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Generativity, ego integrity and the attainment of aging well

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Abstract

This chapter explores the different ways in which the psychosocial connection between generativity and ego integrity tasks occurs, and how they contribute to achieving successful aging. Firstly, we examine the expression of generativity in later life, highlighting that it cannot simply be seen as an extension of generativity during midlife. Next, we analyze how the dynamic balance between ego integrity and despair is effectively achieved and resolved. Additionally, we discuss the significance of engaging in life review activities to varying degrees, as well as the generative accomplishments made during the transitional adult period and throughout old age, which serve as fundamental pathways towards a fulfilling and integrated life. Lastly, we propose a potential characterization of integrative generativity, one that reflects the unique development and expression of generative potential in late life, adapted to the opportunities and limitations of this particular phase in the life cycle.

Keywords: generativity, aging, later life, ego integrity, despair, grand-generativity, legacy

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"With this, I conclude my story, not written out of bitterness but out of pain, with the intention of being able to assist those women, both young and old, who may find themselves in a situation similar to mine. My hope is that they don't make the same mistakes I have made and to encourage them not to be afraid to speak up." (Carmen, in the epilogue of her autobiographical book, "Alas de mariposa" ("Butterfly Wings"), 2019)

Carmen, a retired teacher, published a book at the age of 85 in which she narrated her life story as "a story of love, heartbreak, and personal triumph". The primary objective of her endeavor was to establish coherence and order among the significant events of her life, particularly those related to her unhappy marital experiences. Upon completing her book, Carmen experienced a newfound appreciation for her self-worth as an individual, recognizing the potential value of her transformative journey for others. She felt an overwhelming sense of fulfillment and described herself as feeling "agile and light as a butterfly." This profound interconnection between the essence of a fulfilled life and the lessons it imparts to individuals in earlier stages of the life cycle represents a distinctive experience of later life. In psychosocial terms, it implies to explore the reciprocal influence between the tasks of generativity and ego integrity and how such tasks contribute to achieve a successful and satisfactory experience of aging.

This connection aligns with the Eriksonian epigenetic principle (Erikson & Erikson, 1997), which posits that each developmental stage builds upon the psychological outcomes of preceding stages and contributes to the resolution of subsequent stages. Furthermore, the resolution of a particular stage is assumed to exert the most significant influence on the immediately succeeding stage. Similarly, stages exist in some form before and after their prominent ascendancy during a critical period. Building upon these foundational principles, this chapter aims to investigate two interrelated inquiries. Firstly, it will analyze how generativity continues to evolve beyond middle age and undergoes reconfiguration during the final phase of life. Secondly, it will explore the role of generative themes in addressing the developmental task of late life, characterized as a dialectic interplay between ego integrity and despair. Drawing upon the evidence examined, the chapter will ultimately present a characterization of "integrative

generativity" specific to late life, which serves as a vital component in maintaining a sense of vitality and engagement throughout the aging process.

Generativity in later life

When Erikson proposed his theory in the 1950s, and even when he left his latest writings, in the 1980, the later life he witnessed (and theorized) was way different to the one we are experiencing now. If we take 60 years old as its onset (as Erikson did), or retirement as its defining transitional event, later life was a relatively short period of life in which older people (and particularly men) were expected to rest after a busy working life, many times in physically demanding jobs. Many older people experienced early weakening declines and disabling illnesses and, from a psychosocial point of view, they did not have any clear role in families and communities. In that context, contemplative activities and a certain desire to disengage from society might have sense.

When Erikson proposed his theory in the 1950s, and even in his later writings in the 1980s, the later life he observed and theorized about was significantly different from the one we are currently experiencing. In Erikson's framework, later life was considered a relatively short period that began around the age of 60 (in Erikson own words) or retirement, during which older individuals were expected to rest after a physically demanding working life. Many older people faced early declines in physical strength and disabling illnesses. From a psychosocial perspective, they did not have clearly defined roles within their families and communities. In this context, engaging in contemplative activities and desiring to disengage from society seemed meaningful.

