

## CALL FOR PAPER

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GENERATIVITY & PSYCHOTHERAPISTS

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ERIK ERICKSON, IN HIS SEMINAL WRITINGS ON ADULT DEVELOPMENT, used the term *generativity* to describe a crucial stage of maturity—a stage of ripeness and bearing fruit. The meaning of generativity expands outward from the archetype of mature adults creating a family. Coming after adolescence and young adulthood—when we address those more inward-focused tasks of forming identity and finding intimacy—generativity involves a refocusing of creative and productive energy outwards towards the community. Erickson writes that “the mere fact of having... children does not in itself ‘achieve’ generativity”(Erickson, 1963, p.267). Rather, he says there must be a true investment of the self, a “gradual expansion of ego-interests... a libidinal investment in that which is being generated,” (Erickson, 1968, p.138). In reaching a truly generative stage of development, then, we feel a stake in the welfare of those who will come after us.

Erickson saw generativity as a reciprocal learning process in which growth and validation are experienced by both participants.

Evolution has made man a teaching as well as a learning animal, for dependency and maturity are reciprocal: mature man needs to be needed, and maturity is guided by the nature of that which must be cared for. (Erickson, 1968, p. 138)

In addition to caring for or teaching the next generation, generativity may involve creating new ideas or infusing new life into productive endeavors. It includes creativity and generosity expended for the benefit of future generations.

How do we psychotherapists experience our generativity? Does the healing we offer in our professional roles advance our own maturity? How do we experience Erickson’s paradigm of reciprocity—the idea that at a certain point in life we need to be nurturers as much as those who are coming along in our footsteps need to be nurtured?

If we become productive and creative in caring for others, how do we use this awareness to help our patients develop more generative lives? Alternatively, how might the role of nurturer prevent us from becoming generative in the broader definition of creativity and productivity?

We would also like to hear thoughts about receiving the generosity and guidance of those who came before us. As we think about the people who are our role models for generativity in life, what do we carry forward?

Erickson, E. *Childhood and Society*, New York: Norton, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1963

Erickson, E. *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, New York: Norton, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 1968.

For the summer 2010 issue of *Voices*, The Art and Science of Psychotherapy, we invite submissions regarding generativity in the lives of therapists. Information about submissions can be found on the AAP website on the *Voices* page. You may direct your inquiries to co editors Co-Editors Doris Jackson ([dorisj@comcast.net](mailto:dorisj@comcast.net)) and Penelope Norton ([psynorton@aol.com](mailto:psynorton@aol.com)).