

The Culminating Point of Generativity in Older Women: Main Aspects of Their Life Narrative

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Abstract: This paper reviews the current definitions of generativity and its changes through the life cycle. The main characteristics of the life narratives related to the expression of generativity's culminating points are determined. A content analysis of fifteen interviews with older women who had experienced the development of a culminating point of generativity during their lives was carried out. Through the qualitative analysis of the narratives, it was ascertained that there is a continuity of generativity from childhood to old age. Four significant moments related to this development were established: 1. start with early expressions of empathy, solidarity and helpfulness; 2. expansion and productivity in adulthood; 3. consolidation of generative achievements; 4. generative continuity during old age.

Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Generative Development](#)
 - [2.1 Generativity: Changes related to age](#)
 - [2.2 Culminating point of generativity](#)
 - [2.3 Generative narratives as ways of knowing maturity in adulthood](#)
- [3. Objectives of the Paper](#)
 - [3.1 The life story interview](#)
 - [3.2 Older women with culminating point of generative performance](#)
 - [3.3 Content analysis](#)
- [4. Life Trajectories Devoted to Generative Tasks](#)
 - [4.1 Early involvement with others](#)
 - [4.2 Productive and expansive stage](#)
 - [4.3 Culminating points of generative achievements](#)
 - [4.4 Generative continuity](#)

[5. Conclusions](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[References](#)

[Authors](#)

[Citation](#)

1. Introduction

Erik ERIKSON (1971) describes specific psychosocial tasks that must be undertaken during adulthood; such tasks take shape in his concept of generativity. The author talks about caring for the next generation, about creating, about producing something, about a virtue that can be achieved or not, and about a psychological criterion of adaptation and maturity. The tasks related to generativity are mainly placed in mid-life. The author identifies old age as the life cycle stage, in which the crisis of the integrity of the self versus the despair of facing death would be the main vicissitude and task of this life stage's development. [1]

This work will use the qualitative analysis of life stories to deal with the continuity or discontinuity of generativity and its achievements in women (55 years old and over) who have sustained and keep a highly generative life. We are interested in determining the narrative continuity of generative themes in these older women and in learning, through their life stories, about the conservation of the motivational aspects, of the care for the other generations. We also seek to establish evidence of their early genesis, as well as the impact of a generative development on the integrity of the self and on life satisfaction. [2]

2. Generative Development

ERIKSON (1971) conceptualizes a series of stages or critical periods which involve progressive synthesis of the self; each stage being related to the others. In ERIKSON's schema, the biological or somatic aspects and the intrapsychic aspects continually interface with the historical and cultural aspects of the moment in which the individual lives. The mentioned aspects promote self development and adaptation. [3]

ERIKSON lists eight crises or dynamic stages of development throughout the life span. At each stage, the individual goes through a crucial period, in which an increased vulnerability as well as a heightened potential are present. Successful resolution of each crisis grants a strength to the self appropriate to that stage, and in due time it makes him stronger in order to face the following stages. A poor or regressive development result is also possible, and this will hinder subsequent development. [4]

Generativity versus Stagnation is the seventh stage in the psychosocial development. It begins in early adulthood after overcoming youth's issues of intimacy vs. isolation. It lasts through the adult stage and is followed by issues of integrity vs. despair in the final years of life. The main psychosocial task of generativity is to establish and guide the next generation through one's acts of care. This is fueled by a gradual expansion of ego-interests and by the libidinal energy from which it is generated. Generativity is built upon the resolution of the preceding stages. To have and to raise children would be a prototypical generative activity. However, it is not the only one, and generativity includes a

wider range of activities in a social and cultural context that goes beyond the family circle. [5]

It is not enough to create, but it is also necessary to take care of that which was generated. John KOTRE (1984) completed the definition of generativity by stating that it also implies the process of caring for the products of our creative acts. This evolutionary task of taking care of that which was created or generated is reinforced by certain "need to be needed" experienced by adults (McADAMS, HART & MARUNA, 1998). In ERIKSON's text (1968, p.138), this idea is present when he states: "Evolution has made man a teaching as well as a learning animal, for dependency and maturity are reciprocal; mature man needs to be needed." [6]

The complete expression of generativity combines agentic (expansion of the self) and communal (care for others) tendencies. McADAMS (2001) states that, ultimately, it is about a combination of "power and love." In ERIKSON's terms (1968, p.138), "a gradual expansion of ego-interests and a libidinal investment in that which is being generated." John KOTRE (1984) observes that in many cases generativity is evident in a predominantly agentic (affirmation of the self) or communal mode. A man might wish to father a child just to demonstrate his own virility. This generativity would be "agentic." The author agrees with McADAMS and De St. AUBIN (1992) in concluding that authentic generativity derives from a balanced relationship between both tendencies. Along with these inner tendencies typical of the human being, we find the cultural demands that are the external motivational origin of the generative behavior. The historical context in which people as well as their culture develop strongly influences not only the form but also the rhythm of the generative expression (McADAMS & De St. AUBIN, 1992). [7]

2.1 Generativity: Changes related to age

"Although children and adolescents may act in altruist ways, most cannot be said to be 'generative'. In most cases, children's thought and behavior are not be guided by an explicit concern for the next generation. Also, young people are generally not meaningfully involved—either socially and psychologically—in fashioning legacies of care that will survive them. With an increasing awareness of one's responsibilities to society as a whole and to those who are younger, weaker, less experienced, or subordinate in some way, the adult becomes capable of acting and thinking in generative ways (...) as parents, workers, and volunteers, adults may experience and express concerns for the next generation" (McADAMS, De St. AUBIN & LOGAN 1993, p.221).

