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Developing a Generous Identity Scale

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ABSTRACT

We develop a scale to measure generous identity to be used in future research on prosocial behaviors. Study 1 is a qualitative study designed to examine how people define generosity and generous identity as a person identity. Study 2 pilots a scale for generous identity using the qualitative data from Study 1 and preexisting scales that assess prosocial behaviors and personalities. The results from Study 2's exploratory factor analysis inform Study 3's confirmatory factor analysis using the same items on a larger sample. Study 4 uses the proposed generous identity scale to predict perceptions of generosity in hypothetical helping scenarios. The results are the preliminary steps towards accumulating validation support of our generous identity scale. Future research studies can use the scale in specific contexts, such as religious and work organizations, to test whether generous identity can predict community service, organizational citizenship behaviors, and other generous acts.

While generosity is a common term for giving time, talent, and resources, scholars lack a consensus on its precise meaning in action. It is often conflated with related prosocial constructs like altruism, volunteering, and philanthropy (Collett & Morrissey, 2007). However, despite a high societal demand for generosity research—evidenced by the University of Notre Dame's Science of Generosity initiative—qualitative exploration into how individuals actually interpret and internalize this virtue remains scarce.

This paper presents four studies to develop and validate a generous identity scale, filling a critical gap in the literature (Gur & Olien, 2015). We move from a qualitative definition derived from participant perspectives (Study 1) to quantitative scale development and content validation (Study 2), followed by a latent structure analysis (Study 3) and criterion-related validation to predict perceptions of behavior (Study 4).

Generous identity is fundamentally distinct from other prosocial behaviors for two primary reasons:

Internal vs. External Motivation: While behaviors like philanthropy or "helping" may stem from a need to fulfill external expectations or "prove" oneself to others, generous behavior originates from an internal self-definition. It is an expression of the inner self rather than a response to external pressure.

Situation-Independence: Previous research often focuses on situational prosociality (e.g., reacting to a specific person in need). In contrast, generous identity is context-free and stable across time. It is a general trait attached to the individual rather than a reaction to a specific circumstance.

By isolating generous identity from transient prosocial acts, we can better understand the psychological engine that drives consistent, long-term generous behavior. The higher goal is to define generous identity, and to do that while looking at the literature we realized there isn't a concise and emic definition of generosity. Therefore, we took the initiative to define generosity as the foundation for what it means to have a generous identity. This stems from Edmondson and McManus's (2007) paper positing that new concepts require qualitative methodologies while concepts that have been studied for which we have better understandings can be connected using quantitative methods.

GENEROUS IDENTITY

Generous identity is the extent to which people define themselves as generous; we derive our definition of generous identity similarly to the way in which Burke and Stets (2009) define moral identity. This construct is considered an identity because it is a consistent part of a person's general self-definition that drives that person to engage in certain behaviors across different contexts. In other words, generosity resides within individuals and is not situation-specific. According to sociological Identity Theory (DeLamater, Myers, & Collett, 2015), identity is formed by structures that are internal and situational in a way that resembles a continuous positive feedback loop: a person enters a situation that enables him or her to engage in a generous behavior, the person then chooses to engage in that behavior, the person receives feedback that he or she is generous, then the person internalizes that he or she is a generous person given his or her recent enactment of generous behavior, and the person brings his or her generous person identity to future situations. Therefore, once a person's identity is formed, certain contextual cues can activate it to enact future behavior (Burke & Stets, 2009).

Within identity theory, individuals form identity standards for themselves which influence their behavior, and feedback from others can either reaffirm or contradict those initial standards (Burke & Stets, 2009). This means that people who self-identify as generous should take this identity standard into account in situations that provide opportunities for generosity, and generally engage in generous behaviors in order to reaffirm their generous identity standard. When input from the environment does not match the identity standard of being highly generous, people who define themselves as generous will behave in ways that are extremely generous to over-correct external perceptions.

To summarize Gur and Olien's (2015) main points, generous identity is a type of person identity in the sense that it is an attribute about a person that is context-free. Person identities (such as moral identity) are what make people feel unique from others. Unlike role and social identities, person identities do not require a referent (e.g., a role identity such as "teacher" requires a referent "student"). Rather, person identities are identities in which people can define themselves in a consistent manner that is stable across time and regardless of their associations.