However, in recent decades, there have been substantial changes in the profile of older individuals, especially in developed and industrialized countries. Beyond a significant increase in life expectancy, the newer generations of older people differ qualitatively from their predecessors. On average, older individuals today are more educated, healthier, financially secure, and more technologically oriented than in the past. These changes have shaped different needs and expectations regarding how to live the later part of life. Notably, factors such as education, wealth, and health have been found to predict generative interests and practices throughout adulthood (Muñoz-Rodríguez, et al, 2019). Therefore, generativity may hold particular significance in later life and for the upcoming

generations entering post-retirement ages (Villar and Serrat, 2011), at least in developed countries where these changes have been more evident.

Moreover, conceptual advancements in the field of generativity have facilitated its application to later life. While Erikson originally associated generativity with caring for the next generation, subsequent definitions have expanded the concept. For instance, Kotre (1984) defined generativity as an effort to "outlive the self" and make an impact on others and society that extends beyond one's own life and mortality. This emphasis on legacy and contributions to others and society goes beyond the scope of caring for future generations or specific parental roles. If generativity is decoupled from solely caring for the next generation and associated with the broader idea of 'the human experience of contributing to and promoting lives of others and oneself' (Kim et al, 2017, p.7), it can be seen as a lifelong endeavor expressed in various ways at different stages of life, and not particularly tied to a stage or to a single activity (de St. Aubin, 2013). Therefore, generativity may hold relevance as a concern and life goal in later life, especially considering the "new face of older age" characterized by the aforementioned changes (e.g. Schoklitsch and Baumann 2012; Villar, 2012). Nevertheless, regardless of the conceptual coherence of applying generativity to later life, its empirical evidence remains the touchstone for evaluating such application

Empirical evidence of generativity in later life

The empirical studies focused on generativity in later life have significantly increased in recent years, particularly since 2010 (Villar et al, 2023). In most of these studies, generativity in later life has been examined as a comprehensive attitude or concern, evaluated quantitatively. These types of studies demonstrate the importance of generative concerns for older individuals, sometimes as much as for their middle-aged counterparts, with minimal declines observed from mid to later life (Einolf, 2014; Miner-Rubino et al., 2004; Nelson & Bergeman, 2021; Reinilä et al., 2023). Moreover, generativity scores have exhibited substantial rank-order stability in the second half of life (Lodi-Smith et al., 2021). Additionally, when considering different types of generativity, certain types, such as parental generativity, show some decline, while others, like cultural generativity, tend to remain stable (Stewart & Vanderwater, 1998; Rubinstein et al., 2015)

There are some studies that link generativity in later life to positive outcomes during that stage. For example, strong evidence supports the association between high generative concern in later life and various measures of adjustment and life satisfaction (Pratt et al.,

2020; Serrat et al., 2018). Additionally, research has shown that generativity is related to eudaimonic well-being and satisfaction of the needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy (Hofer et al., 2016; Lodi-Smith et al., 2021; Serrat et al., 2018). Conversely, generative failure appears to reduce life satisfaction not only in midlife but also in later life (Grossman & Gruenewald, 2020). Generativity has also been recognized as a crucial element in successful aging (Versey & Newton, 2013), and low self-perceived generativity in later life is associated with higher levels of disability and difficulties in performing daily activities (Gruenewald et al., 2012).

Furthermore, other lines of evidence have explored generativity as a useful factor for understanding older individuals' involvement in specific developmental domains or specific roles. In this regard, generativity in later life appears to be significant in at least two main contexts: the family and the community.

