Deep Caring XXX: Searching for the Generative Society

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It is important to explore and seek the origins of generativity inside an individual's psyche and inside the spirited and soulful processes engaged by generative people. And it is also critical to look at the environment or context in which generativity is identified and nurtured. Just as we found in exploring the nature of Sage leadership in our study of the two Western Nevada County communities in California, the generative person is encouraged (if not created) by the community in which he or she lives and works. Much as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a community to bring out the multiple roles of generativity in oneself. Our society gives birth to deep caring.

Fortunately, we are not alone in considering society to be a birthplace of generativity and deep caring. Dan McAdams and his fellow connoisseurs of generativity have edited an entire book on *The Generative Society* (St. Aubin, McAdams and Kim, 2004). We will highlight several findings and proposals offered in this book, especially as related to the four roles of generativity we have introduced in this set of essays. We will then turn briefly to the broader consideration of the social-economic structure of a society and the important interplay between social-class and generativity. We conclude with our own thoughts about the nature of a generative society, gaining insights from the generative women and men we interviewed during the Sage project.

In their introductory chapter, St. Aubin, McAdams and Kim (2004, p. 5) propose that: "Generativity is shaped by political, economic, religious and cultural forces. Furthermore, it makes good sense to consider how social institutions themselves, and even societies writ large, may or may not function in generative ways." Like fellow observers of social structure and personal character in their description of the "good society" (Robert Bellah and others, 1991), St. Aubin, McAdams and Kim describe the conditions needed to encourage and maintain generativity and to overcome what another insightful social observer (Christopher Lasch) identifies as a "culture of narcissism." (Lasch, 1991).

In their search for the ingredients to be found in a generative society, McAdams and Logan (2004, p. 18) turn to a distinction first offered by Bakan in 1966 between *agency* and *communion*. On the one hand,

generativity is all about extending the influence and appearance of one's self beyond one's death. This resides at the heart of generativity. It is about the search for immortality first identified by Plato. This embrace of generativity is aligned with *agency*: "the organismic tendency toward self-expression, self-expansion, self-protection, self-development, and all other goals promoting the individual self." (McAdams and Logan, 2004, p. 18) We find this generative agency to often hover on the edge of narcissism and, in its extreme, is a source of individualism and the kind of self-absorption of which Christopher Lasch (1991) wrote in *The Culture of Narcissism*.

While many of the generativity examples we have offered are founded on this self-oriented agency, we propose along with McAdams and Logan that generativity (as displayed through all four roles) can only be sustained if agency is counter-balanced with *communion*: "the organismic tendency toward the self with others, merging the self in community, giving up the self for the good of something beyond the self." (McAdams and Logan, 2004, p. 18)

It is this further extension of self in time and space which enables us to be fully capable of caring deeply. We need agency to move beyond mere empathy, and we need communion to see how caring must be viewed from what we previously identified as seeing the "big picture" when engaging in caring activities. Furthermore, we propose, along with McAdams and Logan, the successful interplay between agency and communion requires that one is participating in a generative society.

To focus more specifically, we note that throughout McAdams and Logan's *The Generative Society* book, attention turns to all four generative roles-even if not specifically identified as such.

Generativity One

First, a generative society is one in which parenting (Generativity One) is fully supported in terms of public policy, economic incentives, and honoring of the role: "What makes a culture generative? The first and most obvious answer to the question is this: The culture creates an atmosphere in which children survive in the most basic physical sense." (Kotre, 2004, p. 37)

Generativity One, however, is much more than just meeting survival needs. It is about the creation of a child or a project that is robust, that is filled with energy and purpose. A robust child, as McAdams and

Logan note, is reared by a particular kind of generative parent: "generativity is associated with an *authoritative* parenting style." (McAdams and Logan, 2004, p. 21). They contrast this style of parenting with authoritarian, permissive, and disengaged styles.

The authoritative parent cares deeply about her children--to the extent that she provides boundaries while also offering freedom. She provides knowledge and guidance while also encouraging her child to explore, stumble, learn and grow as an independent, courageous human being. Similarly, a robust project is one in which the generative founder and leader provides boundaries and freedom and offer knowledge and guidance, while also encouraging those working with her on the project to explore, stumble, learn and help the project grow with courage.