The operationalization of generous identity aids much-needed construct precision in the literature. For example, researchers use the term “generous person” or “generous identity” without explaining what it means (Hillman, 2010), and usually in the context of how much money they would give in contrived situations. However, individual differences in generous behavior exist based on race (e.g., Fong & Luttmer, 2009) and gender (e.g., Cox & Deck, 2006), which show that variability in generosity across people is present but has yet to be measured. Thus, if a generous identity exists, it cannot be included in research as a control or predictor variable until it is defined and measured using an established scale.

THE CURRENT STUDIES

We first answer the empirical question of how to define generosity and generous identity. To do so, we conducted a qualitative exploratory study that asks participants to deeply think about generosity from the angles of the giver and the receiver. The results shed light on how generous identity can be defined and measured. We piloted the items in the second study on a small convenience sample. Based on the latent structure of the pilot items, we collected data from participants using Amazon’s Mechanical Turk and conducted a confirmatory factor analysis to see if the latent structure from the pilot holds on a larger sample. Finally, we used the condensed scale of generous identity to predict perceptions of generous behaviors in hypothetical scenarios.

Study 1: Inductive Exploration of Generosity Meanings

The goal of Study 1 was to inductively explore how individuals interpret generosity in practice to inform the development of a generous identity measure. Using an interpretivist framework, we asked: How do individuals interpret the labels of “generosity” and “generous identity” based on lived experience?

Method

Sample and Procedures. We conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with a convenience sample of adults (mean age 43.8; 68.8% female). Interviews (averaging 27 minutes) focused on personal definitions of generosity, associated values, and examples of giving or receiving. Data collection reached theoretical saturation regarding the attributes of a “generous person.” To ensure trustworthiness, the first author utilized memos, persistent observation during transcription, and three member checks to verify that the emerging themes resonated with participant experiences.

Analysis. Following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, the first author open-coded the data to identify “in-vivo” descriptions of generosity. These codes were organized into themes to explain how participants perceive the construct and the identity associated with it.

Results. The analysis identified 88 distinct acts of generosity, highlighting four primary themes:

- (1) Reciprocity and “Expecting the Unexpected”: Participants viewed true generosity as lacking direct “quid pro quo” intent. However, they associated the label with a belief in indirect reciprocity, such as “karma” or “paying it forward,” suggesting that a generous identity includes an optimistic worldview regarding social or spiritual return.

- (2) Incongruent Perceptions: Generosity is often defined by the receiver's benefit rather than the actor's intent. For example, mentors often viewed their actions as "just doing their job," while receivers labeled those same acts as "generous." This suggests that generous identity involves fulfilling others' needs, even if the act is perceived as mundane by the actor.
- (3) Choice: A conscious, non-accidental decision.
- (4) Thoughtfulness: Driven by empathy or mindfulness.
- (5) Commodity/Give: The sacrifice of time, money, or "self" (e.g., reputation).
- (6) Need: Fulfillment of a physical or emotional void.

Inductive Definition: Based on participant accounts, generosity is interpreted as: the choice to thoughtfully give a commodity to someone in need without expecting a direct benefit.

Attributes of Generous Identity: Participants consistently linked the "generous" label to six personal attributes: kindness, considerateness, caring, openness/vulnerability, mindfulness, and optimism.

Discussion

Rather than providing a purely theoretical definition, Study 1 maps the meanings associated with generosity in everyday life. The results suggest that while specific acts vary wildly, the identity of a generous person is rooted in a stable set of prosocial orientations. These findings provided the raw items for the generous identity scale validated in the subsequent studies.

Study 2: Piloting a Generous Identity Scale

This study aims to determine which items from preexisting scales and the new items proposed from Study 1 are related to the latent construct of generous identity. Since generosity is related to prosocial behaviors and personalities, we included preexisting scales that were most commonly aligned with how we define generous identity (Davis, 1980; Pearce & Amato, 1980; Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Rekken, 1981; Schwartz & Howard, 1982). We compiled 69 items from Study 1 and various relevant scales to create a survey distributed to a convenience sample. Items were selected to most closely match the definition of generosity as "giving some commodity to someone in need," as well as the concepts of prosocial self-identity and how participants think they are seen by others. Exploratory factor analysis was used to reduce the item count of the survey and determine what common factors were measured.

