interview, in which generativity was more deeply discussed, participants were offered the following primer as a background to the nature of the generativity construct, which the researchers created as a layman's description of how Erikson described the construct:

> Generativity is an adult's concern for and commitment to promoting the welfare and development of future generations. Generativity can be taking responsibility for the next generation. Such roles of a generative person might include being a parent, teacher, mentor, organizer, or volunteer. Anything involving selflessly giving to and helping others in society may be considered to be generative. Working to make the world a better place, not just for yourself, but for future generations is consistent with the idea of generativity.

Procedure. The participants who met the outlined thresholds on the *LGS* were selected to participate in the qualitative interview portion of the study. The sixteen participants were interviewed using the *Life Story Interview* structured approach described above. Potential subjects were contacted for participation in phase II via the contact information they provided the researcher while filling out the phase I survey. Participants with the highest and lowest *LGS* scores were contacted first for participation as they represented the most targeted characteristics for the study. However, in a few cases in which participants were unable to participate or chose not to participate when

contacted, then the research team "went down the list" and sought out other participants

that still qualified as either fitting the criterion for the high or low generative group (one

standard deviation above or below the *LGS* mean).

Interviews were completed both in person and by phone. Eight interviews took

place in person with an audio recorder and eight interviews took place over the phone

using Internet software that recorded the phone calls.

When participants asked about the nature of the study they were taking part in

before or during the interview, participants were told they were told they were being

interviewed for a study on older adults' attitudes toward life, work, and family. The

author conducted all of the interviews. All interviews were completed in one session,

lasting between 35 minutes and 90 minutes, largely depending on participants' variance

in verbosity.

At the conclusion of the interview, participants were asked if they had any

questions about the process. In cases where participants inquired further about the nature

of the study, they were debriefed about the researcher's pursuit to learn more about

generativity in the older adult population where this construct had been scantly explored.

Statistics and Data Analysis

Fitting with how Mondada (2007) described the qualitative transcript as an

evolving flexible object tied to the context in which it was produced, the final section of

the interview (approximately 15-20 minutes of interview time), the section that

specifically pertained to participants' lists of generative accomplishments and how these

effect them today, were isolated and selected to be transcribed by a transcription services

organization. This is consistent with the methods of Pomerantz (1980) in a study about

language and social interaction. It is also congruent with the qualitative research theory placed forth by Poland (1995), in that research observations converted into transcripts can only be considered excerpted accounts of the actual genuine encounter of the interview itself. The initial sections of the *Life Story Interview* were not transcribed as it was not directly related to the research questions. However, this part of the interview remained in the procedure as it was intended to provide the participants with a greater opportunity to become more reflective about their lives and help them to identify how generative acts fit into their life's story.

All data was transmitted to the transcription service electronically using secure measures to maintain the confidentiality of the data. The transcription service was careful to use only one transcriber to complete all sixteen transcriptions, both as a means of maintaining as much confidentiality of the data as possible and to allow the transcriber more familiarity with the interviewer to maximize the quality of the transcripts.

In a study seeking similar discoveries, but on the topic of transgender resilience strategies, counseling psychologists Singh, Hays & Watson (2011) used a blend of grounded theory and phenomenological methodologies in their analysis. With a similar sample size to the current study, this research team analyzed transcriptions from semi structured interviews, using two coders to initially code the data and arrived at a consensus of codes in the initial phase. In a second phase to validate the presence or lack of presence of these codes or themes within the interviews, a separate group of 3 raters rated whether these themes were present in each of the interviews.

In the current study, the research process extracted textual unstructured data from participants related to the investigation of a relatively unknown phenomena: the presence

(or lack thereof) and meaningful structure of generativity in older adults. In order to make greater sense of this unstructured textual data (transcription of audio interviews), this research utilized grounded theory analytical approaches. As Charmaz (2003) stated, "unlike quantitative data, in which preconceived categories or codes are applied to the data, grounded theorists create their codes by defining what they see in the data. Codes emerge as you scrutinize your data and define meanings within them. Coding consists of at least two phases: an initial phase involving the naming of data followed by a focused, selective phase that uses the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, and organize large amounts of data" (p. 93). The codes in the current study were identified as follows in congruence with most recent findings in the qualitative research methodologies literature (Charmaz, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 1998; Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003; Singh, Hays, & Watson, 2011):

1. As forwarded by grounded theory researchers Corbin and Strauss (1990), the first stage of the data analysis was "open coding," the familiarizing phase of analysis, wherein the data was examined in a broad sense with two coders doing an initial review of the transcripts to get a feel for the entire data set and in developing ideas for the salient coding categories. Consistent with Corbin and Strauss' methods for open coding the two coders focused on identifying salient categories of information supported by the text using the "constant comparative approach" and attempted to "saturate" the coding categories by exhaustively combing through the transcripts until no further data could be categorized.

2. As outlined by Creswell (1997), the next step of the analysis process consisted of axial coding. A single category was identified as the central phenomenon of interest from list of codes established in the open coding phase.

3. The next step of the axial coding process was to begin exploring the interrelationships of all the categories from the open coding phase and to conceptualize the "causal conditions" that influence the central phenomenon (e.g., context) and how all the codes theoretically revolve around and fit together with the identified central phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

4. A coding paradigm or theoretical model that visually portrays the construction of categories outlined within the axial coding phase was then created. This theoretical model is discussed in greater detail in the results section. A theory was built and generated, grounded from within the data, and demonstrated visually (Creswell, 1997).

5. The data are presented in the results section, following guidelines consistent with May (1986) who stated, "in strict terms, the [results] are the theory itself, i.e., a set of concepts and propositions which link them" (p. 148). As suggested by Creswell (1997), "the major research question, how it evolved, and the definitions of key terms were reported, also noting that within a grounded theory study, this research question is broad, and changed several times during data collection and analysis" (p. 179).

6. The results section presents the theoretical scheme that was understood from the data. Additionally, segments from the actual data in the form of quotes was provided as it useful explanatory material. As Creswell (1997) stated, "these

quotes may also help the reader form a judgment about how well the theory is

grounded in the data" (p. 179).

Contrary to other previous generativity research that have followed the McAdams,

Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield (1997) model of seeking specific generative

themes such as redemption, seeing suffering of others, moral steadfastness, and prosocial

goals for the future, this study takes a bottom up approach in coding. There is no

previous coding categories to try to place themes from participants' stories into. All

codes are identified by letting the data drive the analysis, consistent with grounded

theory.

Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data collected in phase I and the two groups established from this phase of

data collection is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Sample

	Phase I Participants (*n*=89)	Phase II High Generative Group (*n*=8)	Phase II Low Generative Group (*n*=8)
Gender			
Male	37 (41.6%)	5 (62.5%)	3 (37.5%)
Female	50 (56.2%)	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)
Race/Ethnicity			
Caucasian	81 (91.0%)	7 (87.5%)	8 (100%)
African-American	5 (5.6%)	1 (12.5%)	0
Native-American	1 (1.1%)	0	0
Age (mean)	70.3	72.9	69.3
LGS Score (mean)	41.9	54.1	28.8

Note. The range of possible scores on the *Loyola Generative Scale* (*LGS*) was 0-60 (*SD*=8.64).