McADAMS et al. (1993), discuss the most relevant study carried out about age and generativity (RYFF & HEINCKE, 1983). In this study, when analyzing life's middle age, both the young and adults identify the middle of life as the most generative stage. McADAMS confirms this tendency in a compound measure (that combines interest, commitment, action and narrative); this shows middle aged adults with significantly higher levels of these traits than the young and

older adults. However, a deeper examination of the measure of each particular component and the results of comparison on direct contrast among the three age groups show that the panorama is not that clear: the generative commitment and the generative themes in the life narration are incremented from youth to middle adulthood; but there is no information about these components diminishing with age. [8]

Study cases have also supplied some information that would indicate how generative themes increase during adulthood. In FRANZ (1995), we find a systematic analysis of content that evaluates issues of identity, intimacy and generativity through the journal and letters of a British writer named Vera BRITTAIN. Considering the writings done when she was 20-21 years old and others when she was 30-31 years old, the author observes that as time passes BRITTAIN uses a lesser global quantity of themes of identity, whereas the quantity of themes related to intimacy and generativity increases. These studies would suggest an increase in generativity in the path from youth to middle adulthood and a conservation of the generative concerns during the life span. [9]

2.2 Culminating point of generativity

Life trajectories can manifest either strengths of the self or developmental inhibitions. The magnitude of the generative task, the level of commitment of the self in its development and the results obtained through life can be identified by people's expressions. As mentioned before, there are prototypical generative tasks, such as motherhood and fatherhood. However, the fact of having children or working in professions strongly related to generativity, like teaching, tell us very little about the intensity of desires, the commitment to the task and the gratifications or frustrations that the development of these provide. [10]

There are intermediate, ordinary and extraordinary expressions between generativity and stagnation as poles of development. The culminating point refers to the expression and development of generative behaviors, which surpass the common expressions and denote, through their narrative, an exceptional sense of integrity and maturity. In this sense, the exceptional condition would imply a high commitment to the generative tasks, a conviction or special interest in caring for the next generations and a balance between the tasks of personal care and care for others. Moreover, the culminating point of generativity would mean that the achievements of this evolutionary task are a source of support for the self and a main axis of psychological welfare. [11]

Generativity at its culminating expression would be the result of the successful combination of generative desires with cognitive strategies that allows the attainment of the desired goals. The answer to the generative cultural demand as well as the desire for their achievement should be explicit and conscious, and articulated within an ideology that supports such actions, in order to achieve the culminating point. That is to say, in the culminating expressions of generativity there are desires related to beliefs and to strategies that allow the attainment of these goals. Each articulation denotes a particular mode of development of the

self and arranges the ways of developing the generative tasks. Thus, the culminating aspect of generativity involves certain adjustment and balance between cognitive components such as: aspects of self-image, capacity for symbolization and insight, in combination with emotional and dispositional factors towards generativity, such as empathy, perception of the pain and suffering of others and attention to requests for help and assistance by fellow creatures. Likewise, the tasks and achievements of this period of adulthood would not be marginal themes of the life narrative, but would be main and central aspects of the building of meaning. [12]

From its origins, the generativity study involved the study of individual cases. The main themes that form the development of subjectivity, critical facts of development that contributed to its extraordinary expression and the search of meaning of these facts according to its development and identity can be identified from the specific knowledge of generative narratives of people whose development is exceptional (KOTRE, 1984, 1999; KOTRE & KOTRE, 1998). The emblematic case of this kind of study was that developed by Erik ERIKSON in the biography of Mahatma GANDHI (STEWART & VANDEWATER, 1998). [13]

The definition of the heuristic model of generativity presented by McADAMS et al. (1998) allows the identification of culminating aspects of development through generative acts as well as through the life narrative. The life narrative, within this theoretical framework, would include contents related to generative desires, to answers to cultural demands, to the achievement of generative acts in gratifying terms. Of particular importance is the commitment to certain generative belief centered on the "kindness of the species" (ERIKSON, 1968) that would be reflected in a certain ideological conviction about the importance of personal contributions to the development of other generations. [14]

Expressions related to achievements and to consolidation of strengths of the self previous to generativity, such as expressions related to basic confidence, to the will, to laboriousness, identity achievement and consolidation of intimacy bonds emerge in the life narratives. Such expressions are connected to the search and comprehension of theoretical aspects of development that contributed to these extraordinary expressions of generativity. [15]

2.3 Generative narratives as ways of knowing maturity in adulthood

Life narratives are expressions that permit to depict the lived events, to make sense of said events, to their interrelations and to the impact they have had on the identity and development of the person. What people say about themselves structures, identifies and clarifies the meaning of their lives. Moreover, life narrative strongly conditions its disposition towards future events, to the extent that this conviction about identity and the meaning of life is a resource for facing life's challenges and hardships. [16]

Generative narrative refers to the characteristic way in which the individual carries out a significant narrative of the generative efforts that he or she has performed

during his or her life and of future projects. Certain patterns are found repeatedly in very generative people's life stories even though adults show considerable individual differences regarding the generative narration. That is to say, not all of them manifest the generativity in their life stories in the same way. [17]