Sample and Procedure

The final pilot sample consists of 61 participants. Demographic information was not collected at this time. The online survey was distributed to a convenience sample of 82 people through word

of mouth and social media. Respondents who did not complete the entire survey (n=21) were removed prior to the analysis phase.

For the exploratory factor analysis, we included items that were derived in the same method for the same purpose (i.e., items that were on a 6-point agreement scale and assessed generous or prosocial attitudes and behaviors). Of the 69 items included in the survey, 31 items fit that criteria (Appendix II).

Measures

Social Responsibility (Schwartz & Howard, 1982). This scale is a measure of how an individual would react to a situation depending on their social interactions with others. It includes items such as “I wouldn’t feel I had to do my part in a group project if everyone else was lazy” and “I would feel obligated to do a favor for someone who needed it, even if they had not shown gratitude for past favors.” Responses were on the same 6-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). The pilot survey contained 5 items from this scale.

Empathy (Davis, 1980). This scale measures the participant’s level of empathy toward others, and includes “I often have concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me” and “I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspectives.” Responses were on the same 6-point scale. The pilot survey contained 4 items from this scale.

Moral Reasoning (Collett & Morrissey, 2007). This scale measures the extent to which an individual’s personal morals affect his or her reasoning behind certain actions. Items include “my decisions are usually based on my concern for people” and “I choose alternatives that are intended to meet everyone’s needs.” The same 6-point scale was used for responses. Four items from this scale were in the pilot survey.

Citizenship Motives (Rioux & Penner, 2001). The original Citizenship Motives scale measures an individual’s motivations behind Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs) but was adapted for this study to address motivations behind prosocial and generous behaviors. Items included “it is important to help those in need,” “I believe in being courteous to others,” and “I want to help people in any way I can.” Participants were presented with these statements and asked to indicate their level of agreement on the same 6-point scale of Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (6). The pilot study contained 6 of these items.

Generous Identity. This scale most directly measures how an individual identifies himself or herself as generous, and includes items such as “I am a kind individual,” “I am considerate of others’ feelings,” and “I am generally happy and optimistic.” Responses to these items were on a 6-point Likert scale of Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Slightly Disagree (3), Slightly Agree (4), Agree (5), and Strongly Agree (6). The pilot study contained 6 items from this scale.

Perceptions of Generous Identity. The same generous identity items were also rephrased to demonstrate how the individual is seen by others, such as “others would say I’m considerate.” The rephrasing was done for the purposes of comparing self-evaluations with perceptions of how

the self believes they are perceived by others. Responses to these items were on a 6-point Likert scale of Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Slightly Disagree (3), Slightly Agree (4), Agree (5), and Strongly Agree (6). The pilot study contained 6 items from this scale.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for all 31 items are reported in Table 1. The standard deviations show adequate variability in the responses. We first conducted a parallel analysis to determine the number of latent factors in the data. Since the parallel analysis suggests we have 3 factors, we extracted 3 factors from the exploratory factor analysis with an oblique rotation to allow the factors to correlate with each other (Table 2). The fit statistics of the model were good, but they did not surpass suggested cutoffs ($\text{RMSR}=.08$, $\text{TLI}=.73$). Four items cross-loaded on two factors, which further points to the overlapping nature of the constructs. We removed these items in order to promote more construct clarity.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of Study 2 variables