Displayed in Appendix A are the 162 codes identified in the initial open coding

phase of the data analysis.

Table 2 displays the first stage of the axial coding wherein the data was broken

down into the categories related to the identified central phenomena in the study.

Table 2

Axial Codes Established from List of Open Codes

Shared in Both Groups	**High Generative Group**	**Low Generative Group**
Desire to help/impact others	Purposeful life	Searching for purpose/meaning
Life has hardships	Surrendering of control	Self-doubting

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	in life	
Love for family/friends	Adaptive coping via resilience/optimism	Doubting of own legacy
Death inevitable w/ anxiety	Confident in legacy	Regretful
	Blessed/fortunate Education as a primary value	

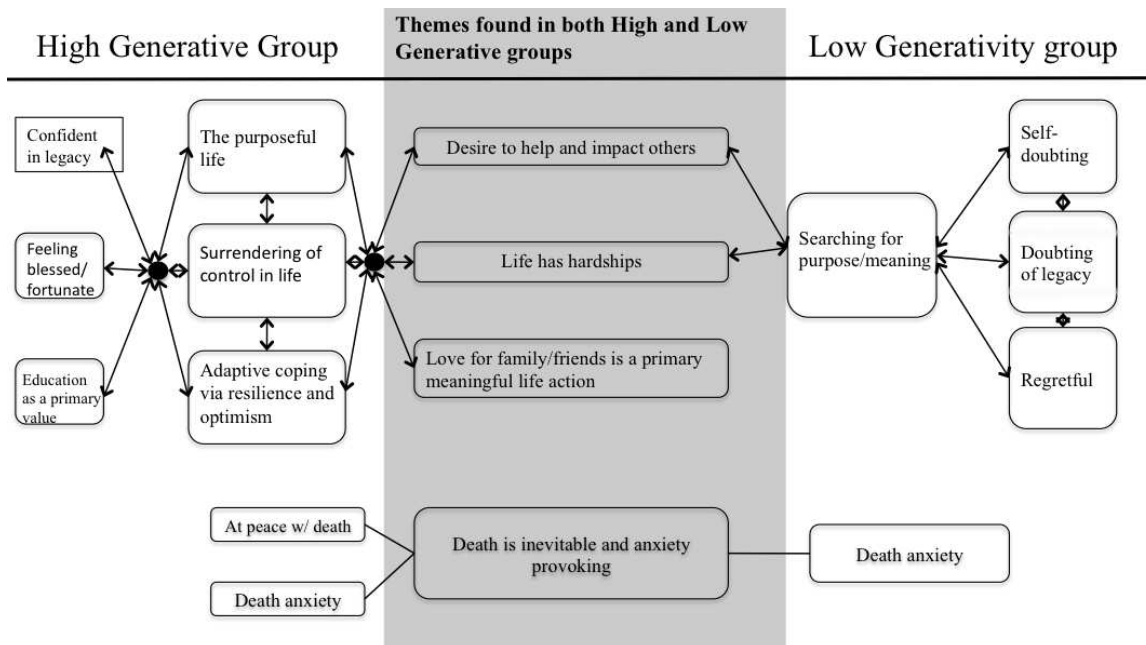Figure 1 provides a visual display of the Theoretical findings form the data.

Figure 1. Theoretical model from the grounded data. The middle section depicts the shared themes found in both the high and low generative groups. The right section shows the themes found within the low generative group and how these themes related to the shared themes. Similalry, the left side of the model shows the highly generative group themes and how these themes related to the shared themes.

Shared Themes/Categories Found in both High and Low Groups

The first themes listed below are the most salient themes found across the entire data set; themes found in both high and low generative participants. As discussed in step two of the procedure within the methods section, prominent themes were assigned based on prevalence and frequency found and grounded within the data. As also stated in step

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two of the procedure, within the axial coding process, three central categories were established (shared themes, highly generative group themes, and low generative group themes). Then within each these categories, themes were discovered from within the data, consistent with step three of the procedure, and analyzed for the causal nature of how the themes fit together.

Desire to help and impact others. Both high and low generative participants expressed a desire to help others. This included such actions as caring for, volunteering, mentoring, and advocating for others. Participant #4, a highly generative female, exhibited this theme stating:

> I guess taking care of people. That's the biggest thing, is helping people; trying to motivate them. Letting them see that life is something important. Life is a gift to you. Life is something that you need to motivate yourself on and try to move on; to make better for yourself. To try to do better things and try to put things in process so that you can educate yourself better.

Participant #1, a low generative male, shared a similar sentiment about a desire to help others saying, "I think giving to others has given my life, to a large extent, more of a purpose. I guess I feel better about myself because I think that I'm doing work that is difficult and benefits people in general." Participant #7, a highly generative female, discussed how even small actions of helping make a difference saying:

> The things that you do for people; you make a loaf of bread. I make bread, and I take it to people. I call people, everybody, in our church on their birthdays and sing "Happy Birthday" if I'm here. I can't do the same things I used to do, because of my age, but I can do a lot of things. I can talk to young people about,

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for instance, where they're going to college. "What are you going to major in? What are your interests?" I can give them a check when they graduate. I can keep in touch with them. You never know the impact that you make.

Participant #8, a low generative female, discussed the value of volunteering, like many others in the study, sharing, "I did a lot of work for Habitat [for Humanity] and I did some work with homeless shelters. I really feel a strong sense of giving back to the community as a social responsibility." Participant #13, a highly generative female, shared a similar sentiment stating:

The other thing that I do is volunteering at a neonatal unit for a hospital in terms of caring for tiny babies. They don't need anything except to be held because their parents in one way or another can't be with them. I think they need that early on, when they're just born; they need to be held.

Similarly, participant #12, a low generative female, shared her value for volunteering for the youth sharing:

I also became involved with the foster care system here in town and the state and the problems with foster care. I got involved with that with some other people and I'm on the board of a non-profit organization that operates for group homes, for foster children. That has been a great outlet for me in terms of working with this company on ways that we can help these children and improve their lives, especially if they age out of foster care. A lot of times when they turn 18, their group home or family home are no longer responsible for them, so I've been working on ways to alleviate that situation for kids aging out of foster care.

Life has hardships. The second theme recognized across both the high and low generative groups is that life has hardships and obstacles, and that these are unavoidable. Participant #6, a low generative male, discussed such hardships in relating to others in business, declaring:

> But it's a rotten world in that sense. That's pessimistic; I'm an optimist as a person because I have to be, but when you look at how the inside really works, you're always dealing with people who are either looking for a leg up because they want to tell you how great they are or they're looking for a way to sneak around behind your back.