The irony, as Kai Erikson (Erik's daughter) has noted, is that, on the one hand, this authoritative parenting and leadership requires a focused concentration on the child's and project's welfare and continuing development: "[T]o provide one's children with whatever leverage in life one can afford to bestow on them is a different kind of activity--and may be drawn from a different chamber of the human mind, so to speak--than looking out for the welfare of a whole generation." (Erikson, 2004, p. 55)

While Generativity Two, Three and Four require a broadening of scope in terms of both time and space, Generativity One especially requires a caring focus. In Japan, this form of focused parental generativity is called *amae*: "To achieve *amae*, or the child's 'basking in another's indulgence . . . Japanese mothers cater to each need of their child . . .' The behaviors associated with Japanese parenting captured by the term *amae* are highly aligned with the values of cultural collectivism that exist in Japan." (St. Aubin, 2004, p. 68) We can point to the same focused attention when describing the successful start-up of a project. We are all aware of the singular attention that is needed when we try to begin something new.

On the other hand, for all of this to occur--for there to be a chamber of the human mind that has a Generative One focus--the parent, child and project must find support in the society where the child is being reared or the project is being initiated. More specifically, the generative parent or founder must have a vision of the future that is inspiring and filled with hope; a generative society helps the parent and founder find this inspiring vision.

As we have seen in apocalyptic movies, such as *The Road Warrior*, a society without a future is one in which there is no generativity at the most basic level: caring for and about children. Why raise a child or start a new project if the world is unlikely to survive in a manner that is conducive to the flourishing of this child or project? Put simply, Generativity One requires a generative society that supports the care and feeding of children and new generative ventures.

Generativity Two

Generativity Two is inherently enacted within an institutional setting. It is about extending the space of care beyond that of a specific child or project and about ensuring that our actions are sustained by other people. Mentoring, motivating and monitoring (along with the other M's) are engaged within an organizational setting. This setting, in turn, is deeply influenced by the societal structure in which it exists. Two prominent organizational theorists, Maturana and Varela (1992), have even suggested that the boundaries drawn between an organization and its environment are artificial. Adopting an organizational perspective called *autopoises*, Maturana and Varela propose that all viable organizations are open systems and that an organization is primarily designed to meet the unique challenges of the environment in which it exists. Thus, from their perspective, a generative organization requires a generative society.

At one level, the generative society is one in which men and women are encouraged to mentor, motivate, and engage the other activities we have associated with Generativity Two. It is a society in which the individual dreams of those being mentored and motivated are tied to the dreams and vision of the organization, and these dreams and visions, are, in turn, tied to the vision of the society:

> The mentor is a host who welcomes an initiate into a new world; an exemplar who provides a model for emulation; a teacher who passes on skills; a counsellor who provides guidance and moral support; a sponsor who facilitates a protégé's advancement; and, above all, someone who believes in a young person's Dream. (Levinson, et al., 1978). To this description we must add what is in the interest of culture: that in their role as teachers, the very best mentors see that crafts are passed on with integrity, that the art in question is not compromised. They also seek out students in whom special talent, special virtue, or special ideas are struggling to emerge; for cultures need the fresh eyes and the blood that these students possess. (Kotre, 2004, pp. 43-44)

In this quotation by Kotre, we find not only the role of mentor as acknowledger and sustainer of another person's dream and vision, but also as acknowledger and sustainer of new ideas and appreciator of fresh talent and perspective. Given this broader role for the Generative Two mentor, a society is required in which new projects (Generativity One) can expand and in which innovation and risk-taking is given its due (as in a recent TV ad that describes how scary new ideas are and how we must not condemn or isolate them). Building on the vision-based support for Generativity One, the generative society articulates a future that encourages a deep caring for the next generation of leaders and the continuing empowerment of new and old members of an organization so it can adopt to the changing condition of this environment and can remain agile in the midst of complexity, unpredictability and turbulence (Bergquist, 1993).

Generativity Three

The role to be played by a generative society in the encouragement of the third generativity role is also salient. In his identification of the forms that a generative society must take to encourage generativity, Kotre points to mentoring and "the keeper of meaning"; he references, in this regard, the work of George Vaillant. As noted by Vaillant and ourselves, the guardians of tradition and heritage must be valued in this role by the society in which they dwell. The parade, monument and museum do not exist in a vacuum.