In the realm of family dynamics, grandparenting has emerged as a typical role through which individuals can continue expressing generativity in later life ([see chapter 11, this volume](#)). As the pressures of parenting (the main generative role in Erikson's original proposal) decrease after midlife, grandparenting provides an opportunity for individuals to transmit family values and make significant contributions to the succeeding generation (Thiele & Whelan, 2008). Simultaneously, grandparenting fosters personal feelings of usefulness, self-worth, and growth, while assigning older individuals a positive and functional role within the family unit (Noriega et al., 2020). For grandparents who do not have custody of their grandchildren, generativity is closely linked to satisfaction with grandparenting, with generativity scores being the most reliable predictor of active involvement in grandparenting (Moore & Rosenthal, 2015). Thus, grandparenting encompasses a diverse array of generative activities that compensate for those that may be lost when children leave home.

Beyond familial roles, engagement in community issues serves as another avenue for expressing generative concerns in later life ([see chapters 16 and 17, this volume](#)). However, it is important to note that not all activities associated with active aging in the community are equally connected to generativity, and a multidimensional assessment of the concept enhances our understanding of generativity in later life (Pinazo-Hernandis et al., 2023). Certain activities such as volunteering and political participation clearly demonstrate a relationship with generativity (Villar et al., 2023). For example, research has shown that generativity is one of the main motivations driving individuals to engage

in volunteer activities, and it is particularly important for older volunteers (Yamashita et al., 2019). Volunteering after retirement is considered a meaningful role that fulfills generativity needs by allowing individuals to give back to their communities what they have received throughout their lifespan (Pillemer et al., 2017). Moreover, participating in volunteering activities has been found to enhance individuals' self-perceptions of generativity (Gruenewald et al., 2016).

Aside from volunteering, older individuals can continue to express generativity through paid jobs, particularly in countries without compulsory retirement regulations. In fact, generativity is one of the factors associated with the desire to extend working life. Older workers value the opportunity that paid jobs provide for interaction and the transfer of experiences to younger colleagues, and generativity serves as a strong predictor of job satisfaction among older workers (Zhan et al., 2015).

Generativity in later life: Critical approaches

As we have discussed, generativity in later life is likely to make particular sense nowadays when generations of people entering later life do so in a healthier way and with more cultural, educational, and (at least some of them) financial resources than in the past. It aligns with a positive approach to the latest stage of life, emphasizing the potential for gains rather than the traditional view associated with decadence, decline, losses, or dependency. Unlike other concepts like active or successful aging, generativity in later life highlights how engaging in generative activities can contribute to both personal development (well-being and meaning in life) and social development (social capital and social cohesiveness) also in later life (Villar, 2012; Villar & Serrat, 2021).

However, the idea of generativity in later life may face criticisms similar to those raised against concepts related to an optimistic and positive view of later life (Martinson and Berridge, 2015). Two primary criticisms can be discussed in this context: the view of older age as an extended midlife and the promotion of a version of later life only accessible to privileged groups of older people.

Firstly, many studies on generativity in later life propose the continuation of generative roles from previous stages of life (e.g., volunteering, political activism, work, caregiving) without significant qualitative changes. These studies suggest that generativity, which typically appears in mid-life, is simply extended into later life with similar benefits and outcomes. This extension implies that if generativity is an expression of aging well, older

age is seen as good as long as it resembles middle age, and people want to continue with the same goals and concerns. This view may promote the idea of growing old without being old, maintaining mid-life interests and lifestyles (Timonen, 2016). However, such a goal may overlook the unique potential and qualities of later life and waste psychological resources that can help individuals cope successfully with losses and declines when they arise. In some cases, it even denies aging itself and reinforces discourses that encourage avoiding age-associated changes at any cost.

Secondly, this middle-aged version of generativity may contribute to the standardization of an elitist and hyperactive view of aging well. Generative activities often require certain resources such as health, education, and social networks that may not be accessible to many older individuals. Enshrining generativity as the ideal of a good later life may perpetuate an elitist view that further marginalizes and disempowers those who are unable or unwilling to engage in generative activities. Older people living with disabilities or dementia, those in economically disadvantaged contexts, or belonging to sexual or racial minorities may find their competences, skills, and experiences hidden, leading to a narrow understanding of generativity that focuses only on middle-aged, middle-class experiences and activities (Berridge & Martinson, 2018).