Similarly, but in a more upbeat tone, participant #5, a high generative male, discussed the hardship brought on by the recent recession, conveying:

> You have to realize that at one time you may have made a lot of money, but it doesn't make any difference. It can come to an end with a screeching halt just as fast as it went up. In those times, you have to go back to the basics and say "I don't have any money; I have to go out on my own. I might even have to work now, with my tools, when I didn't have to before. Before I was management and now I'm working with my tools." But I find out that you still have a skill and that people want me to do more work for them. I don't mean that in a bragging way. I'm saying that that makes me feel good because I have a skill and I could yell that I'm down and out –we almost lost our house but we didn't. There is still something there that I want to go on. I want to live life. With my grandchildren and my wife of 53 years –that's a long time, we've been through all kinds of stuff.

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Another element of this theme was found in participants discussing how hardships and difficulties are inevitable and that obstacles are simply something you must work through or try to make sense of. Participant #10, a low generative male, described this stating, "Despite life's difficulties, the traumas, some of the dislocations and disjointedness, I'm still one of the luckiest men to have walked the face of this Earth." Highly generative female participant #13, shared a similar attitude stating, "I wouldn't be where I am today if there hadn't been some really bad patches." Adding to this theme and using a literary example to relay her experience, highly generative female participant #7 asserted:

It's not an ideal world, and certainly I've read enough of Voltaire to have some concept about "this ain't a very good world." And maybe not; I'm sure for a lot of people they'd be hasty to say –I know many people who are not blessed the way I am and I don't know why I'm blessed, but if I can do something to make life a little bit easier for somebody else, then I hope I would do it.

Love for family/friends is a primary meaningful life action. Also a shared theme amongst both the high and low generative groups was a feeling that relationships with family and friends are of the most meaningful of life actions. Participants with no children of their own were prone to discussing this as perhaps their greatest regret, but were also quick to point to other relationships with friends, nieces/nephews, or partners as being some of the most meaningful aspects of their lives. Highly generative female, participant #3, communicated, "I think that the best thing I'm leaving behind are my children. All three of them are great people." Similarly, participant #14, a low generative male, shared:

The thing that's important to me is the fact that we have two great kids and six great grandchildren and they've never wanted for anything. By some magic, which I don't really understand, I've managed to make my wife happy and hopefully she'll never want for anything.

Highly generative male participant #16 held a similar feeling expressing:

One [last accomplishment] that I feel very good about is that I have a son who is now living in California, and because I grew up without a father and then went through a divorce along the way, when my son was born, I felt like I wanted to have a good relationship with him and see him have a good life in a broad sense - again, not a materialistic life- and to have a close relationship with him. I think that happened; I see feedback from that now. He was 40 this year and has two little girls. I see having passed on something to him about that parent-child relationship that he's mapping over very nicely on his own. I'm very proud of that; that's an accomplishment.

Participant #12, a low generative female, had a similar tone in discussing parenthood and her feeling about caring for others stating:

Children and grandchildren; love them dearly. Love to spend time with them. Sadly I don't get to spend a lot of time with them because they've never lived close to me. But I try to be wide open to them, show a lot of love and respect and devotion to all of them. For family, like my husband would say, I'm a very nurturing woman and I continue to nurture my family as much as I possibly can.

This passion for family and the moments of joy you get from giving to them was also shared by participant #5, a highly generative male, who shared:

But [doing and giving] opens up lots of variants. Like the grandkids, [my kids]

say "dad, they really need their bed fixed. Could you fix it?" I don't feel like it,

but I put on my tools and go over there and they all give me a hug.

Participant #10, a low generative male, described feeling lucky in life, namely because of

his family, expressing, "I was fortunate to have found my wife at an early age, and to

have fathered two really great kids." And lastly in discussing her continued generative

acts in a later stage in life, participant #15, a highly generative female, shared that her

most focused giving right now is that she is, "busy with the generative legacy of two

sons."

Themes/Categories Found Highly Generative Group

As displayed in Figure 1, three prominent themes emerged from the data within

the highly generative group in response to the three themes shared by both groups. These

themes were "the purposeful life," the "surrendering of control in life," and "adaptively

coping via resilience and optimism." Out of these three categories, three other themes

were found in the data from highly generative participants including being "confident in

their legacy," having "feelings of being blessed and fortunate," and lastly of "valuing

education."

The purposeful life. It was found that highly generative participants expressed a

strong sense of purpose, often from the experiences of giving and volunteering. As can

be further understood in the quotes below, this strong sense of purpose in the world also

seems to have provided the highly generative participants an ability to better handle life's

hardships. Participant #13 (female) exhibited this sentiment stating:

I think that everyone wants to have a purpose in life. I think there was a point -

I'm almost 70, now- in my 50's where I felt like I did not have a purpose. Why

am I here? What have I done? What's going to have made a mark other than

having two awesome kids, which is not a little thing? I haven't made a mark; my

name is never going to be on a library or a building or something fancy. I've

never written a book or poetry. So, what is my mark going to be? And I pretty

much reconciled that my mark is going to be what I've done for the few kids that

I've been able to touch or reach [in teaching and volunteering]. The world may not

know about it but I know about it, and I feel good about it. The other thing is that

my grandkids know about it because they see me. If they learn that you can serve

and help somebody else, which they have, that's when I feel that I've done

something.

Similarly, participant #3, shared that she has developed a profound sense of joy and

purpose from giving to others, expressing:

I think that when you do something that has meaning for the future, and you know

it's good, there's that sense of joy. I don't even know how to… I did that. It's

better than getting a raise, it's better than a promotion. It's right on par with when

your child says her first word [laughs]. It's different, but it's an instant sense of

gratification and joy. It gives me such deep pleasure, and that's what I would say

about it: it makes me feel good.

Participant #5 discussed how he has been able to give to others, with what he has crafted

with his hands and his tools, and that by pushing himself to be open to new experiences

he has a strong sense of purpose, opining:

Say yes more than you say no. Even when you don't want to do some things or you'd rather lay on the sofa. Painting these white benches around [his church] that were falling apart, on the front porch and the back porch, that was a whole lot of work. I didn't get anything out of it. Mary paid for the paint but when you see it finished, those white benches, and somebody said that the preschool has those white benches I painted. I don't know, those are those accomplishments that you feel good about because I was given that skill.

Also focused on purposeful contributions via putting one's skills to use in a professional sense, male participant #16, shared:

Another somewhat personal, though a little less personal, yet a sense of accomplishment, is passing things on through my graduate students who are finished and go out and do things…A lot of students have come back in retirement, and I was surprised at the impact that I've had on them that I didn't realize I was even having at the time. I think, by and large, probably most of my graduate students would have respect and say that I added value to their lives and what they're doing. That's certainly a passing on.

Participant #7 shared that she feels a sense of purpose in what she gives to other, along with having a relationship with a higher power, expressing:

That's a wonderful thing if you can bring joy into people's lives. That makes all the difference. I felt it was well worth it. Doing things like that make a difference in people's lives. Love the Lord God with all of your heart, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Whoever is out there that needs something.