In general, these people remember what can be called a "fortunate infancy," as they had a kind of gift or they were the favorite or the most significant to the others (McADAMS, DIAMOND, De St. AUBIN & MANSFIELD, 1997). On the other hand, in those cases in which the infantile development was marked by unfortunate events, the generative adults showed a central life goal in their narrations: "stopping the damage," or interrupting the intergenerational sequence of abuse or misfortune (KOTRE & KOTRE, 1998). [18]

Generative people reported being sensitive to the pain or suffering of others since an early age. The contrast between their own blessings and the suffering of others is occasionally found in the narrative (McADAMS et al., 1997). [19]

During the adolescent and young adult stage, they relate having been guided by what can be called an immovable morality, a strong and articulated ideology that survives questions and doubts, and maintains certain values and basic beliefs. [20]

Highly generative people tend to tell their life stories with what is known as "sequences of redemption," where a bad or negative episode or event gives rise to and facilitates a positive way out, which redeems the initial bad event. In addition to the change of the unfortunate event's affective value, some reflection, learning or cognitive component becomes apparent as a result of the sequence of redemption. This insight would be a meeting point between emotional and affective components and intellectual aspects. [21]

Adults leaning towards generativity tend to see their own lives in terms of redemption. Negative things happen, suffering is inevitable; but good things also take place sometimes if belief and hope are kept alive. [22]

Finally, as regards the future, very generative adults articulate numerous pro-social objectives that benefit society in a broad sense along with goals that aim at personal development. [23]

Following McADAMS et al. (1998), it could be said that highly generative adults, in general, present what has been called a "committed story," in which the protagonist from early on has had a "blessing" that contrasts with the suffering of others. They experience the world as a place where people need the care of others; they are committed to living according to a set of strong values and beliefs that continue and guide their behavior through the life cycle (immovable morality). The bad events that cross their life's paths are transformed into good ones, through personal or external effort. When good things happen, they are rarely transformed into something bad; this reflects the absence of sequences of contamination. They face the future with a wide and expanded range of care, they set themselves goals to help the others, especially the next generation, and

contribute to the progressive development of society as a whole and of its institutions. [24]

3. Objectives of the Paper

This paper seeks the following objectives through the analysis of interviews and the content present in texts:

1. to determine the presence of generative contents in the narratives during the life cycle;
2. to identify in the life narrations generative acts, desires or moments that are strongly linked to the expansion of people's self;
3. to establish the narrative continuity of concerns and actions linked to generativity. [25]

3.1 The life story interview

The interview used in this paper is centered on the life narrative (McADAMS & BOWMAN, 2001). It is structured in function of eight general sections:

1. chronological life narrative in the form of chapters;
2. determination of critical events of special life significance: positive, negative and an event that marks a turning point in life's understanding; and evolutionary meaningful events; infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood;
3. life's main challenge;
4. positive and negative influences on development;
5. remembered stories and narratives;
6. alternative futures (positive and negative) of the personal stories;
7. personal ideology and beliefs related to the future of humankind;
8. central life theme of the story. [26]

This device allows for appreciation and comparison of aspects emerging from the discourse which are linked to generativity, its genesis, development and achievements. In addition to facilitating the symbolic structuring of the representations, the narrative structure allows, through discourse analysis, to establish the main life themes and their relationship with generativity—in this case —, the clarification that individuals deliver about the events, their attributed beliefs and the meaning sequences. In this interview, people are invited to focus on central aspects (chapters, life events, scenes of different periods of development, influences, etc.); this results in a work of life review and reminiscence. These contents are the psychic representatives of the remembered personal story and they are included in the self, that is why they emerge in the narrative sequence. It is important to clarify that the analysis performed is centered on these manifested contents, as they emerge from self-concept and people's identities. [27]

3.2 Older women with culminating point of generative performance

Fifteen women fifty-five years and older were the subjects of this study. All these women work as volunteers in a community organization based on the promotion of the psychological and social welfare of the elderly (CEPRAM, Center for the Betterment of Older Adults). An intentional sampling was carried out. Three judges, psychologists of the institution who had known the people for at least three years, chose the individuals based on their generative characteristics. People who had worked in professions linked to generativity, such as teaching and health care, were selected. They had also performed acts that denoted a strong generative commitment: founding organizations, adopting of children, coordinating institutions and mentoring. They had continued these tasks in their old age. In all cases, consent was obtained and the importance of the narrative in determining central aspects of adult development and their continuity through old age was explained. [28]

3.3 Content analysis

The interview material was recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The mean duration of the interviews was 120 minutes. A thematic analysis was carried out in which each entry was a complete verbal expression that conveyed an idea, act or generative desire. The units of context permitted the identification and classification of the expressions and their inclusion in the different significant dimensions for the analysis of the interviewees' discourse. In this paper, the focus was placed on identifying expressions that showed a clear presence of generative interests, actions and their continuation into old age. These expressions are a reflection of the combination of emotional aspects (desires or demands) and they are facts that people strongly link to their identity. In all the cases, the analyzed contents of said narratives reflect expressions related to generativity. [29]

Although the people selected for the interviews have performed actions that can be visibly linked to generativity throughout their lives, we focused on determining if mentioned generative efforts are integrated into the life narrative and how this is carried out. [30]

The interviews are characterized by the fact that they effectively transmit a "life trajectory dedicated to generative tasks." This would be the most global characteristic; but, in a more specific way, we have found and we will describe the following categories:

1. beginning: early involvement with others;
2. expansion: especially productive adult life;
3. consolidation: culminating generative achievements;
4. continuity: generative continuity. [31]

