

**Growing into Generativity:  
Adolescent Roots of a Generative Self in Emerging Adulthood**

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In this paper, I want to describe in overview a program of research on the roots of generativity development in adolescence. This is part of a broader project on the family and generativity, but here I will concentrate on two complementary aspects of the question of origins – what one might call the traditional personality roots, and then the moral roots, of generativity development from adolescence to early adulthood. I will base this description on two longitudinal studies which explore the relations between adolescent personality and moral development and the expression of a sense of generativity in emerging adulthood. I first describe the construct of generativity, then the studies and the rationale for the research, and then focus on the two topics in turn.

Generativity was originally conceived by Erik Erikson (1963) as the hallmark of the period of midlife in the human life cycle, the 7<sup>th</sup> of his 8 life stages in his model of ego development. Erikson saw parenthood as the prototype of generativity, the commitment to caring for future generations as a legacy of the self. However, he argued that one may be generative as an adult in many other ways than simply parenting. Two further points are important here with regard to Erikson's stage model. One is that his is an epigenetic theory, which incorporates the idea that each of the stages is present in some ways at each period of the life cycle. Thus, the midlife stage of generativity must have its developmental roots earlier on and thus demonstrate some sort of continuity over time. Furthermore, Erikson believed that a successful resolution of each succeeding personality "crisis" in his sequence would be facilitated by more effective resolution of the preceding stages (Erikson, 1963). In the case of generativity, this suggests that the resolution of the preceding stages of identity and intimacy would be linked to generativity development.

McAdams (e.g., 2001) has extended Erikson's theorizing in recent years, and developed a series of measures of individual variability in generativity in adulthood, as well as a broad model of how generativity operates in the personality (McAdams & de St. Aubin, 1992). A core element of McAdams' model focuses on the construct of generative concern, as measured by the Loyola Generativity Scale, a 20-item questionnaire designed to index variations in commitment to generative roles and activities. McAdams also argues that generativity may be relevant across a wider range of the life cycle than Erikson's original stage model has traditionally been interpreted as suggesting.

McAdams has also been instrumental in exploring the narrative component of generativity – in particular, the life stories narrated by adults who are independently judged higher or lower in generativity (e.g., McAdams et al., 1997). He has shown that there are several distinctive features of a characteristic life story "script" that generative adults tend to recount. Of most

interest for the present paper, the generative life story tends to emphasize the important dimensions of “moral steadfastness” over time in the life course, and a strong commitment to prosocial goals for the future. These retrospective life story accounts by midlife adults of their earlier lives thus tend to emphasize the continuity of their moral commitments over time. Nevertheless, these retrospective and “constructive” life stories raise many questions with regard to issues of validity. To date, there has been little exploration of the relations between moral and generative development in the individual personality **prospectively** over time.

In our recent work in this area, we have focused on the early roots of generativity in adolescence. Erikson’s framework, as discussed above, suggests that we might expect some continuity of personality across the stages and over time. We have explored these Eriksonian personality questions by looking for evidence of continuity in measures of generativity from adolescence into early adulthood (e.g., Frensch et al., in press; Lawford et al., 2005), and by looking at relations between the developmentally prior phases of identity and intimacy resolution (Allard & Pratt, 2005; Allard & Pratt, 2006).

Second, we have been examining the moral roots of generativity in adolescence (Arnold et al., 2003; Pratt et al., 2006). The moral domain is clearly complex, and McAdams et al.’s (1997) results on the life stories of adults suggest that certain aspects of moral development in adolescence might be particularly salient in predicting prospectively to generativity in young adulthood. In our studies, we have examined this with regard to commitment to moral ideals for the self and specifically to a sense of moral identity among adolescents. We have used a narrative approach to exploring this construct of moral identity commitment through the stories that adolescents tell about their lives.

I will describe briefly the two longitudinal studies in overview and then summarize hypotheses and results for the two topic areas of personality and moral dimensions in generativity development. The first study (the Futures Study) is a primarily questionnaire-based investigation of individual social, personal and moral development, begun when several hundred Canadian youth were age 17 on average, and continued until age 26. We obtained questionnaire measures of identity status, generativity and personality development at several ages in this research (17, 19, 23 and 26).

