

BAR – ILAN UNIVERSITY

**To Improve, to Conserve, to be Meaningful – Three Types of Generativity  
Motivations Among Midlife High School Counselors**

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## **Abstract**

About seven decades ago, Erikson (1950, 1963) presented generativity as a major developmental challenge in the middle adulthood. Erikson believed that the adult's concern for promotion and facilitation of future generations' well-being is a universal stage in the human life cycle; however, at the same time he emphasized that there are significant differences between adults in the intensity of generative tendencies and the fields in which it is expressed.

Generativity could be directed everywhere in the existential space and is the stage that generates the driving force for the continuity of society from generation to generation. Assuming that there is not one prototype of being generative and that adults are generative in different ways, we sought to examine the generative motivations that evoke and guide middle-aged adults in order to understand from where comes the energy which recharges and fuels the nature of the generative action of the individual adult?

In the literature of research as well as among the school counseling professional leadership, the idea that school counselors are "agents of social change" is prevalent today (Sela & Sinai, 2017). School counselors work with adolescents who are amid their identity formation, and as such they serve as identity agents (Schachter & Ventura, 2008). Therefore, researching generativity among school counselors through an Eriksonian perspective is of special importance.

Furthermore, school counseling offer an interesting platform for the researching the challenges of generativity, since on the one hand it is a role that has a fertile ground for generative processes due to the day-to-day work with adolescents and the ability to demonstrate involvement, mentoring and contribution to the next generation; however on the other hand, it is very intensive work, which exposes the counselors to tensions and conflicts that increase the counselor's need to take care of herself as well, and puts strains on the generative process.

For the purpose of the study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 school counselors working in high schools and middle schools, whose average age is around fifty and that have at least ten years of experience in counseling. The interviews were analyzed using the thematic analysis method in order to establish the participants' feelings and perspective towards generative issues in their personal and professional life.

The findings of the study point to three main generative motivations: the motivation to fix and improve for the benefit of the next generation; the motivation to conserve and maintain personal and collective products; and the motivation to be meaningful to others. These motivations play a key role in shaping the generative roles that the counselor chooses to take on in reaching mid-life and add to the understanding regarding broader questions that the discussion will also address: what are the factors that motivate and shape the adult's generative identity? what leads the adult to act in a certain generative way and not another? And why do adults differ from each one another in their generative behavior?

This article offers a new perspective for examining the generative issue while focusing on the motives that shape the adult's generative identity and the intergenerational (two-way) interaction between the adult and adolescents who are in the midst of forming their identity. The three generative motivations presented in this article, expand the understanding regarding the factors that guide and shape the generative legacy which adults pass on to the next generation, not through tangible and material items, but rather as a piece of refined life itself.