

What is generativity?

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The generative stage, developed by Erik Erikson (1950) as part of his eight life stages of development, is when people focus on the greater impact they have on their immediate world (family, work, community) and their key relationships (FaHSCIA 2009). The generative approach is still relevant today and especially relevant when working with men. Generativity involves the biological and parental capacity to care for the next generation and demands the ability to give something of you to another person. It also includes a societal expression that is historically reflected in the support that people give to Service Clubs, Lifeline, SES and the Rural Fire Service. Other societal expressions include where people may instruct apprentices, act as a guide, mentor or coach kids, young people or adults.

Research indicates that between 30 to 45 years, our need for achievement decreases and our need for influence or impact on some community increases (Vaillant 2002). Besides being applied to human development for men, women and fathering, generativity has had a significant contribution to understanding aging. The Harvard Study of Adult Development reviewed societal trends in the last 50 years and concluded that generativity is the best indicator for healthy aging. The study concluded that “the old were put on the earth to nurture the young” (Vaillant 2002:115). However this learning is not about just giving to others but is found also in the receiving. In a matched study, Pagano et al (2004) identified that similar generative impacts existed in research about recovery from alcohol addiction using the Alcoholics Anonymous approach. Their research indicated that people thrived most when they invested something of themselves into helping someone else (being a sponsor) independent of how many AA meetings they attended. Generativity is powered by the motivation to “invest one’s substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self” (Vaillant 2002:115).

Generativity uses the concept of forces where ego strengths are developed through life in response to challenges experienced. The development of strengths (hopes and dreams) and tensions (fears and anxieties) complement other strength based and resilience approaches that are used today in community services/health practice. When working with men, motivation to change is best mobilised when the focus is **not primarily** on inner self reflections but on generative reflections.

Generativity mobilizes the following ego strengths	Maximizing generativity reduces the impacts of trauma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control and safety • Attachment and connections • Identity, meaning and purpose • Dignity and value 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear and anxiety • Grief and loss • Distrust and hopelessness • Guilt and shame

Generativity is ‘caring for something outside of yourself’ or involves taking care of the next generation. Generativity is best understood as a response to perceived vulnerability. While children are often the strongest expression of generativity in people’s lives, it has other expressions throughout a lifetime. Some of these connections are:

- Children (one of the strongest expressions of generativity)
- partner (however this is often minimised when partners are viewed as being more powerful)
- service clubs - Service Clubs, Lifeline, SES and the Rural Fire Service
- sport – if your involvement provides rewards beyond the immediate reward of competition and exercise
- employment context (if you identify the importance of making a difference in your job)
- gardening
- mates (other people they identify with in a similar situation)
- other key relationships (particularly where vulnerability may exist) i.e. a sibling with a disability
- wider community interests
- dogs/animals/pets.