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Personalized Generativity in the Work Pursuits of African Americans of the Great Migration

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Lifespan psychology recognizes that making a personally meaningful societal contribution is important for psycho-emotional health in old age. Most people make such contributions through their work roles. Were mid-20th century African Americans able to make such contributions despite circumscription to menial labor, work interruption, and unemployment? Answers to this question emerged serendipitously from a larger randomized controlled reminiscence intervention with older African-Americans who migrated north from the Southern United States during the Great Migration. In this qualitative analysis, transcribed audio recordings were coded for consistent work-related themes that surfaced unexpectedly as an important topic for the participants. The intention to locate personally meaningful work that also conferred a benefit to others persisted through daunting life circumstances and despite the great need to secure personal lives economically for 17 (68%) of the 25 participants. These findings represent an important counter-narrative to dominant views of African Americans in relation to work and perhaps a strong need in this segment of the population to tell their work-related generativity stories. It illuminates an element of healthy psychological functioning in African Americans of the Great Migration and suggests an opportunity to capitalize on an inherent motivator that could deliver significant benefits to human society.

Key Words: Older African Americans, Generativity, Personalized Generativity, Great Migration, Integrative Reminiscence, Qualitative Research

Generativity is most often portrayed as the long period of adulthood when individuals move into various roles of societal responsibility in the domains of family, work, and community, thus sustaining the culture and future generations (Erikson, 1950, 1963; McAdams, 1988, 2013). Sabir (2014) presents an alternative conceptualization of generativity as the continued investment of one's most productive time and one's most creative, intellectual, and material resources over many years toward a single intrinsically meaningful life project designed to benefit others—one's life's work—as opposed to random or generic social contribution. Jerome Wakefield (1998) echoes this alternative conceptualization, writing that "Generativity is propelled by an instinctual satisfaction in externalizing [particular] aspects of the self…random externalization is neither sought nor satisfying (p. 168)."

Other lifespan psychologists have highlighted the importance of a personalized form of social contribution for human well-being as we age (Allison & Goethals, 2017; Allison, Goethals, & Kramer, 2017; Fowler, 1981; Franco, Blau, & Zimbardo, 2011; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, & Levinson, 1978; Levinson & Levinson, 1996; Maslow, 1954; Patterson, 1985). "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself (p. 103, 1954)" is an oft repeated quote of Maslow's. Maslow (1968) writes that self-actualization (the counterpart to generativity in his theory of motivation) is not just another motivator, but "the purpose of one's whole life (p. 33)." All life-stages preceding self-actualization stabilize the organism for it, and the enjoyment and happiness in all stages following self-actualization depend on its achievement. Self-actualizers are mission-focused and problem-centered, and they carry a strong need to solve some problem that improves human life as a whole (Maslow, 1954). In sum, lifespan psychology holds that engagement with personally meaningful work that also confers a benefit to

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others represents healthy psychological functioning in adulthood. Whether conceptualized as generic contribution or personalized contribution, generativity is the central element around which Erikson's (1963) theory of psychosocial health in adulthood is ordered (Wakefield, 1998).

People most often make their generative contributions through their work roles (Savickas, 1997), though the work role is by no means the only vehicle for its achievement. Given circumscription by the socio-political environment to menial labor, work interruption, and unemployment, the question addressed here is whether mid-20th century African Americans were able to accomplish this critical life task through work. This paper explores this question in the work-history narratives of 25 older African-Americans who migrated from the Southern United States (US) during the Great Migration of the 1930s-60s (Lemann, 1991). Their narratives emerged serendipitously from a larger integrative reminiscence intervention when the participants spontaneously guided the discussion in this direction.

Given the competition for jobs between European immigrants and African American migrants during this period (Zinn, 1980) and the high risk of unjust employment practices nationwide, one would imagine that African American migrants might have accepted and clung to whatever forms of labor they could find and left any form of employment with trepidation. Steven Reich (2013) points out, however, that while their first jobs in their new location may have been menial, many African Americans searched for work that not only put food on the table but also conferred some level of dignity. They avoided dead-end jobs with no chance of upward mobility, jobs that conferred perpetual servility, or jobs that carried no level of social standing. A majority of the following narratives suggest an additional benevolence motivator in the work pursuits of many African Americans during this time. These narratives show persistence toward work that was intrinsically meaningful to participants and intended to provide a benefit to others, even as participants occupied a very low socio-economic status.