Furthermore, this view of generativity also adopts an individualistic and decontextualized approach, considering it as a personal resource independent of the social contexts in which it appears. However, generativity is expressed through social networks, institutions, and within an ideological milieu. Understanding the facilitators and barriers for generativity in later life, as well as promoting generative activities more efficiently, requires acknowledging and addressing the contextual forces influencing its manifestation (Serra and Zacarés, 2021).

In summary, while generativity in later life offers potential benefits for personal and social development, it is important to consider the criticisms it may face. The view of older age as an extended midlife and the potential for an elitist perspective on aging well need to be addressed to ensure inclusivity and a comprehensive understanding of generativity in later life.

Integrity and Despair: identity development in later life

In the most extreme cases, some older adults are consumed by bitterness, regret and guilt, they intensely fear death and are unable to accept both the past and a future that frightens them. However, a certain degree of despair must also be recognized and integrated into old age, since there are realistic reasons to feel confused and fearful in the face of present losses and the unknown to come. In this way, as in the previous psychosocial stages, the optimal resolution of this task implies some form of "dialectical synthesis" between integrity and despair, rather than an achievement of total integrity or the complete absence of despair. It is not a mere balance of qualities but a true integration of opposites (Erikson et al., 1986).

Erikson described the late-life developmental task as a dialectic between ego-integrity and despair (1986). According to his view, as individuals age and enter later life, there is a tension between forming a positive vision of their lived life and the suspect that they have not utilized their life, the only one they have, well. Attaining ego-integrity involves feeling that life has been worth living, being satisfied with the decisions made throughout life, accepting those decisions as appropriate and inevitable given the circumstances, and facing the end of life with serenity. It entails perceiving life as a coherent totality in consciousness, which allows for the liberation of psychological energy to connect and affirm oneself in the present, in current projects, and in relationships (Erikson et al., 1986).

On the other hand, despair represents the opposite pole in this conflict. "expresses the feeling that time is short, too short for the attempt to start a new life and to try out alternate roads to integrity" (Erikson and Erikson, 1997, p.114). In extreme cases, despaired older adults are consumed by bitterness, regret, and guilt, they may intensely fear death and be unable to accept both the past and a future that frightens them. However, it is important to recognize and integrate a certain degree of despair into old age, as there are realistic reasons to feel confused and fearful in the face of present losses and the unknown future (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Similar to previous psychosocial stages, the optimal resolution of this late-life task involves a dialectical synthesis between integrity and despair rather than achieving complete integrity or the absence of despair. It is not simply a balance of qualities but a genuine integration of opposites (Erikson et al., 1986). This process of actively constructing what is psychosocially healthy is dynamic and evolves over time through the interaction between individuals and their changing circumstances (Kivnick & Wells,

2014). With the prolongation of the old age phase, it is expected that older adults will encounter various "appropriate balances" between integrity and despair as they adapt to new demands (Dezutter et al., 2020).

Previous research has been accumulating empirical evidence on the various pathways connecting ego-integrity and despair with healthy psychological functioning in later life. James and Zarret (2006) identified a positive correlation of ego integrity with higher levels of self-acceptance, autonomy mastery and growth. Ego-integrity has also been found to be positively associated with global well-being, meaningfulness of life, and life satisfaction in older adults from different contexts (Dezutter et al., 2016; Newton et al., 2022; Westerhof et al., 2017) while it was negatively associated with depressive symptoms (Dezutter et al., 2016; Westerhof et al., 2017). The results obtained in mediational models in which the ego integrity-despair balance is included as a modulating variable point in the same direction. Ego-integrity is positively related to an adaptive attitude towards death (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020) and life satisfaction (Derdaele et al., 2019) while despair predicts death anxiety (Van der Kaap-Deeder et al., 2020) and depressive symptoms (Derdaele et al., 2019).