4. Life Trajectories Devoted to Generative Tasks

4.1 Early involvement with others

In reference to the generative narrative, some of the interviews register what we have called an "early involvement with others" although these memories are not present in all the narratives; we highlight those in which the concern about the care for other people appears early. [32]

Mrs. Y., aged 76, keeps on working in adult literacy programs and is a volunteer offering palliative care. She, a retired teacher and school director, says:

"I think I had a childhood, in which I could help and I could feel the values my parents gave me";

"I sometimes felt I helped them and I felt better, but I liked it and they made me feel it with deep affection";

"... I don't know why I went on with the tutelage of my four sisters";

"I matured suddenly because I had to be the mother of the other girls." [33]

Mrs. G., aged 61, was a teacher, wrote a book, had an active participation in politics after the military dictatorship, and has two adult sons. She says:

"I always sided with the poorest; we formed a clique that was called 'broken bridge' because nobody could pass through it, so I really helped all the girls. That was how I was with everybody, involved in everything, when I had to choose to do this, or sing in the choir, or take up a collection for disabled children. I was in everything. I was always like that; maybe I was hyperkinetic, wasn't I?" [34]

Mrs. CV., aged 66, who is and was a teacher, continues working as a volunteer in oral narrative tasks. She describes a childhood scene this way:

"I was big ... I mean ... big; tall, I was always the last in line ... and I was the other girls' protector ... so when boys hit the other girls, I confronted them ... as Wonder Woman defending her classmates, that was my characteristic ..." [35]

Mrs. S., aged 65, worked as a pediatric nurse and nowadays she carries out two volunteer jobs, one centered on storytelling and the other one supporting neighborhood organizations and children soup kitchens. When talking about her siblings, she says:

"... my brother got married ... at that time I was still assuming the family's motherhood ... then ... well, I have always been my brothers' protector." [36]

These examples reflect certain early concern for those who are more vulnerable, classmates or siblings. Although we cannot say they are generative expressions, there is a grade of fraternal empathy, in which due to physical conditions, and the place in the family (the eldest sisters), people get identified with more strengths

and in consequence, they protect, defend and help others by applying an early criterion of justice and solidarity. [37]

4.2 Productive and expansive stage

Another specific characteristic of this generative trajectory is the account of adulthood as a "specially productive and expansive stage," devoted to central generative tasks such as the care for the family and the strong commitment to work associated to expressions of happiness and satisfaction. What was mentioned is revealed in the following expressions of four of our interviewees and will be taken as examples. [38]

The already mentioned Mrs. Y. tells us about her two main activities during adulthood: her daughters' care and her job:

"I got married, had my first daughter, and then I quitted, I had to quit because I had to look after my daughter." [39]

The matrimonial bond would be of short duration; Mrs. Y. shows enough internal resources as to meet the situation:

"I had to start working again ... At that point I started teaching a lot, then I moved to San Francisco, I was in charge of another grade; always studying with () great effort, but always looking after my children (...) I did everything for my daughters, to see the opportunity to fill in that gap, all those things that I think I achieved (...) to take that decision, I had to move forward, so I went on with my daughters, and with my job." [40]

Ego strengths (hope, will, initiative, work) can be appreciated in the account. These strengths are developed in the first life stages and are at the service of the task of the self-expansion and the care for others during adulthood. The following expression shows clearly that all these life experiences constitute an expansion:

"I started teaching in parallel from the first year. It was because of the Teacher Degree, the sisters (nuns) recognized my capacity to face a class, parents. I really liked it (...) It gave me lots of feelings of well-being and great enjoyment, because there is recognition ..." [41]

As years passed by, her job would become more appreciated and more important:

"I was responsible for the whole institution, legal matters, pedagogical issues, students, parents, teachers, laws, constitution, rules and pedagogical matters too; it had to be handled." [42]

Mrs. P., aged 76, had excellent education and labor opportunities. During her adulthood, she took a crucial life decision when marrying a widower with children. She decided to prioritize the care and advance of their development over her own professional career. However, when her children grew up, she returned to her

work, and nowadays she is part of a volunteer program. In the following expressions, we can appreciate the implication of the self with the labor activities, and the satisfaction linked to said expansion:

"I graduated and I began working in public health, I did the whole course of studies and subsidized my own studies. I was lucky to find a job. I had a good job. I ran a pharmacy in San Luis." [43]

Worried about improving in her field, she said:

"I began working for free in a laboratory (...) The Department was very small in those times, so a professor of the National School, a former professor of mine, asked if I could work in his chair of physics, so I began teaching physics. Well, I had my career quite fixed, thinking I was on the right track at the laboratory." [44]

The following expression narrates not only a great change in her life, but also the important fact that it was a generative commitment assumed in a conscious way:

"My fiancé was a widower with two children, when I decided to marry him my mother almost killed me. And she was right, how could a useless person like me, who couldn't cook, be in charge of a house with children and all that? But well, I fought tooth and nail for that, I left everything behind and I began a new stage because there were two small children. We didn't have relatives in Córdoba, so we couldn't leave the children with anybody, there were no day nurseries, I stopped working, I mean, I didn't quit a job because it was unpaid, but I went home with my children." [45]

Bringing up children is not seen as a fact that obstructs a personal career, but as a valid option for self expansion because it is a generative commitment chosen by the person. After bringing up her children, she goes back to her professional activities along with her husband:

"I began working with him; he was also a biochemist; he did research on cancer at the laboratory and I helped him, we gave classes at the laboratory." [46]