The explicit intention to locate and engage in personally meaningful work that conferred a benefit to others was evident in the work histories of 17 (68%) of the 25 African Americans in this study, despite their great need to secure their own lives economically. These participants held personalized generativity (the intention to make an idiosyncratically meaningful contribution to the world) as an important part of their idea of work success. This scenario represents an important counter-narrative to dominant narratives about African Americans in relation to work.

Dominant Narratives about African Americans in Relation to Work

African Americans have a work history distinct from that of every other racial/ethnic group in the US. Africans enslaved in the US provided a steady supply of free labor for which they gained no personal benefit (Blackmon, 2008). In their attempts to control newly freed slaves, southern planters and their political allies suggested that Blacks needed the slave system in order to be productive, "holding that they would not work except under compulsion and could not be trusted to work autonomously (Zieger, 2007, p. 10)."

DuBois (1935, 1962) suggested that Black people were cast as mentally inferior, savage, and physically predisposed to slavery. According to DuBois (1935, 1962), Blacks were viewed mythically in the South as happy and content to have all their needs met within the slave system, because they needed to be directed in every aspect of their lives. This construction of Black people shifted after the Emancipation Proclamation from that of the happy subservient Negro to the dangerous and, most importantly, unmotivated and lazy Negro (Alexander, 2010). The construction of Blacks as lazy and unmotivated to work was emphasized to justify the re-creation of a slavery system similar to what existed before the Emancipation Proclamation (Alexander, 2010).

Once the post-Civil War Reconstruction period ended, a new set of segregationist policies emerged in the South called Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws reestablished white supremacy, forced Southern Blacks to work the land owned by whites in much the same way as during slavery, and systematically prevented Blacks from establishing economic independence from the white establishment. In addition, there was an underground resurgence of the violent and anti-Black Ku Klux Klan, which had been officially dismantled in 1869.

When World War I erupted in Europe in 1914, immigration from Europe to the United States slowed substantially, leaving industrialized urban areas in the North, Midwest, and West with a labor shortage. To meet this shortage, African Americans were recruited to come to these regions. Newspapers reported that a factory wage in these regions was approximately three times more than what Blacks could earn in the South. For all these reasons, more than 6 million African Americans relocated from the rural South to cities of the North, Midwest and West from 1916 to 1970, a movement that came to be known as *The Great Migration* (Zieger, 2007).

Blacks relocated to cities like Chicago, New York City, and others seeking a life with the promise of political freedom and economic gain but instead found themselves faced with discrimination & hostility even in their new locations (Zieger, 2007). Blacks were generally assigned to the least skilled, most physically demanding and lowest paid positions. Even Blacks with substantive education found in many cases that the only jobs available to them were jobs as common laborers. Black women found that the same racial and gender bias that relegated them to low paid domestic servanthood in the South prevailed in the North (Zieger, 2007). The social, economic and political influence of Blacks in the US has evolved over time, but the popular construction of Blacks as lazy, especially when it comes to work, continues to this day (Schram, Soss, &

Fording, 2003). This historical construction of Blacks as lazy in relation to work is challenged in this paper.

Narratives in general are a powerful means for conveying the meaning in lived experience. Counter-narratives can be equally powerful in dispelling deficient notions of lived experience, in this case the lived experience of these African Americans in pursuit of work. Counter-narratives are designed to correct faulty depictions developed by outsiders of a culture, many of which are internalized by the cultural group members themselves. They are designed to tell the truer stories of groups who are often misunderstood or misrepresented (e.g., persons of low socio-economic status, African Americans, indigenous peoples, older adults, or persons of varying physical or cognitive abilities). They are often used to serve social justice by challenging the stereotypes that serve racial dominance around the world (Solarzano & Yosso, 2002). The present paper presents what amounts to a counter-narrative about the work-life of African Americans in the mid-twentieth century.

Methods

Positionality

For any qualitative study it is important to evaluate the ways in which the position of the researcher(s) might influence data collection, analyses, and interpretations (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006). This research was conducted by the first author, an African American female professor who was, at the time, a post-doctoral fellow at the Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging (CITRA). Her scholarly interests center on generativity in middle-aged and young-old adults. The second author is also an African American female professor, and the third author is an African American male graduate student. The fourth author is a white male full professor at Cornell University who served as mentor to the first author throughout the research project from conceptualization to publication.