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These findings support Erikson's conceptualization by defining the task of ego-integrity and despair as the crucial challenge for older adults. An integrated life can be considered an important marker of successful aging from a psychosocial perspective on the life course (Stowe & Cooney, 2015). Therefore, in order to comprehend how ego-integrity

manifests and how it can be promoted, it is necessary to delve into the approaches older adults employ to achieve a satisfactory resolution of this developmental task.

The paths leading to integrity

There is no single path, lifestyle, or culture exclusively leading to the experience of ego integrity. Each individual must affirm the trajectory of their life within the context of their own culture. Two approaches consistent with Erikson's view shed light on this question. The first approach relates to the activity of older adults when they remember past experiences, review them, and accept them. The second approach is linked to successfully navigating the stages prior to old age, particularly focusing on generative development during the central years of adulthood.

The first process that facilitates ego integrity involves predisposing favorably to engage in a particular form of reminiscence, theorized by Erikson (e.g. Erikson et al., 1986) and described as "life review" by Butler (1968). Life review entails bringing past experiences into consciousness and evaluating them. The ultimate cause of this activity in later life is the proximity to death and the dissolution itself. However, it is important to note that not all older adults engage in this activity, and not every form of reminiscence leads to integrity. For instance, according to Wong and Watt (1991) classification, two types of reminiscence (integrative and instrumental) appear to play a significant role in promoting ego-integrity. Similarly, within Westerhof's et al (2010) typology of functions of reminiscence, two of these function (identity formation and problem solving) would lead to ego-integrity. Integrative reminiscing and the identity function involve searching for meaning in past experiences, integrating the past with the present by resolving past conflicts and regrets and reconciling the desired ideal and the biographical reality. On the other hand, instrumental reminiscing and problem solving function involve applying past experiences to address current challenges

Another pathway in Erikson's theory that contributes to the development of ego-integrity is the dynamic accumulation of satisfying resolutions and corresponding ego strengths during the stages preceding older age (Kroger, 2015). This psychosocial growth does not guarantee the positive resolution of tensions in later life, but it facilitates such resolution. There is a greater interrelationship between consecutive stages, which makes it particularly interesting to consider the role of generativity in middle age as a developmental antecedent of ego-integrity. This aspect, which we could call as "crystallized generativity", represents the accomplishments and characteristic generative

styles built during the period of greatest impact on the environment, accomplishments from which the person derives a sense of satisfaction (Stewart & Vandewater, 1998). Crystallized generativity can be considered as the most "closed" part of the generative script of the life story in old age, although it can still be subject to new reinterpretations within the life review processes.

Empirical evidence supporting the hypothesis that midlife generativity predicts the resolution of ego integrity in old age is limited but consistent. Results from longitudinal studies showed this developmental connection between generativity and integrity (Newton et al., 2019; Torges et al., 2008). In addition, the connection has also been found in cross-sectional studies focused on examining predictors of integrity in groups of older adults. Hannah et al. (1996) found that the model that best predicted ego integrity included several of the seven previous stages, with generativity showing the highest correlation. Similar results were found by James & Zarret (2006) or Chen et al. (2021)

In contrast, the question of how the generativity-integrity link is explained is more debatable. In middle adulthood, there is interest in identifying generative styles, modalities (such as familial, social, or cultural), or narrative scripts (such as "the redemptive self" proposed by McAdams et al, 2022) that may be associated with higher levels of integrity later in life. One study by Miranda-Chan and Nakamura (2016) exemplifies this research direction. They conducted a retrospective study involving retirees from academia and proposed a mediational model related to generativity and integrity. However, there is still a need for better definition and understanding to what extent generativity could be related to specific dimensions of the balance between integrity and despair, such as resolution of regrets, fear of death, adaptive reminiscences, acceptance of the past, satisfaction with the present, and wisdom, among others.