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Female participant #15 shared that for her a primary purpose that she has connected with is via the search for one's self, declaring, "It's never too late to find yourself, that's number one." Lastly, participant #13 captured an essential aspect of the purposeful theme, sharing "I feel like I have given and am giving in a way that is important to other people in a very small way and that makes me feel good in a big way."

Surrendering of control in life. Separate from the purposeful life theme, but found among the data from the highly generative group was the importance of ceding control in life and learning that "everything will be okay," and being able to let life come to you, rather than trying to be overly controlling of events in your life is important. This seemed to be a significant quality in being able to cope with hardships in life and remain optimistic in still giving to others. Participant #2 (male) shared:

> I have a long to-do list and I'm somewhat driven, when I was working, and even in retirement. But, I tell you, once you get a certain age, getting things done is not quite as important. What I would say now is that it's going to be okay. I'm going to be okay."

Participant #4 (female) expressed this theme with an added religious connotation, but having a similar experience when she said:

> Get into the Lord; God leads you to wherever he wants you to be at. He can lead you back if you're doing something wrong, and something says "don't do that", that's God saying "don't do that, move over to the other side and try to get yourself together.

Participant #15 (female) shared that a bout with cancer helped her to cede control in her life and this has been important for her. She described that she:

Almost died once, and could feel myself dying. After I got over that though, then

I knew that I was going to be fine and that everyone else was going to be fine. I

don't worry about whether I've done enough or whether there's so many things

that I have to do.

Also with a religious grounding, female participant #7 shared a similar sentiment about relinquishing control in life, stating:

I think that one of them is simply the business about being upbeat about life;

recognizing that the Lord does things with us that we don't understand. I think

the Lord has a plan for my life and it makes a difference in the way I treat people.

Participant #5 directly connected the experience of hardships in life and the importance for him of ceding control to a high power in order to get a long in life, as he asserted:

At this time in your life you realize that I just see other older people and I realize

that you start out in life and you don't know the answer. And then, God might, as

you get older, start calling you home. There is always a controller outside of

yourself; you can basically say, "I can't control things". When bad things happen,

I really can't control this, so I'm going to say my prayers and say "here I am, do

the best for me.

Adaptive coping via resilience and optimism. The final of the three core themes found in the highly generative group was the ability of highly generative participants to adapt to life's hardships, often through resilient and optimistic attitudes. Female participant #13, shared:

The rough patches give me that perspective of how unhappy it can be and how

happy it is now. Now calm and content. I think if you can somehow get through

the really hard parts there is a reward.

Participant #5 (male) shared that a humble optimism for life makes a world of difference

in combating the inevitable hardships, relating:

I think that you have to feel good about yourself. Not to make yourself better

than somebody else, but they make you feel good about -not so much where you

stand- but it keeps you going when arthritis and all of the other things as you get

older. The generative things keep a smile on your face, or someone will say

something about something that happened thirty years ago and that gets you

going. Or you maybe want to do more; volunteer more, maybe even at an

advanced age, it doesn't matter.

Participant #4 (female) expressed that she's maintained a faith and optimism in life that

allows her to conquer developmental hurdles and gain accomplishments and she shares

this with her family, revealing that:

My 'great-grand,' that I'm working with now, she's in 10th grade –she'll be in 11th

grade- and she's striving to go to college. And I told her that if she did, "I don't

have any money, but with God's will, you'll make it there and I'll try to help you

as best as I can, to get you into the college.

Participant #3 (female) concisely remarked, "I would say that I have noticed that I have

resilience and enthusiasm for life." Participant #5 (male) observed that, "The people with

better attitudes seem to make out better than people with a not-so-positive outlook on

things."

Confident in legacy. As a result of feeling a strong sense of purpose in life, adaptively coping through hardship, and learning to cede control in life, the highly generative group overwhelmingly expressed confidence in the legacy they will eventually leave behind in the world. Participant #15 clearly articulated this, when she conveyed:

> What I'm most proud of -and this is a theme that I'm proud of- which is that I feel, to my core, respect for others. I feel that I've instilled policies--whether it was at the shelter program or whether it was in developing housing for mentally ill people, and in my relations with others--I feel equality with people. I have felt it from the beginning. I don't know how I got that but I feel it. I feel that that has been my gift to the future, to have put out into the world those values. I hope that they come through in my children. I feel that the actual things -the shelter program, and more than that, there were 14 different police jurisdictions that we covered, and we had to train police recruits on how to be respectful and understand families.

Participant #16 (male) similarly commented:

> On a professional level, I think that a couple of the things that we do, research-wise, have had a lasting impact and are beneficial. One of them is a test for carotid arteries that is pretty common now and while I was not the only one who did that, I paved the way for it. Thousands and millions of people have had that kind of test done.

Participant #13 shared that it is her legacy through children and volunteering at schools that she is confident in, stating:

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I think that when you volunteer at a school, there is so much feedback from

teachers and administration and from the kids. When you walk in a classroom

and some little bitty thing in a ragged dress runs up and gives you a big hug and

wants to talk about his family and his day, and it's something that I can't even

imagine a child experiencing, that yeah... You can see it and you can feel it. It's

more of a feeling.

Participant #2 was excited to relay that he can still physically see some of the impact that

he'll leave behind, sharing:

I started [this community group on campus] in 1965 or so. So it's sticking!

Forty-five years or so. I got a call maybe ten years ago from somebody who says

"you started the project? We want you to come down to our big annual meeting."

They had t-shirts and logos…way beyond. But there it was.

Participant #3 said she feels a genuine sense of accomplishment, maintaining, "But it's

true. And I did. So I feel as though I've accomplished a lot. So I guess I have a sense of

accomplishment." Participant #2 summed it up, stating, "I think life's been great. I've

met very interesting people; important people. I'm proud of it, yeah."

Feeling blessed/fortunate. Perhaps aided by a sense of optimism and having felt

they have lived a life with meaning and purpose, a common theme extolled by highly

generative participants was a feeling of being blessed or fortunate. This was captured by

female participant #7, sharing:

I don't have a lot of problems, and that's easy to say when you don't have a lot of

problems. If I had had more in my life, I might think differently but my life has

been so blessed from the very beginning.

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Participant #15 added to this talking about the fortunate nature of her timing in life, when she expressed:

> We have been blessed. We lucked out. We had jobs waiting. I had three job offers to be a teacher when I got my teaching credentials in 1965. It's not like that today for kids. My husband had job offers here and there. It's different now. We were lucky.

Participant #16 felt fortunate that he's been able to accomplish what he set out to do while still building strong relationships with those around him, conveying:

> We're lucky. I always wanted to have accomplishments and experiences that somehow were connected with people, and I never thought about it so much as generativity in that sense. But I guess those are the things that I really feel good about; content.