The consumers of Generativity Three products and services do not live in isolation. They are members of a specific society, and they help build the museums, collect the valuable artifacts, and march in the parades. Kotre even notes that Generativity Three can be engaged, often inadvertently, by those people in a specific society who become "living legends" in their own time. Being honored by other members of their society as saints (Mother Teresa) or geniuses (Einstein), these men and women exemplify the values that are to be safe-guarded and perpetuated. Generativity Three, then, is intricately interwoven with the propensity of generative societies to identify, appreciate and sustain these values.

There is yet another level at which Generativity Three and the generative society interact. This level is concerned not just with the keeper of meaning, but also with the fundamental construction of the reality in which the society operates. Values, traditions and even fundamental perspectives are guarded and passed on by Generative Three leaders and by the society in which they live. The fundamental memories

of a society are shaped by the Generative Three guardians. The work of Karl Mannheim (father of the sociology of knowledge) is relevant here:

> To explain the continuity and change between generations, Mannheim proposes structures of memory at the individual and social levels . . . According to Mannheim, there are two ways by which people incorporate a cultural experience in social memories: (a) as consciously recognized models to determine the direction of their behaviors or (b) as unconsciously condensed patterns. (Imada, 2004, p. 86)

McAdams and Logan have noted in their own analysis of the generative society, that collective memories (whether they be consciously recognized or unconsciously condensed) tend to be forged in mythic or real narratives that are repeatedly shared in a generative society. These narratives form the basis of our individual and collective identity:

> A growing number of philosophers, psychologists, social scientists, and social critics have argued in recent years that adults living in modern societies strive to provide their lives with some sense of unity and purpose by constructing self-defining life stories . . . Indeed Erikson's conception of identity can be reconceived from a narrative point of view. (McAdams and Logan, 2004, p. 24)

Kotre offers a similar perspective on the nature of a generative society or culture: "What does a culture need to keep the young connected to its traditions, even as it welcomes youthful reform? What will lead the young to create a generative *identity* . . . and arouse in them what is now called *generative desire*?" (Kotre, 2004, p. 39) He identifies five type of generative stories that create generative desire and sustain a culture and tradition: (1) the epic, (2) the origin myth, (3) story of real life, (4) the parable and (5) the cautionary tale. (Kotre, 2004, pp. 40-42). Each of these stories is told by a Generative Three narrator and supported by a generative society.

In Kotre's identification of the generative story and narrator, we find an interesting and important blending of the second and third roles of generativity. As noted by McAdams and Logan (2004, pp.19-20), in most traditional societies "generativity may take the form of passing on the eternal truths and wisdom of the ages that are embedded in religious and civic traditions." Even in a secular society that

often shows little respect for civic traditions, there is storytelling and the honoring of "living legends" and mythic images through film, novels and other art forms. There is, in other words, the opportunity of a generative society to emerge and support Generativity Three actions.

Generativity Four

In describing the conditions that create and sustain Generativity Four in a society, the various authors of *The Generative Society* understandably focused primarily on the volunteer services being offered by men and women. We have similarly focused on the volunteer services offered by civically engaged Sage leaders--especially our Emerging Sage leaders--who engage the role of Generativity Three through their work as paid employees in human service agencies.

The most extended description of Generativity Four in *The Generative Society* comes from the chapter written by Snyder and Clary (2004, in which they report on their study of volunteerism as related to generativity. Snyder and Clary (2004, p. 237) identify six psychological functions that are served by involvement in volunteer work: (1) expressing altruistic and humanitarian values, (2) promoting understanding about oneself and other people, (3) fostering social functions, (4) promoting career development for the volunteer and other people, (5) reducing feelings of guilt on the part of the volunteer about being more fortunate than other people and (6) increasing a sense of self-esteem and growth on the part of the volunteer.

The first, second, fifth and sixth of these functions seem to be closely related to our previous discussion regarding the motivations associated with Generativity Four as well as the benefits derived from Generativity Four-based civic engagement. A society can be generative if it provides its citizens the opportunity to offer meaningful service to other people that is soulfully gratifying. The source of generativity for some people might be what McAdams refers to as "redemption" and what Snyder and Clary refer to as a guilt-reducing function. We pay forward our good fortune by being of service to those who are less fortunate. Snyder and Clary suggest that civic engagement (volunteerism) can also be of more practical benefit by providing an opportunity for the volunteer to learn new skills and gain greater knowledge through engaging in novel activities and providing different forms of leadership.