Mrs. B., aged 60, was a nurse in public hospitals. The labor environment was a space for the expansion of the self, she learned, saw hard realities, matured and enjoyed her profession:

"I began working when I was very young and then I studied nursing when the profession was not well seen (...) I studied and graduated";

"I like my career very much, I think it is the nicest profession, I wouldn't have been anything else (...);"

"I began working at a public hospital where poverty, promiscuity and scarcity are predominant; this doesn't mean that I had lived in another world, in a bubble; but I really didn't know that (...). It was very hard for me to accept that reality, I knew that if I didn't give that mother a bottle of milk that I took from the hospital, that baby wouldn't eat anything that day." [47]

She raised her family simultaneously, but with some generative setbacks and wounds:

"(...) raising a family made me feel more complete, and that came to complete what I was lacking, it was good for my life (...) I have a 33 year-old daughter who is great in my life";

"I had three children, but two died, a very hard thing; today my son would be 34 years old and the other one 30, and in spite of the fact that it has been a long time, it is still very difficult, these are things that are remembered, accepted, but I say that they cannot be overcome or forgotten, just accepted";

"the daughter we had, who made us very happy and who is a studious and good person, graduated and that was what we wanted to see, as all parents we want our children to graduate, first we want them to finish secondary school, to study and then to live well, that is what parents always want. Well I always want the best for my daughter, now I would like her to have a family." [48]

To finish this point, let us see the expressions of the already mentioned Mrs. CV., where the satisfaction that the ego expansion produces through the performed generative labor can be clearly understood:

"Meanwhile, I was appointed teacher, but in a rural area ... (...) I was appointed teacher ... and from that moment on I was extremely happy ... (...) dedicated with passion to the school because I did it with passion, I never did things like ... I have been an extremist; I have always done everything with great passion ..." [49]

In the following expression the gain in pleasure as regards children can be also seen:

"When my daughter was born; she was the first born. They placed her on my belly, I really felt like ... the curtain went up and an accumulation of love appeared, always, at that moment I said ... all that maternity ... rained over me ... bloomed inside ... grew." [50]

4.3 Culminating points of generative achievements

We have observed that all the interviewed people were characterized by having generative behaviors throughout their lives (at least the narrated story shows that). The third central characteristic of the life narratives is that they identify generative acts at key times of their development and these generative contents are the most significant of their lives. [51]

From the analysis of the interviews, we conclude that one of the key questions to understanding the life development of the interviewees is that which asks them to think about the culminating point of their life story (making reference to the moment in which they have experienced positive emotions more intensely, such as joy, happiness, peace, etc.). Such culminating point, without taking into account the chronological time in which it occurs, can be placed on the continuum

proposed by ERIKSON and can be considered as a characteristic of some of its stages. [52]

When Mrs. G. is asked about the culminating point of her life, she answers:

"The moment I lived with most emotion, with most sentimentality, with most pain, was the birth of my children; I mean physical pain, I was expecting them with joy, with eagerness, with enthusiasm. I think that it was one of the most striking things in my life ... during my childhood I would say I have ... what about the birth scene? I tell you, I was in my house expecting the birth of my first child. I was in my house with my mother; my brother was with me too ... I began feeling the labor pains, they were awful and I went slowly, slowly and I was terribly anxious and nervous (...) and it was like that, then when J.P. was born, he was beautiful, beautiful. So when he was out I felt when they pulled a little bit, although I had the epidural anesthesia, I felt the baby taken out and I heard the cry, that is something I can't explain; it is something of your own that was taken from your entrails, and that is an emotion and relief because then you have no more pain; but it is a nice pain that moves you. I felt very well, happy, I was moved; it was a mixture of pain, of emotion and gratitude for having had a healthy boy. During that situation I thought: please, take the baby out because I couldn't stand the pain any longer, and then when he is born, a feeling of relief, of sweetness. Then he was placed where they put all the babies, in the crib and I thought I have to devote myself to this son and it was like that; maybe an overbearing mother. But I am like this, but absolutely devoted to them, thinking about them. I don't know if I'm doing right or wrong, but that's how I feel it. One does what one feels, that's why it is difficult for me to say no to them and to anybody, but it was such a nice sensation, so nice that I can't explain it." [53]

When they are asked about "one" culminating point, the generative people tend to group their several generative efforts in this memory. The children's and a grandchild's births also constitute the life culminating point of Mrs. AA.'s, who was a kindergarten teacher and at present works as a volunteer in solidarity tasks.

"The most positive event was having my children, because I longed to have them. They were wanted children ... I lived both births intensely, they were striking, remarkable. Between them I had a miscarriage, so my second daughter was much longed for because I spent six years waiting for this second child (...). My grandson's birth, the fact that I was in serious trouble due to a malpractice suit and to open my eyes and find all my friends there supporting me." [54]

In the interview with Mrs. S., the next generation's birth comes up again as the culminating point of her life. Moreover, it is evident that such memory is related to her own generative story (the relation with other parents, especially the mother) and the choice of her professional career (nursing, work with children):

"Another scene that ... profoundly moved me was when ... let's say ... I had my daughter, let's say ... the scene when you have your child in your arms for the first time, that was another emotion that ... that moment, that situation is a moment in which you can't believe the baby is yours, that you have had that for a long time and

that finally you find it and ... tenderness ... isn't it? A matter of tenderness, and that sensation of tenderness comes back to me every time I lift a small baby; isn't it true? It's like having an unprotected person and you are somehow responsible ... you know, at work we had to pick up tiny babies, the perfume ..." [55]