Integrity in later life: Critical issues

The balance between integrity and despair, as a central psychological task of the aging person, can be interpreted negatively when excessive consideration is given to life review, contemplative and reflective activities, and introspection not involved in the environment as central features of later life. The centrality of the integrity-despair tension could be questioned, especially in view of the extension of life expectancy and a new vision of old age in which generative motivations may be still maintained, as discussed in previous sections

However, this "quietistic" perspective of late life should not be associated with Erikson's original conceptualization, especially as made explicit after his latest published research (Erikson et al., 1986)¹. The resolution of the tension between integrity and despair supposes a considerable external activity that nurtures the internal efforts of the older adult. Thus, the most significant ways of dealing with it "*were not primarily rumination and reflection (...), (...) it was fundamentally grounded in their engagement, their vital involvement, with life's people, materials, activities, ideas, institutions, and so forth*" (Kivnick and Wells, 2014, p.44). The internal work is equally intense since there is a thematic permeation of all the preceding psychosocial issues. Older persons are not only facing what is focal at the moment (How successful has my life been?), but they also need to rework, resolve, review and renew past tensions associated with each psychosocial theme. Changes in context prompt this thematic re-experimentation. For example, retirement may open again identity commitments that were adaptive in the past and now have to be transformed to ensure the experience of self-continuity. Similarly, the style and generative achievements in middle adulthood could turn unsatisfactory in late life, and these tensions can be solved more effectively through a reconsideration of the generative tasks.

Facing the integrity-despair balance is therefore not equivalent to the meditative action of an older adult who, sitting in their armchair at home or engaging in spontaneous conversations with family members, reviews and reinterprets their life. This balance is inseparable from their significant involvement with their daily environment. What has been questioned is whether the integrity task encompasses all the developmental challenges that the aging process entails, considering the increased duration and diversity of the old age experience.

One way to address this question is through the proposal of a ninth stage of psychosocial development. In this sense, The most well-known proposal is the one formulated by Joan Erikson when she developed her husband's intuition to redefine old age (Erikson and Erikson, 1997)¹. She suggested that as people progress through their 80s and 90s, their day-to-day life involves a constant battle with the dystonic elements of the previous stages that they confront once again. Despair emerges daily, and "one may no longer have the luxury of retrospective despair" (Ibid., p.113). Only the pioneering study by Brown and Lowis (2003) supports the hypothesis of the existence of this ninth stage. Further

theoretical and empirical exploration is necessary to validate or refute the possibility of a ninth stage.

Towards an integrative generativity in later life

The hypothetical identification of a ninth stage does not resolve the central question of whether it is possible to distinguish a generative development in later life with specific characteristics (contents, dimensions or styles), distinct from generativity in earlier stages. As reviewed above, there is consistent evidence of generative expressions in later life age and, at the same time, older people face the challenge of developing a coherent and positive vision of their lives. How should generativity be transformed when it is permeated by the integrity challenge?

The potential identification of a ninth stage does not definitively address the central inquiry of whether it is feasible to differentiate a generative development in later life, characterized by specific contents, dimensions, or styles, that are distinct from generativity observed in earlier stages. As previously examined, there is substantial evidence of generative expressions during the later stages of life, while simultaneously older individuals confront the task of constructing a meaningful, coherent and positive life perspective. This leads to the following question: How should generativity be reconfigured when confronted with the challenge of integrity?

To address this matter, it would be valuable to consider Bugasjska's proposal (2017) that suggests the identification and description of an additional eighth stage, distinct from the original stage of integrity, which would subsequently become the ninth and final stage. Bugasjska argues that the tension between integrity and despair is more applicable to individuals in what is known as the fourth age, and emphasizes the need to acknowledge a new challenge in early later life. This proposed "new eighth stage" entails the dynamic balance between engagement and acceptance. In Bugasjska's words, "*vital involvement in the first period of old age needs to be looked at differently – with more courage and with the belief in the potential of older people, who no longer have to do many things and can still do so much*" (Ibid., p. 1104).