Participant #4 added that it is the act of giving that she connects to a feeling of being fortunate, suggesting, "Giving makes me feel good. It makes me feel that I'm being blessed." Lastly, participant #13 expressed feeling fortunate about where she has finally arrived in life, announcing, "I've got it made now."

Education as a primary value. The final theme discovered within the qualitative data from the highly generative group was that they hold education as a primary value of importance. Participant #4 expressed this sentiment, stating, "When my kids were coming up, I would tell them to educate themselves: 'get your education, get your diploma, go to college, go to some kind of training school, get your skills, and better yourself.'" Participant #7, a retired professor, spoke of her feeling that education and ideas are of the utmost importance, suggesting:

When you're in English, it's an entirely different world, as one of my students

tells me –who was in something else- he used to say "this is the only class where

I'm able to talk about ideas." That, I think, is what the arts do. It doesn't just talk

about things and making things work, but it's interested in ideas and in people,

because that's what you're dealing with.

Participant #3, suggested one of her favorite aspects of one of her former careers was that

she got to advocate for education, sharing, "That job was good in that sense because I

also felt as though I was advocating for educational standards at the time, which is

critically important." Participant #15 shared that despite her parents wishes, she needed

more than just the church for learning about the world, stating, "I was longing for

education and there was nothing from the church. Nothing. What I learned was in

college and in life." Lastly, participant #13 captured her feelings about the importance of

education in the lives of young children, when she noted:

What I've found is that I worry about some of the kids that are in school: the ones

whose parents don't have the time or the money to sit with them and go through

the basics like reading, learning the alphabet. I feel so sad and I want to take them

home and teach them how to read; so that's what my job is at school: I work with

them one-on-one, reading, learning their letters. Because I can't imagine going

home to a house where their parents probably don't even ask if they have a book

to read.

Themes/Categories Found in Low Generative Group

The core theme discovered and grounded within the interview data from the low

generative group was that many of the participants are still searching and struggling to

identify purpose and meaning in their lives. As demonstrated in Figure 1, seemingly as a result of this search without yet finding answers or purpose, themes of self-doubt, doubting of one's legacy, and feelings of regret also emerged as themes from the low generative data set.

Searching for purpose/meaning. A primary theme within the low generative group was a feeling of disappointment of not quite having found a larger meaningful purpose in their life that they could look back on. This theme was captured by participant #12, as she expressed:

I think that maybe what we could say is that I had expectations of maybe doing a lot better or doing something that would make me unique; stand out of the crowd, someone that others would be in awe of, of something I'd done.

Participant #1 similarly communicated a feeling of uncertainty about searching for a purpose and contributions, as he said:

I'm fairly uncertain about [the future] in that I don't ever see myself completely retiring from what I do. I have an attorney buddy of mine who has been visiting me and we've sort of talked to some extent about it. This is kind of the same boat I'm in: if I wasn't doing this, what would I do? I don't have a tremendous amount of outside interests and I like doing what I do, but I've seen attorneys that stay to long.

Participant #14 shared that he has struggled to identify a larger purpose beyond his family, stating:

I take care of family, including grandkids, but beyond that, almost nothing. I have almost no religious grounding; I'm a member of a church only because my wife is.

If I weren't with her, I wouldn't know. I've come to volunteerism fairly late in

life. I've always walked away from that in past years. Since I've been retired and

I've had the time, I put time into volunteer work, but typically not social causes. I

don't like joining things, I don't like committees. I'm somewhat of a loner, I

suppose, in that sense. So I don't give back, in general. My wife worked on me a

lot to try to soften that edge. So as a member of the church I've tried to participate

and give back. I've tried to be generous to both my children and grandchildren

but when it comes to society at large, I would put myself down as fairly selfish.

Participant #8 felt like she made some differences in others' lives, but held some doubt

about her larger impact and role, stating, "But when he tells that story and you have

somebody who will say that, that I made a difference, even if it was just one day in his

life that would be good, I guess. Probably I have touched other people somewhere along

the way." Participant #11 shared a similar sentiment, discussing how she goes through

the motions in hopes that it provides greater purposed, but still feeling somewhat unsure

about this impact, suggesting, "Well it never hurts to stay busy. And to work your mind.

Trying to find a reason to get up, and get dressed and get out of the house." Participant

#9 expressed a sense that he did some good for others, but he doubts he ultimately made

much of difference in the larger scheme of things, communicating:

I was somewhat active and I think that I probably did more good than harm;

basically, civil rights would've come out the same way if I had never been there.

It's nothing major, but you've got to try to find something that get your juices

going.

Self-doubting. A major theme found in the data among the low generative group was doubt in how they described and saw themselves. Participant #6 demonstrated this in discussing his intelligence. He stated, "Until I found out I was intelligent. I was never sure of that growing up, that I had a brain. I've never been a great student; I'm an average student but I have that drive to do things." Despite describing some significant contributions he'd made in caring for others, participant #1 doubted the impact he is having on those he helps, suggesting, "I don't know that I see myself as a champion for the interest of kids, but I like doing it, so that's the major reason I do it." Participant #9 offered a similar notion about his contributions by down playing the impact he's had on some of the students he's taught, stating, "I think I've been a modestly contributing member of society." Participant #10 similarly reflected, "I think that going to your grave knowing that you're going to die and that your life hasn't been miserable, that you have done some good things, that your children are settled; that makes it easier, I think." Participant #14 shared that he felt inferior in many areas of his life, offering, "I don't have any sports acumen and I'm unnaturally introverted so I don't have any particular claim to social skills. So whatever I've done, I've managed to either get there on my intellectual skills, I suppose." Lastly, participant #12 similarly downplayed her contribution in stating, "I've done nothing earth-shattering."

Doubting of legacy. Participants in the low generative group also had doubts about their legacy, or lack thereof. Participant #9 communicated:

> I had some modest influence on several hundred young folks though college
> teaching. I'm not sure what the effect is or how much influence I had. None of
> [my students] have said to me, "you changed my life," nothing big.

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Participant #1 said simply, "I wish I had done more, I guess." Participant #12 suggested she was disappointed about not having something physical or tangible she could look back on and be proud of, stating, "I'm disappointed that I did not create or accomplish something that was very meaningful, and maybe in a narcissistic way, would've impressed other people. Having something that was going to last forever. An everlasting type of accomplishment." Participant #11 reflected back that she's disappointed she did not impact others at a greater level, stating, "[My husband and I] don't do a whole lot for others…I should have done more."

Regretful. The final theme discovered grounded within the data from the low generative participants was feelings of regret. Participant #12 relayed feelings of disappointment and regret, suggesting she wished she had made some different choices. She stated:

> I'm not trying to put myself down or anything, but I think that my story is so average and kind of dull in many ways. I never really achieved anything famous; I never created anything that was life-changing. In that respect, and maybe it's because of the age I'm in and the mood I'm in at this age, but I do have to say that I'm disappointed.

