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

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We are ready to "set the stage" for our in-depth analysis of each deep caring role. We begin this analysis by turning to the word "stage" itself--a word that has several different meanings when the nature of deep caring is being addressed. We use this concept in two different, though related, ways. The first is most often embraced by developmental psychologists, where *Stage* refers to a phase in a person's life – like the stages of launching a rocket into space. We propose that each of the four deep caring roles of generativity is prominent at a particular stage in our lives.

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

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

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

> McAdams and his colleagues, while remaining somewhat committed to the idea of midlife salience of generativity, have recently recognized the difficulty of differentiating between generativity as a personal attribute, which may become particularly salient in

middle adulthood as a consequence of social timing, and generativity as a relatively distinct developmental stage . . . To this end, they have begun an intensive study of adults characterized as generative, irrespective of age.

While this predicted broadening of perspective on generativity was offered more than 15 years ago, we see little evidence of it appearing in the subsequent literature; we believe that the four role models of generativity being offered in this set of essays begin to fulfill this prediction and potential.

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

Throughout our set of essays, we will draw on this analogy to theater and will describe four roles of generativity that can be played by anyone, at any point in their life. While, as McAdams has suggested, a specific expression of generativity might be more commonly found at a particular point in our life as a result of societal expectations ("social timing" in the words of McAdams), we will argue that anyone can be generative in one way or another at any time in their life. While we don't deal specifically with cross-cultural comparisons in this set of essays, the emerging of generativity during various stages in life might be particularly the case if adult development in a variety of world cultures is explored.

The Four Deep Caring Roles

In keeping with our use of the theatrical metaphor, we make extensive use of the term "role" as we describe four closely related parts that people play when they care deeply and are being generative. The term "role" is being used because we believe generativity is not just about a particular way of thinking, or about a specific kind of maturation (e. g., a change or improvement in one's needs, feelings or beliefs). While many developmental researchers focus on thinking or cognitive maturation, we focus on the role played by generativity as an activity or set of activities. A generative role is played-out not just when we think about caring or when we need

to be more caring; the role of generativity is enacted when we *actively participate in deep caring*.

The "stage" is the setting in which we engage the generativity role. This role undoubtedly is influenced by changes in the way we think and feel, and the emerging needs and motivations in our mature life. But generativity is more than this. It is about playing a role in relationship to other people. It is about playing a caring role. It is about action, not just thinking good thoughts. It is about feeling gratified in having done something that tangibly benefits people.

With this articulation of our perspective on the roles of generativity as active engagements in the world, we identify four roles of generativity that we believe are played-out in our lives:

> Role <u>One:</u> raising children, enacting a project, or performing a specific job in an organization.

> Role <u>Two:</u> mentoring, leading, and leaving a legacy inside an organization.

> Role <u>Three</u>: leaving a legacy outside family and organization by fostering and ensuring the maintenance of a tradition and/or preserving heritage.

> Role <u>Four</u>: working on behalf of a community or broader society, ensuring the welfare and prosperity of people living in this community or society.

While we will spend considerable time exemplifying each of these four roles, we begin with a simple illustration: The first role of generativity is tangibly demonstrated in the offering of food to our family. We have engaged in a project (cooking a meal) that will benefit our children and other family members by providing nutrition, gratifying their senses, and creating a setting in which familial conversations can take place. Meals often provide sanctuaries in which certain kinds of words can be stated and in which nonverbal communication is prominent. Many religions make use of food and special meals to portray, honor, or invoke spiritual presence in a family setting.

So, what happens when we want to convey to the next generation what we have learned about cooking? We prepare and distribute recipes. If we are particularly ambitious and are skilled and knowledgeable cooks, we write cookbooks or even host a cooking show on a cable channel. The

goal is to spread and sustain our knowledge by teaching the next generation or our current generation. This is the second role of generativity.

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

This third role of generativity can also be enacted when we seek to honor a person who has won the most baking contests at the annual county fair over the past 30 years. We collect baking recipes from many people in our community and assemble them in a cookbook named after the baking champion. Researchers in many fields have been doing this for many years. They honor a colleague who has made major contributions to their field by assembling a series of essays that focus on the themes and findings for which their honored colleague is noted. These assembled essays are given a fancy, Germanic name— they are called "Festschrifts." This is big time Generativity Three.

There is a fourth way in which generativity is enacted on behalf of the culinary arts. We can engage our community in the enhancement of these arts. We start a recipe-sharing club. We ask a chef in town to come to one of our homes and cook a meal for some members of our community. At the same time, the chef offers some tips about cooking and shares her recipe at the end of the meal. We pay for the food and chef, and the chef donates the money to a charitable cause. The chef finds the event to be personally gratifying, and her restaurant gets some publicity.

Generativity Four is also enacted when we start, manage, or advocate for a program that provides left-over food from restaurants and grocery stores to homeless families in our community. Called by many names (often "Urban Harvest"), these food-sharing programs are a "god-send" for many destitute people and local shelters. In some large cities, it is estimated that food not used by

restaurants and not sold by groceries could meet all of the nutritional needs for every homeless person living there. It is only a matter of legal protection (the so-called "Good Samaritan" laws) and finding the right people and distribution networks to get food to these people. Typically, the costs of distribution are offset by restaurant and grocery store savings in reduced garbage services. It comes down to a matter of generative services on behalf of the community's ultimate welfare. It comes down to the enactment of the fourth role of generativity.