According to Bugasjska (2017), the concept of involvement is related to the deliberate selection of a lifestyle that promotes personal growth and the realization of universal values, while simultaneously accepting the changes associated with the aging process.

The challenge lies in discovering one's new role in the world while confronting physical and cognitive limitations. This may involve initiating new activities, establishing future goals, exploring qualitatively new forms of generativity, or even revisiting previous interests or consciously deciding to withdrawal from other ones. On the other hand, the dystonic aspect corresponds to "resignation," characterized by a lack of engagement in new or existing activities, while expressing "*his/her conviction of the senselessness of undertaking any activities for his or her development*" (Ibid., p. 1105). The virtue that arises from this tension is courage—the courage to forge one's own path in life, even challenging societal norms associated with old age. While this proposition is internally consistent and thought-provoking, it lacks empirical substantiation.

Another approach is to conceptualize the dynamics between generativity and integrity in later life is to conceive such relationships not as a formal life stage but as a distinct style of expressive generativity, a style that considers the life circumstances of later life, including those leading to the emergence of integrity as a prominent life theme. In fact, Erikson himself (Erikson et al., 1986) proposed the existence of a qualitatively different form of generativity known as "grand-generativity" that may manifest in later life. Grand-generativity acknowledges the fact that many older adults maintain a strong commitment to the promotion and development of future generations by assuming roles such as grandparents, mentors, or advisers. Unlike mid-life generativity, which entails assuming formal roles and responsibilities, grand-generativity involves caring for others and enhancing communities in a more indirect and informal manner. It entails a balance between outward interests and inward reflection, which aligns with the evaluative life review task that becomes salient in later life. Grand-generativity encompasses not only caring for others but also accepting care from others, thereby fostering generativity in both the giver and receiver.

Based on these ideas, we propose that the manifestation of generativity in later life, which we refer to as "integrative generativity," may exhibit distinctive characteristics and possibilities, including the following four aspects:

(1) Lived experience as a generative resource in later life

Older adults are particularly motivated to construct a comprehensive and meaningful narrative of their life story (Schoklitsch & Baumann, 2012). Consequently, the wealth of lived experiences accumulated in old age becomes a valuable intangible resource that can inspire generative behavior and enhance one's perceived generativity (Ehlman et al.,

2014). This generative behavior may involve the transmission of lessons and advice from their own personal biography to younger individuals, including experiences related to failure, with the aim of preventing and reducing risks and frustrations among the younger generation (Tabuchi & Miura, 2016). Sharing specific forms of life narratives in later life, including narratives centered on acceptance (McAdams et al., 2022), is expected to stand out as a generative contribution that helps others cope with adversity, loss, and suffering. The transmission of older people's wisdom and values is one of the clear benefits for younger generations in intergenerational educational programs (DeMichelis et al., 2015; see [chapter 26 in this volume](#)) and is evident in other familial and societal roles of older individuals (Pratt et al., 2020).

(2) The generative intergenerational encounter potentially has a wider scope of action and occurs in a more relaxed, positive and fluid process.

In later life, when the pressures of family and work are less burdensome, there is an opportunity to expand intergenerational interactions both within the family and in the community in a relaxed and more satisfying manner. Older adults tend to choose intergenerational contacts that have greater emotional significance and are free from the instrumental tensions typically associated with child-rearing and work obligations. Positive affective experiences in valued domains, such as the family, become a source of meaning in life that holds particular relevance for most older adults (Hicks et al., 2012). In the context of grandparenthood, leisure activities often serve as channels for generative expression, allowing for teaching, the creation of a family legacy, and the presentation of a life model to younger generations (Hebblethwaite & Norris, 2011). In community settings (e.g., educational, professional, or civic participation), intergenerational contacts provide older adults with the opportunity to adopt a "natural" generative position or status, free from the constraints and responsibilities associated with more structured and formal roles in paid-work settings.