The function that might be most easily overlooked is "social function." As many of our Sage leaders noted, their civic engagement provides an opportunity to work with men and women who share their interests and hold similar values and priorities: "[I]n both activities [volunteerism and generativity] we find human beings attempting to connect with others, both others who exist and others who will one day exist, and in doing so, contribute to their communities and to their society." (Snyder and Clary, 2004, p. 235)

We also want to add another Generativity Four role that would probably not formally qualify as "volunteerism," since it is very informal and often not given much thought by those who are generative. Generative men and women are conveners of informal small groups of "fellow travelers" that meet every day or once a week to simply talk about what is happening in their lives or in their communities. One of us occasionally has breakfast at the nearby McDonalds and observes that four to six men and women in their 70s and 80s are always there sitting together at the same cluster of tables. The elderly mother of one of our colleagues similarly meets every day with other old timers near her home in New Jersey, where she has lived for more than 80 years. One of our brothers meets once a week with other guys in their New England town, and a colleague meets every Thursday morning with six other men at a restaurant in Nevada County.

These gatherings would not occur if there were not settings in which to meet with women and men who share similar values. Several years ago, Ron Kitchens, executive at a community bank in Kalamazoo Michigan, wrote about "community capital" (Kitchens, Gross, and Smith,2008). He offered the metaphor of filling a bowl with rocks, pebbles and sand. When speaking to other people about community capital, Kitchens brings out a large bowl and asks one of the meeting attendees to fill the bowl with rocks contained in a bag.

When this task has been completed, Ron asks another attendee to gather pebbles from another bag and continue to fill the bowl; apparently, the bowl is not really filled until the pebbles are added. Kitchens now asks yet another member of the audience to open a third bag that is filled with sand. Remarkably, there is still room in the bowl for the sand in addition to the rocks and pebbles. Kitchens suggests that the "rocks" in a community are the major institutions that provide jobs and financial stability (for example, industrial and financial institutions). The pebbles are those institutions that provide nutrition,

human services and education. These "pebble" institutions stitch the community together and make it a place where people want to live. Governmental agencies provide some of the pebbles, but also some of the rocks.

It is the "sand," however, that makes the community truly come alive. The sand is to be found in the daily interactions among members of the community: the gatherings in local restaurants, the art and craft fairs, the weekly farmers market, the local concerts. We suggest that civic engagement and volunteer services of all kinds can be found operating at all three levels in a community -- and that the "sandy" forms of generativity service are just as important as the rock and pebble roles of Generativity Four that are engaged through formally organized volunteer services and leadership in nonprofit organizations.

It is through the interplay of community rocks, pebbles and sand that generativity is likely to flourish. The institutional rocks must provide the resources and stability to ensure that there is legitimate generative hope for the future in this community. In the case of Kalamazoo Michigan, this building of hope was critical, for like many American cities in the "rust belt" the economy was rapidly deteriorating. Few jobs were available. As a community banker, Kitchens had to provide smart and timely financial support that would aid the recovery. The pebble institutions are also critical. People must be fed and cared for, and the citizenry must be educated about the complex challenges that the community faces-- otherwise, civic engagement and Generativity Four will be short-lived, misplaced and misunderstood. The sandy generativity fills in the community's gaps, providing the glue that holds it together even during times of hardship and insecurity about the future. The generative society, then, would seem to be a bowl filled with Kitchen's rocks, pebbles and sand.

As we conclude our brief exploration of Generativity Four as it is enhanced in a generative society, we note that the distinction between Generativity Three and Four is often not clearly drawn; both involve civic engagement. Both are motivated by a desire to extend values and benefits to the next generation: "Clearly, many of the activities that are labeled as volunteer work fit these definitions of generativity. Many of the activities of volunteers cross generational lines. . . .As such, the activities of volunteers may contribute to continuity and linkages across generations." (Snyder and Clary, 2004, p. 223)

The distinction we draw between Generativity Three and Generativity Four concerns the primary focus of each: Generativity Three centers on expanding the time dimension, while Generativity Four centers on expanding the space dimension. We provide caring linkages across generations by bringing the past into the present so that it can be available to the next (Generativity Three); and we expand our care to other people and to the next generation by engaging in activities that improve community services (Generativity Four). The extension of care in time and space best operates in a generative society -- otherwise the extension is hard to achieve and often short lived. Monuments will crumble, stories are no longer told, the poor are no longer served, children are ignored, and humans live in isolating silos.