In the following two cases, it is very interesting to observe that the culminating point, although related to children, is not about the moment of their birth. It is about the moment they achieve their autonomy. At this point we should mention Françoise DOLTO (2004) who states that, as regards children, parents have only responsibilities and no rights; their duty is to perform a tutelary role that promotes children's autonomy, which will turn them into dispensable parents. And that their anguish should not prevent children from developing their own life projects. The often heard phrase "your children are not your children, they are life's children" refers to this characteristic of generativity; it is not just about bringing children to the world, it is also about letting them go. The genuine generativity always promotes the other's development, it is rewarded by the others' development which is like one's own development. [56]

Mrs. B., aged 77, was a teacher, headmistress of a basic education school and now she continues serving others through volunteer work. The culminating point of this narrative is:

"I really don't know what to say, I think that it was when my son graduated because it was as if we had completed our parental duties. From then on, their profession was now their responsibility. I clearly remember when my son graduated; his sister, who lived in another house, and our friends were waiting for A. to graduate, to know how he and his friends did in the exam. We had a big party, I don't remember who gave the party but we had to go, so we stayed a bit and then we left. But the memories remained, the photos, his friends smoking the classical Havana cigar, the hug with his brothers, but we had to leave. It was important because for us it was like the icing on the cake of our obligation as parents. What would happen to them later in their careers would be their responsibility; we had fulfilled our duty as parents. That was an internal moment for me and I think that for my husband too, because he had been unable to finish his university studies and he felt deeply involved in our children's careers." [57]

Now, we will transcribe the culminating point of Mrs. L.'s life story, aged 66, who had devoted her life to teaching, working with children and adolescents:

"When you reach maturity, let us say around 45 years old, when you have left many fears behind, when you have realized you are capable, through many things; then you realize you have aptitudes and you have the interior framework to face life. A specific event probably was when my children got their diplomas, my eldest daughter. At that moment I felt that all I had done finally bore fruit, you review your life, the concerns you had during your life, so you think that despite the tough road, you arrived, your children arrived. Especially the children's achievements are gratifying, so you think that you didn't work in vain ..." [58]

Mrs. M. became a widow with no children when she was very young; however we can observe how generativity finds nooks and crannies to express itself, it moves, it sublimates; it finds its course when it is part of a human being's life stream:

"the culminating point of my life was the birth of my grandniece ... because I witnessed a birth and a person I loved dearly was born; that would be the summit ... I saw life, I saw a life arriving, didn't I?, it was, it was a light, I felt something so pleasant, so pleasant; although she arrived under circumstances that weren't normal, didn't she?, It wasn't the happiest time because she was young and single without support from other women ... but it happened. To see this creature I loved so much being born ... made me mature ... look, I remember that even though I wasn't her mother this gave me the opportunity to raise a child I loved a lot (...) and it made me mature. It made me mature because suddenly this experience, even though I was not the baby's mother and I didn't pretend her to call me mom or see me as her mom, I felt I was her mom, so it was like having become a mother, you know ..." [59]

In the interview with Mrs. P. the culminating point of her life connects her with a later generation. When she looks back to find the culminating point in her life she says:

"An important moment in my life? Because my life has had important moments, as everybody's life, I guess. When my third grandson was born, he was two-month premature, and I was with my daughter at the hospital because it was a difficult delivery, normal, and the baby was brought in an incubator to be taken to neonatology, he was very small, a kilo and seven hundred grams (imagine that) and I put my finger on his face and he held my hand and he didn't release it and he has never released it for twenty five years, we are very close. I also have memories of my first granddaughter being born ... my grandchildren's births were very beautiful for me ..." [60]

Mrs. P's culminating point of her life is not just strictly generative; it also makes us think about the concept of secondary narcissism; if children constitute a primary narcissist transfer (we love them as we love ourselves, as a prolongation of ourselves), grandchildren constitute a secondary transfer. This is about the symbolic immortality to which KOTRE (1999) makes reference: our death is the end of an individual life cycle, but it is not the end of a wider cycle of which we have been part. [61]

When ERIKSON (1971) says that generativity constitutes an intergenerational bond, he makes reference to the fact that the generative adults can cultivate the virtues that he postulates for development in the next generations, he talks about basic confidence as the strength that is first constituted into the human being and that would be fundamental for the development. These definitions that seem theoretical and abstract are not far away from the insight that mature people carry out about parental roles. In addition to her two children, Mrs. A.S. received and temporarily raised more than 20 foster children (most of them babies) through her life. She had them under her care until the final adoption hearing. She

remembers a culminating point of her life, an early memory that directly links it to her parental function:

"We were in the kitchen in my parents' house, a warm sensation, my mother was cooking and my father was polishing his shoes, I was reading a book they gave me as a present. It was a book we used at school to learn the first letters and then I went running; my father had his foot on the shoe polish box, and I told him that there was something I didn't understand ... I had begun school one year earlier, my teacher told my parents that I wouldn't have any problems because I liked reading. So when I talked to my father he left the box aside; he sat down with his legs open and I sat on that hole with my hands on the table and it was like a shelter and I saw my mother moving away from the stove and looking at me and, at that moment I felt wrapped, protected and I have had that feeling many times in my life. That's why I love hugging my children and the babies I have transitorily, because this gives them security. The situation when parents look after you and hug you gives you that strength that will be useful to you in all the stages of your life, or for many problems of life or not, because when you live nice moments you feel like a strong hug and I love that, I love hugs ..." [62]