(3) The relevance of care for and being cared

Care, which involves considering the needs of others and striving to provide what is necessary for their, well-being, and support, is a fundamental life task and a crucial human competence. It plays a vital role in developing adult and mature relationships and, according to Erikson, is the primary outcome of successfully navigating the generativity vs. stagnation challenge in mid-life. The orientation toward caring for others remains equally important in later life, presenting an opportunity to express deep love and give

back to those who hold significance in our lives. However, during this stage, individuals may find themselves in a position where they require to be cared, perhaps with a level of intensity and explicitness never experienced in their adult lives, due to age-related illnesses or disabilities. In societies that prioritize autonomy and independence as core values, accepting our own vulnerabilities and frailties, and allowing others to care for us, can be challenging. Paradoxically, trying to live without acknowledging limitations or burdening others can be more taxing than simply accepting care. The ability to care for oneself when possible, thereby lessening potential burdens on others, and to accept care in a gracious manner, making the caregiver's task easier, can also be an expression of generativity, particularly prevalent in later life, as it is discussed in [chapter 12](#), this volume.

(4) Cultural context and expectations toward older adults

Generativity is, if not taken-for-granted, is at least to some extent expected in mid-life, as society demands middle-aged adults to be productive, creative, and caring. Social institutions and roles are designed to provide channels for expressing generative concerns that are deemed essential for every middle-aged individual. However, the situation changes in later life, and older people are not always expected to be as creative, productive, or involved in family, community, or political affairs. Instead, they may encounter ageist attitudes that label them as unproductive, outdated, passive, or eager to disengage (Datta & Panda, 2022). Therefore, the manifestation of generativity in later life is not solely an internal resource or motivation but is also influenced by social expectations and available roles. It crucially depends on what McAdams referred to as cultural demand. Transcultural studies support this notion, highlighting that the position of older people within society, the perceived respect they receive from others, and the perceived importance of their opinions (e.g. what kind of feedback they receive when they participate) play a crucial role in maintaining generativity in later life (Kim et al., 2017; Cheng, 2009; Tabuchi et al., 2015). Such studies suggest that the nature of generativity in later life may differ, leaning more towards symbolic expressions rooted in wisdom and authority, rather than the typical generative expressions observed among middle-aged adults in family or work settings.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed the significance of both generativity and integrity as fundamental sources of meaning in later life. We have argued that generativity remains relevant for older individuals; however, due to the unique life circumstances surrounding later life, particularly the increasing importance of integrity needs and expectations, the expression of generativity may differ from the way it is shown in earlier stages of life. Thus, the intersection of generativity and integrity motives in later life gives rise to what we refer to as 'integrative generativity'. This concept incorporates the use of life narratives and lived experiences as valuable generative resources, a more relaxed engagement in intergenerational contexts, the importance of self-care and receiving care from others, and the presence of social expectations that value older individuals. These factors serve as potential components of integrative generativity.

Such intersection between generative and integrative motives could also be embodied in the notion of legacy. In generative terms, legacy involves the transmission or donation of a valuable personal expression that can benefit future generations. In integrative terms, legacy contributes to providing a positive and cohesive closure to one's life story. Legacy can be understood in two complementary ways (Hunter & Rowles, 2005): tangible (giving biological life and leaving material goods) and intangible (e.g. transmission of lessons and values). Tangible legacy refers to intentional creations and the care of people and products that will endure after we pass away, serving as our contribution to our families and communities. These tangible contributions, resulting from past and present generative commitments, are key to finding meaning in the life one has lived and provide landmarks for shaping our life narratives. On the other hand, legacy can also be understood as an attitude, a way of being in the world that serves as an example to others. In this sense, older individuals become living models who inspire others in how to navigate their own lives, and they serve as a source of memories that inspire future generations in their behaviors.

Both forms of legacy, as a product and as an attitude, allow us, as Kotre (1984) suggests, to 'outlive the self', transcend ourselves and leave a lasting impact on the lives of those who come after us. They enable us to achieve a symbolic immortality that may paradoxically be finite in most cases but nonetheless adds value and purpose to life.

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