Participant #1 felt some regret that he was not more effective in helping others, expressing, "I guess I wish, to some extent, that I had done better but I'm not sure that I could say exactly how that could be." In thinking about his death, participant #9, suggested concerns that he may become even more regretful than he currently is. He explained, "I can imagine being really regretful. And who knows? Maybe when I'm really close to death some things will come back to me and I'll think, 'oh, my God, why

didn't I do that?'" For participant #11, her greatest regret was not having children stating, "I had no children, I have adopted several fake children." Lastly participant #12 added:

> I guess what I'm talking about when I'm disappointed is that I never became a famous author and I never accomplished anything for the long term. I'm happy with what I'm doing, in terms of giving back to the community but I feel like it's limited.

Death is Inevitable and Anxiety Provoking

The last shared category/theme identified concerned thoughts and feelings about death. For the most part, participants expressed feelings that death is uncomfortable to think about and face, yet it is inevitable. This sentiment was captured well in highly generative participant #5 when he exclaimed that, "Nobody makes it out of here alive. Arthritis or not, maybe you can take something to make you feel better, but you have to go on until the end. At least that's my feeling." For most of the participants, in both groups, this was an anxiety provoking topic to discuss. However, some of the highly generative participants did take solace and feel at peace about the end. Quotations below are divided into three sections: highly generative participants who felt at peace with eventual death, highly generative participants scared by death, and finally low generative participants who also expressed anxiety about eventual death.

Highly generative and at peace with death. Within this theme seems to be a strong belief in a higher power or certain religious beliefs about the nature of death. Participant #4 communicated her feelings about death, stating, "At the end of my life, I'll have done what I was supposed to do. When I get ready to go, there is nothing for me to

worry about because I'll have done what I wanted to do." Participant #7 added to this notion suggesting her belief in an afterlife provides her peace, expressing:

I know, for instance, that all of the people that have gone on ahead of me, they're in that great cloud of witnesses cheering us on. I firmly believe that and I firmly believe that when I get there, I'll see them and I'll live with them. And that'll be it. And that death is a part of life… But if you think that death can be cut off or can be done away with, you're deluding yourself.

Highly generative with anxiety about death. A theme found among some of the highly generative participants is that they are reticent to leave this world because they feel productive about how they are helping others in this life. In dying they would have to give that up. A quote from participant #3 captures this theme. When asked if she thought whether having lived a very generative life would make facing death any easier she asserted:

Not necessarily; no. After my husband died, my immediate thought was that I really wanted to go ahead and join him, but after that thought passed, I thought, "Well, he's such a courageous person and a strong person." But I remember thinking to myself: "well, if he can do this, surely I can". It's not a simple thing. Not at all. Everybody faces this differently. I don't know how I feel. I try not to worry about it. I try to be more like my son when he was four years old, and one of our family members died, and he wanted to know what was going on, what did that mean. So I was trying to explain it and he says "I'm not doing that. You can do that but I'm not doing that. I am not going to do that." So I'm going to operate on that for the moment. [Laughs].

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Low generative with anxiety about death. The low generative group expressed anxiety and reservation about the inevitability of death. Participant #10 stated:

> Dying is what it is. Cover your face with dirt and hold your breath forever. I think it doesn't overall relate to having led a generative life. From birth to death, we travel through the eternities; there was nothing before, there is nothing after. I'm not sure I really believe that either, but you just don't know. The only way to find out is to die. [laughs]. I won't be happy, I'll go kicking and screaming, but I think that's pretty standard.

Participant #11 spoke of feeling uncomfortable even thinking about death, saying:

> I don't dwell on [thinking about death]. So I don't think giving will make it any easier. It's not the first topic on my agenda. [Laughter.] Everyday is a day shorter; I know that. But, I do - I don't feel it will make a difference. I'd rather just look at it as helping others, not trying to help myself deal with reality- with death.

Participant #12 expressed that there was as much difficulty with aging as dying when she stated:

> I'll tell you one thing for me: it isn't facing death so much as facing a really ugly old age. That worries me a lot more than death. It used to be that there were all of the old people, and they were having their lives, and I didn't relate to it at all. Now... I can look at them and say, "you know what, in 10 years or less, that's me." And that is depressing.

Finally, participant #1 spoke to the difficulty of facing the end of life expressing:

You sort of go along, and death is way off [voice breaks, sobs quietly]. And it's sort of easy then, because you've got time [sobs quietly]. And you still can do things. But when you get the call, then you're running out of time.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that there are significant benefits of having lived a generative life. Moreover, it appears that highly generative adults feel confident in themselves and the legacy they are leaving behind. While highly generative individuals in this study are no more or less likely to encounter hardships in life than the low generative participants, they seem to manage these difficulties very effectively through adaptive coping mechanisms. It also appears that these hardships do not detract from their ability to maintain a strong sense of purpose in life. Furthermore, the results suggest that highly generative older adults were able to maintain a strong sense of confidence in themselves and avoided expressing much doubt about their lives.

Contrary to the highly generative older adults, the low generative older adults seemed to struggle with doubts, both about themselves and their legacy after death. They also expressed feeling regret within their lives. It appears that this sense of self-doubt and regret may stem from a difficulty in identifying a larger sense of purpose within their lives. Rather than having found a strong sense of purpose or meaning in middle adulthood, as many of the highly generative participants spoke to, low generative individuals seem to continue this search into older adulthood.

It was surprising to see that both groups communicated a desire to help and give to others through volunteering and other such activities. It was expected, based on previous research, that this was a primary feature of highly generative adults. It seems though that people, in general, want to make a difference and to help others. However, the low generative older adults did not seem to experience the same level of life-

satisfaction and contentment that the highly generative participants attained from these actions.

The high and low generative groups seemed to differentiate from one another based on two factors. The first factor was oriented around life's purpose and meaning. While both groups seemed to refer to much of their middle adulthood as a time of searching for purpose, the highly generative group claimed to have found a sense of purpose, whereas the low generative participants continued to search or in some cases expressed pessimism about not finding more purpose. The second factor differentiating the two groups was found in attitudes about life events. Participants' attitudes seemed to significantly alter the tone of their narratives. The highly generative group consistently spoke of optimism, resilience, and enthusiasm for life, which allowed them to adapt in healthy ways to the constraints presented to them. The low generative group seemed to be more psychologically injured by hardships, which easily knocked them off a potential life course and prevented them from seeing their life stories and contributions more optimistically.

Perhaps the most difficult element of the grounded data to analyze was the diverse set of expressions about the inevitability of death in the final stage of life. While the low generative group expressed a more consistent difficulty with not wanting to face death, even being reticent to discuss the topic, the high generative group data was not as "clean." On the whole, the data did suggest that the high generative group was somewhat content and accepting of death, consistent with Erikson's theory about ego integrity. However, the highly generative participant responses were quite diverse. Specifically, several highly generative participants balked at the idea of being near death and still felt

as though they were in their prime generative years. In these cases, participants felt they were not ready to begin thinking about death as they still had much to give and provide others with the remainder of their lives. These participants seemed quite connected to the purpose and meaning of their lives, and seemed to have a difficult time letting that go.