One consideration is whether the shared racial background of the researcher and participants might have encouraged socially desirable responses from participants or responses that might make the participant appear more praiseworthy in the eyes of the researcher. While it is inevitable that some amount of romanticizing has entered the retelling of these participants' work experiences, there are also several reasons to accept that the essential elements of these accounts are true. Csikszentmihalyi & Beattie (1979) discuss the implicit assumption of coherence in any form of life review—whether those of autobiography, biography, psychohistory or a clinical report—a quality sufficiently demonstrated by the narratives presented. Additional elements of a believable narrative identified by Csikszentmihalyi and Beattie are the presence of concrete elements and a certain degree of vivid detail, both of which are characteristic of these narratives. There are two remaining reasons to accept these narratives as essential trustworthy. One is that the narratives often contained what might be considered unflattering elements that a person seeking social desirability might seek to conceal, such as spending time in prison or disagreeing with spouses over work goals. The second is that all of the participants had already spent decades of their lives together in this community, and most of the experiences described were already known by all. There was a large degree of shared telling and shared knowing among group members (see the stories of Marian. Evette, and Isabelle, for example). Any outright lies would not have gone undetected.

Another consideration may be whether data interpretation was influenced by the authors' shared heritage with the participants. To remedy this possibility, the near-finished paper was shared with the participants for any corrections to the current reflections on their work narratives. A large print, hard copy of the article was mailed to each participant along with a large print letter inviting their responses, allowing a lengthy time frame for responses. Six participants responded with approval of the manuscript.

Finally, it is important to mention that there are important benefits to conducting research with participants who share characteristics with the researcher (Sabir & Pillemer, 2014; Zola, 1982). For example, research has shown that a shared ethnicity between researcher and participants may provide an insider advantage in regards to eliciting more nuanced, detailed and candid responses (Baca Zinn, 1979; Hood, 1998, 2001). As an African-American woman, the first author was able to establish a rapport and a trusted connection with the participants through which they could speak freely about their work experiences.

Recruitment

The narratives presented in this article emerged serendipitously from a larger reminiscence study conducted in 2005. Participants were older adults receiving services at a senior center established in 1973 by a concerned citizens committee composed of local neighborhood residents. The Center Directors and Advisory Committee approved the study after a detailed review and discussion of the intervention protocol. The Cornell University Institutional Review Board also approved the study. Eligible participants were 60 years of age or older and English speaking with no significant symptoms of cognitive, hearing, or visual impairment. Screening was conducted by the Center Program Director and the Center social worker, both of whom knew each center member well.

In this study, we made selective use of The Life Review and Experiencing Form (LREF), an integrative reminiscence protocol developed by Haight and Haight (2007) and used in reminiscence research for more than 25 years. The LREF was designed for use with a single older adult over eight visits. The LREF provides a series of

questions from which to choose for use in each session. The full series of prompts walks the participant through each of Erik Erikson's (1963) eight developmental stages, from *basic trust versus basic mistrust* in early childhood to the final life stage of *integrity versus despair* in old age. The questions guide the life reviewer to examine, appraise, and come to terms with important life experiences across the entire lifespan without preferring some experiences over others.

While the LREF was designed for use with a single older adult over eight visits, it was adapted in this study to an eight-week group intervention format. In adapting the LREF, we took the necessary steps toward proper group formation, including setting ground rules and making everyone sufficiently comfortable to move forward with sharing intimate details of the life lived. For example, participants played a name game in which they shared their historical and continuing emotional connection to their first names. First names are usually far less threatening to examine than surnames can be, and they can initiate the introspective process in a gentle and often humorous way. The number of questions posed during sessions varied from a single question to three or four, depending on the amount of discussion among participants; however, the question(s) most important for a particular session was posed first.

Participants

The mean age of participants was 72 years (*SD* = 8). Ninety percent (90%) of the participants were female. All the participants were of African heritage (two participants identified as Caribbean American). Thirty-nine percent (39%) completed some college or obtained an associates or vocational degree. Sixteen percent (16%) earned a bachelor's degree, and 11% earned a master's degree. All participants (100%) arrived at their destination city in poverty.