Although this remembrance can be chronologically placed during the interviewee's childhood, it is a remembrance that is logically related to the theme of generativity; ERIKSON (1971) postulates that a childhood, during which one has received many things, establishes the bases for being a giver subsequently. [63]

4.4 Generative continuity

The last characteristic that we will mention as regards the generative life trajectory is what we call "generative continuity." The interviewees are older people; however during their old age they still show important levels of commitment and concrete activities that link them with the improvement of younger generations and the care for the others, in the family circle as well as in the wider community environment community. [64]

Examples of this generative continuity during old age can be found in our interviewees' expressions. Mrs. Y. tells us about her present day activities. Activities that she hopes to keep doing:

"I do what I do responsibly at the crisis telephone answering service as well as at tutoring school children, and volunteering at the 'Casa de la Bondad' too (House of Kindness). I try to comply with everything and to be useful everyday I go and all the time I'm with them. I try not to give a bad example (...) I do volunteer work at 'Casa de la Bondad', a house that has been set for terminal patients only (...); people who have nothing, who are very poor or who have nobody to stay with, go to this house. So we spoon feed them, or touch them, caress them or rub them where it hurts. How good we feel about it is perhaps more than what we give to them, it is very nice";
"... continue supporting my daughters, my granddaughters ..." [65]

Mrs. P. expresses her present experience as a volunteer, which shows her commitment and continuity with the concern for others' well-being:

"I work as a volunteer in a telephone service for older adults and that has not only allowed me to give something of my own to someone who may need it, but it has also enriched me with many things that have been important to me";

"being able to do something for someone who needs it comforts me, I don't know how to put it, I would love to help people even more than I do now." [66]

Mrs. D., aged 64, devoted herself to the religious life; she was a teacher in the institutions where she worked. At present, her generative commitment is evident in the volunteering she performs; her generative concerns are crystallized in her beliefs:

"I volunteer at 'ATM,' which means telephone service for adults in crisis. When I enrolled as a volunteer, I knew I was going to receive more than what I was giving, and it was just like that (...). To love your fellow beings is, for me, the purest energy, I believe you devote the whole day, twenty four hours. When you get out from that pure energy, you have to ask yourself: what can I do? (...) I have to give what life gave me back to people in need." [67]

Mrs. M., aged 60, is a mother of two children and a grandmother of several grandchildren. She worked as a teacher since her youth and had an outstanding professional career that she combined with family care giving. She performed all this alone after her husband's death. Nowadays, she carries out volunteer tasks and shows her generative commitment when talking about her desires:

"As regards to other people I want to help those in need; to help my children economically and to help people my age who are suffering from privations. I think it is unfair for them to suffer at this stage in their lives. I have no economic needs: I'm not rich either, but I have my retirement and that's enough; those people that suffer, that need to visit the doctor and can't ... being able to help them would be perfect for me." [68]

In the following expression, the already mentioned Mrs. G. not only summarizes the generative activities she did in her life, but also talks about the activities she keeps doing and the reasons for that continuity:

"I worked hard, I also wrote a book with a colleague, I accomplished everything, I planted a tree, I did everything and then I decided to retire from teaching and I retired from the job in the province, but I still had some teaching hours and I stayed to help the children until they graduated." [69]

Her generative commitment is also shown in the volunteer work she does and in the beliefs she expresses:

"During life, we have to be absolutely caring, if we can help, we should help. If we can help in every sense (...). I feel that volunteer work is very little because we aren't

professionals, but we are helping a lot, helping people who need to be understood (...) trying to help and to make people feel well in the same way I feel well. I also want people to feel well, especially those around me and even more my loved ones; I want them to feel well." [70]

5. Conclusions

In reference to life narratives, it is significant that generativity linked contents are integrated in the narrative of older people with a culminating point of generativity, although this is not a prototypical generative age (middle-aged adults). These generative tasks are the axes that organize the narrative; their significance is transcendental to life satisfaction and the sense of coherence, integrity and continuity of the self. The "need to be needed" is in all cases an expression of psychological need that structures the evolutionary development. Doing generative activities throughout the life span becomes a permanent expansion and growth of the self, aside from being an answer to this reciprocal need. If generative motivations are structuring, the expression of this structure is present during the whole life journey, remaining in time and showing different hues according to the various life stages. The beginning of generativity during childhood is seen in germinal concerns about others and early actions that will become consolidated in an expansive and productive adulthood, and will continue through old age. [71]

In this sense, generative motivations, communal as well as those that serve the development of self (agency), structure the psyche by establishing a stable developmental pattern. The four periods of expansion of the self, associated to the transformation of the response to the need to be needed, can be identified in the interviewed women, all of them with an exceptional development of generativity. There are germinal and very early evidences, such as empathy, thirst for justice and inclination toward solidarity: the beginning. Moreover, a period of constant generative exercise is confirmed, in the familial as well as in the professional environment (productivity and expansion). Finally, a generative continuity at the service of the self appears, to the extent that the achievements during adulthood are a source of personal gratification. Thus the generative achievements represent components that explain part of life satisfaction and give meaning to life: a fruitful trajectory that has its prolongation in the descendants' lives. [72]

The results of the analysis of these culminating points of life trajectories, in the generative sense, show that adult generativity and its continuity during old age have, in an implicit and early way, the perception of others as individuals who need to be helped, along with certain strengths of the self that gave them the capacity to respond to these demands. This ego efficiency, added to the sense of reciprocity, is an early confirmatory clue that, like promises, would permit a wide expansion of the self and a productive trajectory during adulthood. [73]