The more religiously oriented participants, within the highly generative group, appeared to be those most content with the inevitability of death. These participants often cited a strong belief in God and other religious beliefs as buffering a sense of death anxiety.

Support for Erikson's Stage Model of Development

Just as the early stages of Erikson's model have been supported by modern psychological research, his final two stages of development: generativity vs. stagnation and ego integrity vs. despair, were supported by the results of the current study. The participants who were identified as being highly generative in middle adulthood were consistent with Erikson's description of "ego integrity," in that they were confident and aware of their place in the world, self-assured about the contributions they had made and what they will leave behind after death. Erikson (1982) described successful individuals in middle adulthood as acquiring and embodying wisdom in the final stage of life as an "informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death itself" (p. 61).

Conversely, Erikson (1982) defined despair as a lack of ability to find resolution in life's pursuits that may manifest with anxiety about death, regrets, and depression. The lack of "resolution," that Erikson spoke of, was an accurate description of what was observed in the low generative participants in the present study. Consistent with Erikson's theory, the theme of a lack of resolution manifested within the low generative

group as a confluence of doubts and regrets, along with these participants struggling to identify meaning within their lives. The lack of fulfillment found in middle adulthood with this group seemed to bring on a sense of despair in the last stage of life.

Comparisons to McAdams Findings

Following several studies, McAdams developed a profile for the typical highly generative middle-aged adult. The qualities he found for the generative adult included feeling fortunate and lucky, often having a strong sense of faith, and offering a narrative that frequently included stories of redemption and adapting to hardship via resilient qualities. He also found that the typical generative adult consistently felt as though growth was an on-going process and never an end state. The highly generative sample of older adults in the current study seemed to embody similar qualities that McAdams found in middle-aged adults. Feeling blessed and lucky in their lives was a prominent description of the highly generative participants in the current study. Several of the highly generative participants also pointed to a belief in God and faith as a point of strength in their lives. Furthermore, the highly generative participants frequently spoke to the importance of surrendering control within their lives. And similar to McAdams' findings with generative adults, highly generative older adults in the current study also spoke to experiences of adaptively coping with hardships in their lives in a redemptive fashion. They used optimism and resiliency to transcend obstacles placed before them in their lives.

Adding to McAdams' findings, a sense of purpose in older adults seems to be an important variable in better understanding the construct of generativity. The search for purpose and meaning seems to be an important feature at the end of one's life and seems

to be a large determinant in either experiencing contentment or regret toward the end of life. Those who are successful in middle adulthood, living generative lives, seem to be better equipped to transfer these achievements into a sense of purpose. In contrast, those who are less successful in attaining and recognizing their generative accomplishments in middle adulthood seem to be left with a greater sense of doubt and regret in the last stage of life.

Other Comparisons

The data from this study also fit closely with the findings and ideas of both Vaillant (1977) and the Dalai Lama (1998) discussed earlier in the literature review. Just as Vaillant (1977) suggested that adaptive coping mechanisms were a primary characteristic in living a healthy and successful life, the highly generative participants in the current study exhibited a strong sense of adaptively coping through life's hardships with optimistic attitudes and resilient qualities.

The highly generative participants in the current study are reminiscent of the description from the Dalai Lama's (1998) speech for finding the good life through adaptation and giving to others when he stated, "by going beyond your own problems and taking care of others, you gain inner strength, self-confidence, courage, and a greater sense of calm." The highly generative participants similarly experienced a strong sense of purpose from giving to others and contributing to future generations. From these behaviors, they reported gaining the benefits of feeling more self-assured and having a greater sense of calm and peace in their final stage of life.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. The main weakness relates to the sampling. The sample used in the current study was largely homogenous, limited in size, and affected by the snowball sampling method of identifying and finding participants.

While a diverse sample was sought for the current study, both in socio-economic status (SES) and race/ethnicity, ultimately the sixteen participants used in phase II were of mostly similar SES and ethnicity. Fifteen of the sixteen participants were Caucasian. From the content of the interviews it was also ascertained that most of the participants were college educated and of some affluence, although no formal demographics were collected on these specific variables. A more heterogeneous sample would have provided the study with greater external validity and allowed the results to speak more broadly about generativity in older adults across class and race. Future studies on this topic would benefit from gathering data from more diverse samples.

In that qualitative research is time intensive in data collection and analysis, only sixteen participants (eight in each group) were interviewed. This limitation further reduced the external validity of the results. With more resources and a larger research team, replication with 50-60 participants, would be ideal.

The nature of the snowball sampling procedures, in identifying participants, also presented a limitation in the current study. As a result of this sampling procedure, the study had a large proportion of participants from religious organizations and university settings. McAdams (2006) found highly generative people are often active in religious organizations. As a result of this finding, the current study actively sought out church groups in order to find highly generative participants, which resulted in some self-selection bias. While it is quite possible, and even expected, that there is a population of

more secular highly generative individuals, this study did not access as much of that population.

Another limitation of this study was the nature of identifying participants within the two groups for phase II. While the *Loyola Generativity Scale* is considered the "gold standard" of generativity measures within this body of the literature, it is still only one measure. It would be desirable to have more assessment to isolate and confirm the presence and amount of generativity within participants for such a study. This study would have benefitted from having more precision in identifying the presence of "high" and "low" generativity within the participants assigned to each of these groups. In furthering research on generativity, the goal is to continue to learn more about the qualities and features that make up this construct. The hope is that qualitative studies, like the current study, utilize the power of in-depth interviews to detect important themes that may increase knowledge about the construct in order to further develop measurement tools to more reliably assess for generativity.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study used a grounded theory qualitative methodology in line with the suggestions of Morrow & Smith (2000) that such is the best approach when trying to develop and expand the understanding of new theoretical constructs. Investigating the manifestations of generativity in the final stage of life meets this criterion. The findings from this study established a theoretical foundation of themes expected to be found in high and low generative older adults. Future research could test the presence of these themes and characteristics with larger samples. It may be beneficial for future studies to study generativity in the older adult population using quantitative research. This would

allow for researchers to have larger and more diverse samples of both high and low generative participants. Themes identified in the current study could serve as the theoretical basis for creating targeted items to confirm and establish further theory about these populations. Future research in this area could also serve to further test the connective link in Erikson's final two stages of development, as so few studies have attended to these final two stages of his developmental model, despite the fact that these stages encompass such a large proportion of the lifespan. Like McAdams (2006) with generative adults, future research may also develop a more detailed profile of the typical high and low generative older adult. Furthermore, while most of the research on generativity has focused on highly generative individuals, a continued exploration of low generative individuals would serve to provide a broader understanding of the many layers of the generativity construct.

With larger samples, this body of research would benefit from developing a more nuanced understanding of generativity within individuals. Specifically, future studies could analyze generativity across multiple different groups and variables. For example, gender differences in the expression of generativity between older adult males and females, as first hinted at by Peterson and Stewart (1993) with younger populations, could be a fruitful area to further investigate. Also, as previously discussed, studying differences in generativity using marriage status as a potential independent variable could produce a deeper understanding about the relationship between Erikson's final three psychosocial stages.