Procedure

Participants met for eight consecutive weekly two-hour sessions of deeply engaging oral reminiscence work. Each received a $10 stipend, and healthy refreshments were served each session. With participants' consent, the sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. A structured reminiscence protocol was used, and questions posed were open-ended. Participants took turns responding orally to the questions, followed by open-ended and fluid discussion. The phrasing of the question relevant to work was as follows, "What I want to know is your work trajectory. How did your work life evolve? What did you finally settle and do and how do you think about that?" All names used in this paper are pseudonyms, and all locations have been omitted to protect the identities of the participants.

Data Analysis

The audio from the session containing the question regarding work was transcribed. The transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a systematic process of identifying patterns of meaning in participants' narrative accounts; and the open, axial, and selective coding methods of grounded theory (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The analysis was comprised of several steps. In the first step, the first and second authors read through the transcript independently several times simply to become familiar with this group of participants' discourse around their work history. The second step involved the independent coding of all passages relevant to the participants' work experience (open coding). In the third step of the analysis, the first and second author independently coded for any and all mention of the *meaning* work held for the participants, each creating a table of all work narratives alongside the meaning indicated, if any. In the fourth step, a consensus approach was used to refine code labels. The first and second author discussed the different ways in which the data were conceptualized and represented and modifications were made before reaching agreement on the three meaning categories: (1) generative success (those who were eventually able to obtain their generative work goals, more or less); (2) generative desire (those who were unable to achieve their generative work goal); and (3) no indication of a generativity motive (those who gave no indication of a generativity motive in their work lives) (axial coding). Once the narratives were organized within these three categories, we re-examined all narratives for proper fit within their assigned category. Attention was paid to ensure that each theme was supported by extracts from the interviews and represented the most compelling evidence from each narrative for generative success, generative desire, and no indication of generative intention in participants' work pursuits (selective coding) before entering what Braun & Clarke (2006) consider the sixth phase of analysis, writing the final report.

Results

In the following narratives, 14 of 25 participants (three teachers, two nurse's assistants, a youth worker, a counselor, one civil service worker/union representative, one homemaker, one social worker, one music instructor, one accountant, one personal development entrepreneur, and one tour guide) provide insight to their success at obtaining specific self-affirming employment that was also intended to benefit others. Three of the 25 participants (a would-be attorney, a would-be nurse, and a would-be social-worker) share their unfulfilled desires for such generativity in their work roles. Eight of the 25 participants give no indication of generative desire.

Work Narratives of Participants Falling in the Generative Success Category

The following narratives are those of participants who were eventually able to obtain their generative work goals, to greater or lesser degrees.

Generative success 1: Barbara. Barbara held stable employment in a coveted job with the telephone company, but relinquished the security of that job to pursue her desire to teach.

> *I worked for the telephone company…. I worked about three or four years. Then I got to take night courses at Local College because I always wanted to be a teacher. They didn't have a shift that I could work things with my courses in college. So I ended up leaving there. Then I met my husband.*

Barbara never completed her education because her husband was in the military, which meant moving frequently. Over the years she worked on base in the commissary, in clerical positions, in a casino, and in miscellaneous other positions. When I asked her about her intention to be a teacher, she reiterated that this was what she always wanted to do, then told of her current volunteer work with students. I asked where, and she responded:

> *It's called the ____. They have a school on Saturday, and I go there and volunteer with the students 2nd through 8th grade. They bring their homework and we help them with their work and correct it and see where their weaknesses are and try to help them. And do you know what I found out too? I found out we're helping 8th grade students and we're helping 4th grade students. They don't even know their times table. I can understand 3rd grade but 4th by then…."*.

So, while Barbara never taught formally within the school system, she nevertheless found a way to contribute to society in the way she found most meaningful.

Generative success 2: Michael. Michael had a talent for math and taught math to middle-schoolers before being derailed by a wrongful arrest. Before being arrested, he was also very much involved with taking several hundred middle-schoolers to summer college programs. As a consequence of the arrest, he was not re-hired to teach in the public school system; however, after many years working in another industry, he also returned, in a small way, to teaching math.