The second study (the Teen-Parent Study) is a smaller, family-based study of 40 Canadian families, focusing on the process of value socialization in families (e.g., Pratt et al., 2004). The data for these participants were collected by interviews and questionnaires, starting at age 14, then ages 16, 20 and 24 for the target adolescent. Included were standard measures of identity status development (Adams et al., 1979), generativity, moral value endorsement, and adjustment measures. We also collected extensive narrative data in these interviews. In particular, we drew on specific life stories to characterize levels of moral identity commitment at ages 16 and 20, as described later.

Hypotheses regarding the **Eriksonian personality** roots of generativity were as follows:

1. There should be continuity of individual variations in generativity from adolescence to early adulthood.

2. Patterns of identity development in late adolescence should predict to generativity in early adulthood.
3. Intimacy development in late adolescence should be linked to generativity in early adulthood as well.

The first hypothesis focused on the question of continuity from adolescence (only ages 19 and 23 were measured) to adulthood (age 26) in measures of generativity. As shown in the table, there was considerable stability across these ages for generative concern on the Loyola Generativity Scale of McAdams in the Futures Study. There was also stability in the use of standard measures of generative themes in life stories in the Teen-Parent Study from 16 to 24 (Frensch, et al., in press), which I have no space to present here. These stability results support the argument that generative variations among adolescents are meaningful, and these measures also were shown to predict to open-ended indices of emerging adults' understanding of the ideas of concerns for future generations and of leaving a legacy of the self in emerging adulthood (Pratt et al., 2006), further supporting the validity of these generative indices in late adolescence.

Hypothesis 2, Erikson's general epigenetic prediction that development of generativity would be positively related to effective resolution of the identity issues of late adolescence, was also supported. As shown, endorsement of a more achieved identity status in the questionnaire data at ages 17 and 19 in the Futures data set predicted modestly positively to higher levels of generative concern on the LGS at age 26.

Hypothesis 3 concerned intimacy development and generativity development. Though I don't have space to develop the measures in detail here, we did find that loneliness, treated as an index of low levels of intimacy, as well as a narrative measure of intimacy, were related as predicted to more positive generativity development as assessed in both studies (Allard & Pratt, 2005). Table 1 shows these data for loneliness when first measured at ages 19 and 23 in the Futures sample with generative concern at age 26.

In general, then, our data suggest that there is evidence to support some continuity of an early generative personality, and between stages in the Eriksonian sequence of personality development, from late adolescence into emerging adulthood. Of course, much more remains to be done to explore the details of these patterns.

I turn to the question of moral roots next. The McAdams' life story findings, as well as several previous studies of the lives of moral exemplars (e.g., Colby & Damon, 1992; Matsuba & Walker, 2005), surely suggest that there should also be relations between moral components of the personality and generativity development. In order to explore this model in our narrative Teen-Parent data set, we developed a measure of commitment to a moral identity based on ratings of the life stories told by our adolescent participants. This measure focused on level of caring for others, even at some cost to the self (Pratt et al., 2006). Participants in the study at ages 16 and 20 told specific stories of a turning point in their lives, of a situation of moral uncertainty ("not knowing the right thing to do"), of a time when they were taught a value by parents, and of a time when proud of themselves. Here are two example stories from the data set (with ratings on a 1-5 scale):

**21 year-old male's proud story:** "OK, I got kicked out of my parents' house. And that was probably the biggest life-turning thing that has happened to me. And now I have my own house, I have my own tenants. I get paid for a living. I think I'm stronger, more independent. I can hold my head high because I'm very proud of what I've accomplished. And this is only the start. I want a lot more... **I'm zealous for money, sometimes over-zealous.** Having the house gave me a new drive for money, that it's achievable. It gave me more maturity. It gave me a different outlook on life... **just knowing that I'm controlling people's lives.** Like at the drop of a hat I can walk upstairs and get all three of these people out of my house, you know, and say, 'Come pick up your stuff next week at this time...'

This individual's story set was rated low (1 on our 1-5 scale) on moral identity.