The origin of this generative concern could be centered in the paradox of the discovery of strength in front of weakness. This discovery of weakness or fragility

in others contrasts with the perception of personal strength. This early empathic perception would be internalized in the development of the self and would lead to complementing oneself with others in asymmetric relationships of care and solidarity. This combined perception of need and strength, of fragility and capacity for caring underlies what authors like McADAMS (in McADAMS et al., 1997, 2001) and KOTRE (in KOTRE & KOTRE, 1998) make reference to: the beginning of generativity, not only in narratives that show a fortunate childhood but also in those that reflect the need to prevent early damages in future generations. We believe that this sensitivity to fragility and of certain strength to minimize such weakness could explain why two apparently contradictory origins (fortunate and unfortunate childhoods) can be equal sources of adult generative developments. Maybe the key is not only in the degree of remembered wellbeing or childhood pleasure, but in the capacity to perceive necessity, which would stimulate acts of caring or repairing and giving an effective answer. [74]

In every case and according to life narratives, the pleasant tendencies have predominated over the unpleasant ones in the development; in this sense generativity has predominated over stagnation through adulthood. This tendency is reflected in expressions of productivity and care for more vulnerable people (sons and daughters, students, patients or children). Commitment to future generations and to political and civic matters is evident in the analyzed narratives. At the same time, a retrospective look at adulthood is present and integrated in the narratives. These narratives show the involvement of the self and its expansion in familial as well as professional generative tasks. The care for others is not restricted to the conventional one related to the care of one's own children, but the personal realization is reflected in tasks which include caring for, teaching, and working for other members of society. Moreover, the narratives show clearly a satisfactory report related to the commitment to these tasks during the adult life. There are no expressions of complaint or disdain in any case. Performing these "duties of adulthood" is seen as a typical task of development, for which people were apt and mature. These fruitful tasks are characterized by being pleasant and seen as opportunities to continue the personal growth. Expressions related to the completeness of the self and to personal happiness are proofs that the early perception of others' needs is put into action during adulthood. The productivity and the expansion of the self are fruits, expressions of maturity, that acquire their realization starting from the infantile germinal potential. In this sense, the generative structure performs its function by the performance of transgenerational caring. [75]

As proposed by ERIKSON (1971), the development of all the stages previous to adulthood has as a goal to arrive at adulthood, and to form an individual with the necessary and essential attributes for the care and guidance of the following generation. At this point we would like to recover some words from Françoise DOLTO that we consider relevant when thinking about the role of generativity on development:

"The desire that lives inside the organism of an infantile human specimen is to reach maturity through growth. If everything goes right, the objective is to procreate so that

his death leaves something alive. This is the universal law of individuals of living species" (2004, p.173). [76]

As we can see, DOLTO's proposition is not far from ERIKSON's proposal. When DOLTO says "if everything goes right ..." he refers to the stages that ERIKSON has meticulously developed (the six epigenetic crises previous to the arrival at maturity). If everything goes right, adulthood is transformed into a creative and productive stage, at the service of one's own development and at the service of future generations' development. It is relevant to ask about the breakdowns of development or vital impediments that prevent generative components from maturing in adulthood, since this stage is the phase that allows the generational linking and the maximum expression of productivity. Some answers to this question can be taken from the analysis of narratives of people whose narratives do not present generative contents. [77]

Finally, if generativity would be just at the service of the reproductive function or of the familial organization in more conventional ways, while a social structure is created to educate and guide the other generations, the generative concerns should go down during old age in front of other life vicissitudes, such as physical or cognitive changes or social roles. On the other hand, if generativity is important as a structuring construct of the psyche and as a representative of continuity, it would be evident that expressions of commitment and generative achievements would still remain during old age. The latter was evident in the narratives of older people with a culminating point of development. [78]

When our interviewed women look back, they recognize themselves as older women who have given origin to ideas and have cared for people. Apart from the importance of their life story for the meaning of their present time, they feel apt and capable of continuing the practice of generativity in extra-familial social roles. They know that, by doing volunteer work, they maintain a space that keeps this vital structure centered on help, reciprocity of care and learning. The continuity of generative tasks in the familial context includes children and grandchildren; however, these actions are complemented with other social and community tasks. Contrary to what could be expected, the need to be needed has not declined, but it has acquired another sense and the expansion of the self is held by including unrelated people. In this way, other functions that are less conventional and more related to personal choice have been added to familial generative functions. [79]

The perception of the complementary condition between necessity and help, between fragility and care were discovered early. It is a conviction that commits more generative people during old age. During this period of life, the continuity of generativity is not just an act of what was potential in childhood. At this stage of life of people with a culminating point of development, generativity has a regenerative sense of reciprocity and gratitude. "I have to give back to people in need what life has given me." At this life stage, highly generative people integrate in their narrations that the well-being is personal and social; fortune and strengths are gifts that should be shared.

"To try to help and to make people feel well in the same way I feel well, I also want people to feel well and especially those around me and even more my loved ones; I want them to feel well." [80]

Thus, some people had an early and clear perception of the needs of others and a productive and fruitful exercise of their generative capacity during adulthood. In their old age, the expansion of the self of such people is reflected in the acceptance of the life cycle just as it has been; a life cycle that results as meaningful because it has become a link inside the wider cycle of "Life" with capital "L." [81]

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