> *I went to college…My emphasis was math; I was good in math. I had a degree in math…. I got a job teaching here at ___. I was there for two-and-a-half or three years, and then I had some trouble. … I got arrested for something I didn't do. …I was in for a month, … they let us go. …So when September came around, I didn't get my job back. …so I started taking Civil Service exams, every Saturday. …I took the job on the court because my mother was a court employee, and I had worked there one summer as a typist in the court, so I took the job as a court officer, and I worked 28 years in the court. …Since I retired, I worked a couple of part time jobs since then within the school up in…".*

Unlike Barbara, Michael did have a chance to teach formally within the school system before being derailed. Like Barbara, he found a way to contribute to society in the way he found most meaningful despite the forces that interrupted his generative contribution.

Generative success 3: Marian. Marian didn't explicitly state an intention to benefit others even though she worked for 19 years at Catholic Charities in various roles. Then someone in the group who had known her for many years stated that she and her sister had run a highly respected music studio for many years. As a music instructor, her intention to benefit the musicians shows up in the ways she supported them beyond simply teaching them and beyond the music studio.

Researcher: Did I hear that you were a musician too?

Marian: Yes.

Researcher: What's that story?

Marian: I taught in my studio. …I used to make their lunch and take it up or whatever, when they had recitals, when they had a break in the concert, after the concert I would take up their lunch or whatever, at Carnegie Hall, so that's my life. Busy as a bee, and I'm still doing the same thing.

The special care Marian took of her students as a music instructor suggests both the level of personal meaning this work carried for her, as well as her intention to benefit her students.

Generative success 4: Faye. Faye worked several miscellaneous jobs despite her husband's objections, but she remained unsatisfied with her work life. She eventually obtained a position in a large commercial building, her idea of an ideal work environment, working with a state social service agency. She later transitioned to a city-run social service agency and remained in that position for a little over ten years until she retired. In this last employment position, she consistently chose to work with adolescents as, in her understanding, adolescents needed her the most.

> *I always wanted to help others. …when I got that job with the city we had to go for a lot of training in the beginning and sometimes ongoing, off and on. We put like little signs up on the wall and chose [which to] stand under. I would always stand under the one that says adolescents. Nobody else would be there but me and she says why, why did you choose that. I said because at that time I felt that teenagers are the more difficult*

population to deal with, and that they need the most help. So…every time they were like, "Why do you always choose…..".

Generative success 5: Tessa. Tessa became a homemaker reluctantly and at the encouragement of her husband, but she found great satisfaction in all that was involved in raising her children.

Researcher: "You stayed home and raised your kids?"

Tessa: "Yes, and I volunteered, when they went to day care I went to volunteer …."

Researcher: "So your husband supported you while you were raising kids?"

Tessa: "Oh, yes. He died in 1991. He supported us. … But that wasn't what I wanted to do…."

Researcher: "So you would rather have worked more?"

Tessa: "Yes, I would have, but with the kids, and then I was glad I was able to stay home with them, being they were young, getting them ready for school and getting involved in that. I'm glad of that. … Yes. Running to the school, and then I used to volunteer at _____, watch them when they'd come out….Going on those trips; I went on a lot of trips."

Generative success 6: Janice. Janice identified her love for children early and never worked in any other industry once she entered college.

I graduated and went to college. Every summer, except the summer I got mad and had to go to summer school most of the summer, I would come here and work at the childcare center. Basically my life has always been around children. I love children. So when I finished college, of course, I had to come back to school because… the city said you have to go [for teacher certification]. My life has been with children, going to school…. teaching for 30 years.

Generative success 7: Ophelia. Ophelia followed her natural talent in math all the way up the ladder to a position as comptroller for a well-known corporation in the city. She made no mention of intending to benefit others in her work over those many years and those many positions, however following retirement; she actively applied her knowledge base to benefit others in two important ways.

Well, I always liked numbers. Math was my favorite subject. You show me how and I'll do it, and that started me on the career to accounting. …After my second son was born I decided to see if I could get a part time job. I went to work for the _____. That led from a part time to full time. That led me back to college, and I attended ____, started in accounting as a major, graduated from [there], went to ____, and became accounting manager. … so then I went to work for ___ as comptroller over there, and when I took the position, I told her I'd stay for five or six years…. I stayed at ___ for my five-and-a-half years and left. I met some great people during my career, and because I liked numbers and because I believe in giving back to the community, …now I do volunteer taxes for ___ and ___. …I also teach computers for ___ in the city, which starts next Wednesday. The computer center is being renovated so we have 20 slots instead of 10, so it will accommodate more people.