Lastly, the body of generativity research could benefit from continuing to tease apart the nature of the relationship between generativity and death anxiety. Erikson

highlighted death anxiety as a prominent feature of "despair" in his model's final life stage. The current study identified three different themes in the relationship between death anxiety and generativity, however still struggled to more fully arrive at a clear understanding of the relationship between these two variables.   A larger sample and more focused investigation on this specific aspect of generativity could produce greater knowledge about where adults might place their focus in middle adulthood to reduce death anxiety toward the end of life.

Implications for Practice

The findings from this study lend support to the benefit of an existential focus in therapy, especially therapy that explores making meaning of one's life. It seems beneficial for individuals to arrive in the final stage of their life having found a sense of purpose and awareness for what brings meaning to their lives. While this more "meta processing" is not always necessarily sought out by therapy clients, the results of this study suggest that taking a step back from everyday stress and assessing the meaningful aspects of one's life, is beneficial for people.

Relationships with friends and family were the most frequently cited meaningful aspects of life by both high and low generative individuals in the current study. Thus it is believed that a relational focus in therapy, specifically the encouraging of seeking, finding, and building relationships in life, is of great importance in clinical practice for counselors to attend to with clients. Furthermore, it may also be beneficial for counselors to attend to current relationships in clients' lives, perhaps by utilizing marriage and family therapy more frequently throughout treatment. By including multiple members of clients' relational systems in the room, the hope would be that clients could strengthen

and increase connectivity with others, which would invite greater meaning and purpose into their lives.

Finally, the findings from the current study also support a narrative approach to therapy. As the late Michael White, and his contemporary David Epston, espoused, our identities are shaped by the stories we communicate to ourselves and others. As was found in the current study, the highly generative participants who communicated an optimistic and resilient narrative were adaptive in developing healthy coping mechanisms for combating the inevitable hardships of life. It would be beneficial for therapists to help clients externalize problems (as encouraged in narrative therapy), and not see hardships as fatalistic or intrinsic to their person. This may help teach and encourage clients to let go of inevitable difficulties, and not internalize problems, which then can manifest in the form of nagging doubt, regret, and negative self-talk.

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List of all Themes Found in Open Coding

Ability to sacrifice	Creativity	Finished products	Love unto others	Restlessness
Accomplishment focused	Critical thinking	Flat affect/tone	Love, not violence	Running out of time
Accomplishment via intellect	Curiosity	Fundraising	Love for God	Sacrifice for others
Actions must benefit self	Cynical	Generativity buffers death anxiety	Machiavellian	Say yes more than no
Adaptive coping	Death a part of life	Gentleness	Making most of time left	Science
Adaptively	Death anxiety	Give is to receive	Mentorship	Searching for purpose
Adventurous	Declining energy with age	Giving is purpose	Mindfulness	Self deprecating nature
Adventure seeking	Desire for purpose	Good life	Modesty	Self exploration/growth
Aggressiveness	Desirous of fame	Grandiose	Moral net positive	Self-doubting
Alternative medicine	Difficulty facing aging	Gratefulness	Morality	Self-indulgent
Altruism	Difficulty with the unknown	Heaven in afterlife	Need to help	Selfishness
Anti-capitalistic	Disappointment in human nature	Hedonistic	Non-materialistic	Shallowness
Anxious	Disappointments	Helping impoverished	Non-status driven	Shared hardships
Attachment focused	Distrustful of others	Helping others	Not afraid of death	Social anxiety
Avoid thinking of death	Do no harm	Hope	Nurturing	Social responsibility
Being passed by in world	Do what you enjoy	Hospitable	Optimism	Socially judged by others
Belief in God	Don't sweat the small stuff	Humility	Overcoming hardship	Southern pride
Belief in moral compass	Driven	Humor	Pessimistic	Spiritual seeker
Blessed/lucky	Education as a value	Independent	Planner	Spiritual self
Calm/content	Empathy	Introversion	Political advocacy	Spirituality
Care for family	Empowerment	Lack of confidence in legacy	Positive attitude	Strategic
Ceding control	Enthusiasm for life	Lack of purpose beyond career	Positive change	Strong in reframing
Charitable	Environmentally conscious	Lack of generativity	Productive	Survival
Church	Envy	Lack of insight	Protect the vulnerable	Taking care of others
Community	Epistemology	Lack of meaning	Proud	Trauma/hardship
Compassion	Equality	Laid back	Redemption	Uncertainty
Competitive	Eudemonic happiness	Liberalism	Regret	Vanity
Concern for future generations	Expectations unmet	Life as a teacher	Rejection from others	Volunteering
Concern for others	Faith	Life is hard	Relationships to others	Well cared for by others
Confident with Legacy	Family first	Life is important	Reliability as a person	Women's rights
Content about death	Family is most generative act	Likes large groups	Resilience	
Contribution of value	Fatherhood	Love for partner	Respect for others	
Controlling	Find what excites you	Love of children	Responsible	

Loyola Generativity Scale (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992)

For each of the following statements, please indicate how often the statement applies to you, by marking either a "0," "1," "2," or "3" in the space in front.

Mark "0" if the statement <u>never</u> applies to you.

Mark "1" if the statement only <u>occasionally</u> or <u>seldom</u> applies to you.

Mark "2" if the statement applies to you <u>fairly often</u>.

Mark "3" if the statement applies to you <u>very often</u> or <u>nearly always</u>.

1. I try to pass along the knowledge I have gained through my experiences.
2. I do not feel that other people need me.
3. I think I would like the work of a teacher.
4. I feel as though I have made a difference to many people.
5. I do not volunteer to work for a charity.
6. I have made and created things that have had an impact on other people.
7. I try to be creative in most things that I do.
8. I think that I will be remembered for a long time after I die.
9. I believe that society cannot be responsible for providing food and shelter for all homeless people.
10. Others would say that I have made unique contributions to society.
11. If I were unable to have children of my own, I would like to adopt children.
12. I have important skills that I try to teach others.
13. I feel that I have done nothing that will survive after I die.
14. In general, my actions do not have a positive effect on other people.
15. I feel as though I have done nothing of worth to contribute to others.
16. I have made many commitments to many different kinds of people, groups, and activities in my life.
17. Other people say that I am a very productive person.
18. I have a responsibility to improve the neighborhood in which I live.
19. People come to me for advice.
20. I feel as though my contributions will exist after I die.

APPENDIX C

Life Story Interview (with modifications for current study) (McAdams, Diamond, de St. Aubin, and Mansfield, 1997)

I. Life Chapters

II. Important Persons

III. Dominant Theme or message of the Story

IV. Future Chapters

V. How have the generative acts of your life impacted how you feel about your life now?

VI. Do you think being a generative person makes facing dying any easier?