#	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1	4.98	0.70	—														
2	5.07	0.70	.513**	—													
3	5.34	0.68	.541**	.648**	—												
4	4.56	0.96	.339**	.340**	.238	—											
5	4.64	0.86	.214	.316*	.159	.290*	—										
6	4.44	0.92	.401**	.391**	.258*	.339**	.226	—									
7	4.87	0.78	.638**	.408**	.492**	.454**	.201	.450**	—								
8	4.79	0.69	.622**	.582**	.553**	.387**	.292*	.415**	.659**	—							
9	4.90	0.77	.528**	.382**	.512**	.438**	.173	.298*	.752**	.624**	—						
10	4.44	0.99	.277*	.220	.215	.806**	.132	.292*	.461**	.361**	.430**	—					
11	4.48	0.98	.208	.318*	.251	.229	.706**	.188	.235	.228	.174	.209	—				
12	4.57	0.99	.304*	.160	.246	.395**	.091	.666**	.506**	.305*	.360**	.483**	.213	—			
13	5.13	1.18	-.043	-.211	-.255*	.036	-.312*	-.053	-.182	-.180	-.162	.051	-.192	.023	—		
14	3.67	1.29	-.162	.160	-.264*	.106	.033	.142	-.204	-.108	-.135	.028	-.113	-.045	.128	—	
15	4.57	1.19	.274*	.313*	.555**	.007	.206	.099	.260*	.500**	.318*	.092	.278*	.211	-.243	-.255*	—
16	4.62	1.25	.165	.293*	.037	.164	.104	.147	.101	.060	-.005	.163	-.001	.190	.260*	.326*	.069
17	3.72	1.11	.123	.151	.327*	.164	.068	.073	.091	.248	.162	.174	.185	.087	-.003	-.273*	.299*
18	4.87	0.69	.203	.291*	.415**	.112	-.025	.092	.121	.290*	.288*	.061	.118	-.010	-.062	-.063	.335**
19	4.23	1.06	-.233	-.181	-.236	-.102	-.185	-.031	-.319*	-.345**	-.419**	-.013	-.167	.112	.325*	.167	-.172
20	4.61	0.86	-.295*	-.290*	-.548**	-.129	.015	-.139	-.218	-.307*	-.318*	-.071	-.028	-.113	.233	.197	-.354**
21	4.70	0.86	-.008	.087	.261*	.081	.237	.062	.139	.258*	.282*	.038	.229	.045	-.318*	-.211	.346**
22	4.28	1.08	.272*	.391**	.479**	.217	.056	.158	.260*	.486**	.314*	.007	.093	.190	-.128	-.210	.314*
23	4.43	0.94	.139	.133	.184	.158	.194	.183	.235	-.012	.128	.098	.175	.109	-.084	-.145	-.044
24	4.79	0.80	.174	.114	.137	.114	.203	.153	.167	.129	.237	-.005	.175	.157	-.048	-.142	.096
25	4.48	0.85	.098	.198	.203	.140	.079	.174	.195	.148	.252	.043	.004	.166	-.137	-.008	-.044
26	5.11	0.71	.139	.118	.366**	.101	.124	-.003	.177	.222	.296*	.092	.161	-.024	-.181	-.316*	.493**
27	5.49	0.57	.402**	.587**	.505**	.347**	.200	.246	.448**	.403*	.458**	.288*	.143	.231	-.177	-.065	.267*
28	5.20	0.73	.271*	.366**	.569**	.271*	.143	.142	.368**	.387**	.394**	.178	.148	.142	-.204	-.248	.369**
29	4.61	1.02	.226	.431**	.462**	.126	.026	.188	.309*	.402*	.269*	.125	.090	.079	.012	-.179	.326*
30	4.61	0.84	.359**	.522*	.386**	.235	.354**	.164	.324*	.487**	.377**	.112	.170	-.025	-.221	.059	.346**
31	4.75	0.98	.362**	.339**	.455**	.505**	.310*	.511**	.479**	.467*	.389**	.509**	.334**	.492**	.044	-.041	.267*

Note. $N = 61$. ***, $p < .001$; **, $p < .01$; *, $p < .05$. Item numbers correspond to item numbers from Appendix II.

Table 1 (Continued). Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of Study 2 variables

#	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
1															
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															
7															
8															
9															
10															
11															
12															
13															
14															
15															
16	—														
17	-.065	—													
18	-.134	.297*	—												
19	.324*	-.283*	-.201	—											
20	.140	-.457**	-.497**	.486**	—										
21	-.305*	.243	.212	-.497**	-.289*	—									
22	-.093	.218	.382**	-.177	-.388**	.214	—								
23	-.031	.195	.215	-.135	-.190	.014	.226	—							
24	.018	-.030	.219	-.138	-.215	.198	.494**	.257*	—						
25	-.017	.001	.362**	-.062	-.397**	.104	.543**	.243	.669**	—					
26	-.269*	.379**	.505**	-.276*	-.484**	.301*	.392**	.301*	.338**	.378**	—				
27	.242	.142	.124	-.115	-.062	.200	.289*	.257*	.125	.164	.272*	—			
28	-.100	.337**	.382**	-.332**	-.552**	.334**	.565**	.168	.390**	.495**	.635**	.369**	—		
29	.012	.151	.373**	-.178	-.427**	.206	.463**	.143	.243	.489**	.501**	.398**	.556**	—	
30	.204	.166	.309*	-.197	-.242	.067	.378**	.194	.195	.289*	.300*	.343**	.319*	.379**	—
31	.195	.227	.320*	-.039	-.239	.130	.271*	.298*	.274*	.204	.234	.373**	.304*	.319*	.306*

Note. $N = 61$. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Item numbers correspond to item numbers from Appendix II.