*Generative success 8: Zena***.** Zena was never ambivalent about what she wanted to do, and she eventually found her way to her chosen profession helping others. However, she found the work too demanding and too emotionally disappointing to continue it into the indefinite future and took early retirement when her current location closed.

Zena: "I wanted to be a sitter, sit with patients. I wanted to be a sitter, but they didn't call me for the job. So when I came up here I said, well, I guess I could try again. So they said you have to go to school here. So I went to school to learn to be a nurse's aide. So I went there and graduated from there. Then I got me a job at the hospital and I stayed there until they closed."

Generative success 9: Evette. Like Marian, Evette failed to mention parallel work tracks, one of which provided her the ability to serve others in a way she found personally meaningful. Most of her story was about a laundromat she and her husband operated for many years, a laundromat that many of the participants recalled frequenting. It was only when I probed about something she mentioned earlier that I learned of her generative intentions.

Evette: "I had a laundromat. So I was working the job and I had four children and went to college. My husband was there. He worked while I worked my full time job and the laundromat and the children. It was a lot."

Researcher: "You were talking about wanting to be a nurse and getting into the hospital and you were a…"

Evette: "Nurse's aide. …I worked [from] the recovery room all the way down."

*Generative success 10: Cynthia***.** Cynthia graduated with a degree in social work and found many of the positions she held over the years unacceptable or boring until she found her niche working with elderly African Americans, a niche which invigorated her later years.

I graduated from Ivy League with a Master's, and the first job I got after having graduated was working in a day care center. I worked there for about two months, and I said oh, no. I've got to get out of here. …so I left. … [A friend told me about a position] working in Aging; that's what I like…. Advocat[ing] for the unique needs of the Black elderly… …then last year, in August, Marie came downstairs and said I've got this little

proposal here. They want us to do a friendly visitor program. …Anyway, I'm here. Doing the job and loving it. It's not for the money, because I think it's right. I call it a stipend. It pays my coffee. But I enjoy it, because I'm doing something. Speaking of giving back, this is my golden opportunity to give back, so folks, that's where I am.

Generative success 11: Isabelle. Like both Marian and Evette, Isabelle's generative contribution was also nearly lost beneath other parts of her work history. Isabelle "did odd jobs like taking care of white people's children and factories and all kinds of things, to make a living." After working briefly for the Board of Elections then for the Department of Social Services, Isabelle eventually landed a job with the Civil Service where she remained for 31 years. She radiated that certain satisfaction customary to people who have managed to engage in self-affirming work and further probing proved useful. Her fellow group members shared that throughout her 31 years in Civil Service Isabelle served as the union representative. Her group members were aware of her years of effort on the part of her fellow employees and held her in high esteem for this work, although Isabelle was quite demure and modest in her responses.

Researcher: Did you talk to the workers?

Isabelle: Yes. If they were being mistreated or something then I would step in and then I would go to a higher level.

Interviewer: So what motivated you to do that?

Isabelle: Because I saw it when I was working and I went through a little bit because managers and things wasn't fair some of them. They used to give people work that they didn't... So I used to go around and they made up their own rules.

Researcher: How long did you do that?

Isabelle: Until I retired.

Interviewer: So you started like 30 years ago.

Isabelle: 30 or 31 years I did.

Generative success 12: Herbert. Herbert had two stints in prison before discovering his generative potential helping other men who were still trying to manage alcohol and drug addiction as he himself had once done.

I went away twice. …After a while of being involved in an addiction and all kinds of alcohol problems I joined a program, what they called groups, confrontation groups. They taught you about [how] you have an affective disorder—there's something wrong with you before you use the alcohol or before you use the drug. …So once you admit that to yourself you're on your way to being cured. …So between getting a job and therapy and college I got the job in therapy first and then I went to college to back it up with a degree. …after taking the related courses I went out in the field and started working with the same people that I had trouble with.

Generative success 13: Beverly. Beverly's second career provided her the opportunity to design educational tours for African Americans traveling to Washington, DC and the surrounding area until she had a stroke. Following the stroke, she became an entrepreneur, meeting the need for greater exposure to books written by African American authors.