**Turning point story of a 16 year-old girl:** "You know in school I was always part of the little cool crowd... And then S came into my class, and she was Indian, and she was made fun of so much. I believe it was a real racial issue. I felt so badly for her because she did not stand up for her rights at all, she would smile or brush it off as if everything was OK. But I knew it wasn't OK. **I thought 'Look, if she couldn't stand up for herself, she needs someone else to stand up for her, because what is happening here is not right.'** So I started becoming her friend, and then all the members of the cool group totally ditched me... I remember one specific time... I just stood up and burst out and I started yelling. I don't even remember what I said, but I remember after that I just felt so good, and all the cool girls just stood around us in a circle and it was totally silent. It was like such a moment. It was a day I'll never forget."

This individual's story set was rated as high (a 5 on our 1 – 5 scale) on moral identity commitment to caring for others at a cost to the self.

We first sought to establish the construct validity of this narrative rating of commitment to a moral identity in adolescence. Hypothesis 1 predicted that scores on this rating would be related to endorsement of moral values as ideals for the self in adolescence, using a values task adapted from Arnold (1993), involving choices of moral versus nonmoral values for the self. Hypothesis 2 explored whether the narrative ratings would predict to prosocial behavior in the community at age 24, which was measured by self-report on a questionnaire (Pancer et al., in press), reasoning that such a prospective finding would support the construct validity of this narrative measure as an index of prosocial motivation. Finally, Hypothesis 3 held that stronger moral identity commitment in adolescence would be a precursor of a generative self in young adulthood.

Table 2 shows correlational results testing these three hypotheses for the Teen-Parent Sample. As can be seen, the longitudinal correlations between moral identity commitment ratings at 16 and 20 and moral value endorsements for the self at ages 14 and 16 were fairly consistently positive (Hypothesis 1). Interestingly, Kohlberg stage level of moral reasoning did not predict to these identity ratings, as shown. Regarding Hypothesis 2, moral identity commitment ratings at ages 16 and 20 were strong predictors of youth involvement in the community at ages 20 and 24. Indeed, they predicted unique variance in prosocial behavior beyond moral values at these ages in simultaneous regression analyses. Finally, the data indicated that, as hypothesized, moral identity commitment ratings were positive predictors of generative concern on the LGS, as well as of the narrative use of generative themes in life stories at age 24 (Hypothesis 3).

In summary, we are encouraged by the findings to date that seem to support the continuity of personality stages within the Eriksonian framework, but much more needs to be done to establish the developmental links between identity, intimacy and generativity in these prospective longitudinal analyses. Obviously as well, we have only been able to examine measures of generativity development into the earliest period of adulthood, and most of our participants are only beginning to confront the midlife tasks of career growth, marriage, and parenthood. The patterning of generativity development may be different in a variety of ways across the long period of adulthood.

The results for links between our narrative assessment of moral identity and generativity development are particularly interesting, because they support the findings of McAdams' retrospective life story research in midlife, using a prospective longitudinal design. They suggest that the idea of moral identity development as an component of motivational commitment to moral action (e.g., Blasi, 2004; Hardy & Carlo, 2005) can shed important light on this question, and indeed that this construct is particularly relevant for generativity development, as might have been predicted from the work of McAdams et al. (1997) and other research on moral exemplars. Finally, we intend to pursue the work on narrative measures of commitment to moral identity in the future, as a particularly promising way to study this aspect of the moral self in action.

Table 1. *Longitudinal correlations of generativity and personality measures across time*

Measure:	Generative Concern (Study 1 – Age 26)
Generative Concern (19)	.44**
Generative Concern (23)	.73**
Identity Achieve (17)	.27*
Identity Achieve (19)	.29*
Loneliness (Age 19)	-.39*
Loneliness (Age 23)	-.57**

Table 2. *Correlations of narrative moral identity measures with moral values, behavioral and generativity indices (Teen-Parent Study)*

Measure:	Moral Identity Rating 16	Moral Identity Rating 20
Moral Value Choice Age 14	.40*	.17
Moral Value Choice Age 16	.59**	.52**
Moral Stage Scores Age 16	.12	.15
Moral Stage Scores Age 20	.12	.16
Prosocial Behavior Age 24	.57**	.60**
Generative Concern Age 24	.44*	.53**
Generative Story Theme 24	.25	.41*

\*  $p < .05$

\*\*  $p < .01$

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