Table 2
Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

#	Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	h ²	u ²
7	Others see me as a kind person	0.76	0.1	-0.03	0.61	0.39
4	I consider myself an open person	0.69	-0.18	0.01	0.45	0.55
8	Others say I am considerate	0.69	0.29	-0.02	0.64	0.36
10	Others would say I'm an open person	0.68	-0.17	-0.1	0.41	0.59
31	I like interacting with people	0.66	-0.11	0.17	0.51	0.49
1	I am a kind individual	0.65	0.1	-0.01	0.45	0.55
6	I am generally happy and optimistic	0.63	-0.22	0.05	0.39	0.61
12	Others see me as happy and optimistic	0.63	-0.26	0.02	0.39	0.61
9	Others would say I'm a caring person	0.61	0.24	0.05	0.53	0.47
2	I am considerate of others' feelings	0.6	0.08	0.12	0.45	0.55
27	I believe in being courteous to others	0.53	0.06	0.11	0.36	0.64
3	I care about others	0.48	0.4	0.18	0.6	0.4
5	I am mindful of myself	0.4	0.15	-0.13	0.18	0.82
11	Others would say I am mindful of myself	0.38	0.21	-0.14	0.2	0.8
30	It is easy for me to be helpful	0.36	0.14	0.22	0.29	0.71
19	I sometimes find it difficult to see another person's point of view	0.08	0.62	-0.05	0.4	0.6
21	I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspectives	0.04	0.56	0	0.32	0.68
15	No matter what a person has done to us, there is no excuse to take advantage of them	0.27	0.5	0	0.39	0.61
16	No matter how much people are provoked, they are always responsible for whatever they do	0.38	-0.47	-0.02	0.28	0.72
20	Other people's misfortunes do not usually disturb me a great deal	0.04	0.45	0.39	0.48	0.52
13	I wouldn't feel I had to do my part in a group project if everyone else was lazy	0.05	0.44	-0.07	0.19	0.81
14	When people are nasty to me, I feel little responsibility to treat them well	-0.09	0.42	0.06	0.18	0.82
17	I would feel obligated to do a favor for someone who needed it, even if they had not shown gratitude for past favors	0.12	0.39	0.06	0.21	0.79
25	I choose alternatives that are intended to meet everyone's needs	-0.04	-0.19	0.9	0.73	0.27
24	I choose alternatives that minimize negative consequences to other people	0.03	-0.07	0.61	0.36	0.64
22	My decisions are usually based on my concern for people	0.13	0.15	0.61	0.52	0.48
29	I want to help people in any way I can	0.16	0.15	0.53	0.45	0.55
28	I am concerned about others' feelings	0.16	0.35	0.53	0.62	0.38
26	It is important to help those in need	-0.06	0.47	0.49	0.56	0.44
18	I often have concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me	0.04	0.27	0.43	0.35	0.65
23	My decisions are usually based on what is the most fair and just way to act	0.14	0.01	0.27	0.12	0.88

Note. $N = 61$. Oblique rotation method was used to extract factors. **Bolded items** cross-load on more than 1 factor.

We then closely examined each item per factor. The first factor encompasses all the items derived from Study 1, plus additional items from Rioux & Penner's Citizenship Motives scale. The second factor included items about empathic concern and reciprocity, while the third factor was about caring and helping for others. The three latent factors were moderately correlated with each other ($r_{1,2} = .24$, $r_{1,3} = .32$, and $r_{2,3} = .30$), indicating that, albeit related, they are distinctly different constructs.

Discussion

Since the purpose of this study is to measure generous identity, the first factor is of most interest to us. This factor is what we consider generous identity, and the next step is to examine whether the same items hold together in the same latent structure on a different sample. However, since generous identity is about how individuals define themselves, we excluded items that pertained to the extent to which individuals believe others view them. We are therefore left with 6 items for the generous identity scale that captures the generous identity construct.