I trained myself to specialize in black tours. There's so much Black history in DC. During the tours I said to myself I missed my profession. … I used to love to get on the bus and talk to the kids. That was really, really nice. But then I had a stroke and I forgot everything. …that was the end of the tour guides. …I was an entrepreneur for a little while. Me and some friends we opened a business called Black Books for Everyone. We realized that the downtown bookstores didn't sell Black authors the way they should. So we started our own business and we operated out of a beauty parlor and went to the barbershops and we used to go to the churches. So we sold Black books. We ended up selling our business to some teachers...

Generative success 14: Abigail. Abigail was so transformed by a personal development experience that she opened a business to reproduce this transformation for others.

…Eventually… I was able to get into a personal development program. It was something like meeting with a psychologist and you have a round table discussion and you go to exercises. …I was able to come out of [my] shell and then as a result of it I was able to do things in my particular job with my supervisor that I wouldn't have been able to do ordinarily. It gave me license to act a certain way and exercise certain talents that I had. I found out later when I returned to the company a second time, that the people in personnel said I was running the entire department. I made changes. I introduced an art class because the department was highly thought of in the credit department. But I did things to get… to teach art. They had art exhibitions in the executive dining room and they were like on the map. They had earned a certain prestige. I did a lot of those things. I was also able to start my own business while I was still working there. My supervisor allowed me to do it because he wanted to keep me there. …I went into this business and I mean I had a wonderful time. I developed programs for people to reach their highest potential. I did a videotape, I did the article and the extras. The program is graphically illustrated and it's something that is my pride and joy.

So, 14 of the 25 participants were able to find work that was personally meaningful to them and made a difference in the lives of others. An additional three participants, however, convincingly conveyed a desire for generative work, but for various reasons were unable to accomplish this.

Generative Desire

Generative desire 1: Angela. Angela wanted to be a nurse, but spent her years working with computers because of the security it brought her family.

> *So then I got involved in computers. The next thing was computer special analyst because they were going to automate the office and computers were coming in. This was in the 70's and 80's. So I started working in that department, and then I became a trainer in that area. So it was satisfying to the point that I look back now…. By that time I had my daughter. My husband and I…so I knew I was going to stay right where I was and I had invested so many years and you just don't, I couldn't. I admire you for being able to just kind of go on and follow your dreams. But, of course, I had other dreams. I wanted to be a nurse. My godmother was a nurse and that's where I went to high school. …That's what I wanted.*

Generative desire 2: Francis. Francis wanted to help people as an attorney, but couldn't continue after her grandfather, who supported her education, died.

> *…I was studying to be a lawyer of all things. I wanted to be a lawyer. I'd still like to be a lawyer but it was something to help somebody. I worked very hard and I probably would have made it if I had some help but as I say my sister was doing the best she could. …she'd sit down with tears in her eyes and she said, "I'd love to see you be a lawyer." …when you don't have a mother and you can put your head on her lap and cry but I put my head on my sister's lap and cried. I wanted to go to school so bad but books got so I couldn't afford it. My grandfather died and what money he had left she just took that money and put it on clothes and things.*

Generative desire 3: Sharon. Sharon wanted to be a social worker and demonstrated commitment to this intention by minoring in social work in college and only majoring in sociology because the college she attended did not offer a social work major.

> *I didn't have to work after I got married, because my husband never required that I work. But, I was sitting home, waiting for happiness ever after, and it didn't come, so I decided I'd go back out there and look for something to do. I got a license as a beautician. I was a beautician, and after I adopted my [special needs] son, I got a school secretary's license so I could be home and take care of his needs, so from the beautician to the school secretary…. …I got my college degree, because I dropped out of high school, and I ended up retired after… 20-some years from the Board of Ed, as a school secretary, which the whole thing, when you look back on it, was not really what I would have wanted for my life.*
>
> Researcher: What would you have wanted?
>
> *I think I would have wanted a more professional care. Maybe social work, because I did have some of that experience in college. My major was Sociology. They didn't offer Social Work at ____ College as a major, so Social Work was my minor. I think I would have preferred that, but it just never happened, so that was it.*

Generativity Unmentioned

Eight of the participants shared interesting work histories but gave no indication of an intention to benefit others through their work. For example, Veronica, a textile worker, demonstrated high level sensitivity to fabric textures from childhood, and earned hundreds of thousands of dollars as a buyer for a large department store during her career. Although there was intrinsic meaning in her work, there was never any mention of its benefit to others. Another became a practical nurse, earning superior grades through several college degrees. One worked for the phone company, others worked as secretaries, messengers, and held other odd jobs; however, none of the remaining eight participants indicated an explicit intention to benefit others.

Discussion

These mid-20th century African Americans managed to make personally meaningful social contributions despite the social and economic injustices under which they labored, which affirms their commitment to serving others as much as to earning an income. More than once, participants forewent gainful employment to pursue their chosen means for service through work. Barbara, for example, quit an economically coveted job with the telephone company in order to pursue her dream to become a teacher. Cynthia left working with children as a social worker to eventually find her place happily working with older African Americans.

In addition to representing a degree of psychological health in this population (Jackson, Knight, & Rafferty, 2010), the participants' success represents a remarkable degree of resiliency and resourcefulness as their routes to

meaningful work were circuitous, challenging, and often protracted. Barbara's efforts to become a teacher were circumvented by marriage to a man with a military career. She eventually found gratifying work volunteering at a school where she worked with children on Saturdays; however, the route to her dream was non-linear, and the form it eventually took may have been unanticipated. Similarly, Michael was denied the opportunity to teach for many years until he could return to teaching math as a volunteer.

Sometimes the employment desired was too difficult to maintain due to the unanticipated nature of the role. For example, Zena dreamed of being a "sitter" and maneuvered her way into a nurse's aide position which she found gratifying but unsustainable. Nurse's aide work includes the physically demanding task of lifting human bodies. So, while she persisted in her efforts to locate and engage in meaningful work, the work role itself fell short of expectations.

While the majority of the participants were able to eventually achieve their generative intention to some degree, some were not. Those who failed to do so, failed for two reasons: loss of economic support and the immediate economic needs of a growing family. Others had very interesting work histories but made no explicit mention of seeking intrinsically meaningful work or of an intention to benefit others. All of the participants demonstrated extraordinary stamina as they arrived at their new locations penniless and relying on friends and family for assistance. The typical scenario was one of attending college at night while working full-time and raising a family. Sixty-six (66%) of the participants attended some college. All of them made their way to work that provided relative economic security, and the majority engaged in personally meaningful work that made benefitting others a priority.

The study had a number of limitations. First the sample size is small. Data should be collected from a larger sample to gain a better sense of personalized generativity among this population. Second, participants were recruited from a geographically restricted, well-known senior center and may not be representative of all migrants of this movement during this time period. Third, recruitment for this study occurred in a senior center environment, which tends to attract more mobile and socially integrated older persons. The meaning of work question should be posed to older persons who are recruited from the general community. Nonetheless, the study suggests some important directions for future research.

First, a larger sample size would allow for comparisons between qualitative and quantitative measures of personalized generativity. Secondly, the question in the protocol was not expected to generate such an animated, lengthy, and consistent portrayal of the challenges and rewards of the work experience. The participants spontaneously focused the discussion on these stories and the meaning these experiences held for them, which is understandable in retrospect. Success in work was one of the main reasons six million African Americans migrated to other regions. Perhaps future life review efforts with the broader set of these particular elders should respond to their strong need to tell their work-related generativity stories.

Admittedly, the stories shared by these older adults were surprising to us, when perhaps they should not have been. We wondered whether others might also find these stories and these accomplishments surprisingly different than what was imagined about the work lives of African Americans of this era. We agreed that these findings present an excellent opportunity to share a consistent counter-narrative to the dominant narrative around these adults and their work. Counter-narratives are designed to tell the truer stories of not just African Americans but also other groups whose stories are often misunderstood or misrepresented. The counter-narratives of other marginalized groups in the US present a third possibility for future research. What, for example, are the work-related generativity stories of low-income and employment-challenged Whites in the US or of persons of varying physical or cognitive abilities? How have they managed to meet their needs to contribute to society in ways that matter to them despite their challenges of social injustice?

Finally, as the centerpiece of the adaptive human life trajectory and as a global human requirement for satisfaction with the life lived, supporting human achievement of personalized generativity is of high importance. The present participants' experiences affirm that the need to make a personally meaningful societal contribution persists even under challenging conditions. How can we support the accomplishment of this important life task for all people? These narratives suggest an opportunity to capitalize on an inherent motivator for human well-being and for positive societal engagement.

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