Study 3: Confirming the Generous Identity Scale

The pilot survey was revised to reflect the results from Study 2. Study 3 employed a survey design with 40 items that were sent out to a larger random sample of 418 people using Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform. For a wider range of purposes, the final survey measured the factors of generous identity, perceptions of the generosity of others, and the boundaries of when it is appropriate to engage in generous behaviors.

Sample and Procedure

A total of 472 participants were recruited to take a survey through use of Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform. Of these participants, 56% were male, 75.1% identified as white, 5.8% identified as black, 7.3% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 9.6% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 2.2% identified as other or preferred not to answer. The average age of participants was 33.84 years ($S.D.$ 11.07). We removed participants with incomplete data ($n=6$). We also removed participants who took one minute or less to complete the survey ($n=48$). We ran the analyses with these fast participants included and the results held the same structure, so removing them does not change the nature of the results. Our final sample consisted of 418 participants.

Appendix III contains the items that were included in the final survey for Study 3. We removed some of the items from the pilot survey based on preliminary analyses of the data. The reason we reduced the number of items from Study 2 was to shorten the survey and encourage a higher participation rate.

Measures

Social Responsibility (Schwartz & Howard, 1982). Five items from this scale were included in Study 3.

Empathy (Davis, 1980). The final survey contained 3 items from this scale.

Moral Reasoning (Collett & Morrissey, 2007). The final survey contained 2 items from this scale.

Citizenship Motives (Rioux & Penner, 2001). The final survey contained 6 of these items.

Generous Identity. The final survey contained the 3 highest-loading items from this scale (“I am a kind individual,” “I am considerate of others’ feelings,” and “I am generally happy and optimistic.”).

Perceptions of Generous Identity. The final survey contained the 2 highest-loading items from this scale (“Others say I am considerate” and “Others would say I’m a caring person.”).

Results

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of generous identity variables.

<i>Item</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>5</i>
1. I am a kind individual	4.91	0.89	—				
2. I am considerate of others' feelings	4.92	0.85	.75**	—			
3. I am generally happy and optimistic	4.32	1.23	.44**	.36**	—		
4. I believe in being courteous to others	5.3	0.76	.50**	.53**	.25**	—	
5. It is easy for me to be helpful	4.68	1.03	.61**	.56**	.44**	.50**	—
6. I like interacting with people	4.32	1.28	.49**	.42**	.48**	.41**	.62**

Table 3 shows the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of the six items on the proposed generous identity scale. There was adequate variability for each item, and they were highly correlated with each other. We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis and loaded all six items on the same latent factor, generous identity (Table 4). The one-factor model had good fit indices (CFI=.91, SRMR=.06, TLI=.85). The Cronbach’s alpha is .84.

Table 4. Summary of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

<i>Item</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>
1. I am a kind individual	.85
2. I am considerate of others' feelings	.81
3. I am generally happy and optimistic	.52
4. I believe in being courteous to others	.62
5. It is easy for me to be helpful	.76
6. I like interacting with people	.64

Note. *N* = 418.

Discussion

The confirmatory factor analysis results suggest that these items tap into the same latent variable construct. Even though these items might not seem like they are measuring generous identity on the surface, they were derived from Study 1, which assessed how people view generous identity from below the surface. Therefore, we believe that these items go deeper into what it means to be a generous person above and beyond what seems to have “face validity”.

Study 4: Using Generous Identity as a Predictor

We test for criterion-related validity of the generous identity scale to continue offering preliminary evidence for the validation process. In Study 3, we asked participants to rate their perceptions of how generous an actor is in different scenarios. We predict that people with a higher generous identity level will see the levels of generosity in those scenarios more positively. In other words, we posit that generous identity is a lens through which people see social behaviors. To test this hypothesis, we examined whether we can predict generosity perceptions from generous identity. In essence, we are examining how generous participants view the scenarios based on their levels of generous identity and the scenario’s characteristics.

Sample and Procedure

This study used the same participants as Study 3. For each participant, we created a composite score of generous identity by calculating the mean of the items. We then ran regression analyses for the different generosity scenarios and examined whether generous identity can be used to predict the extent to which participants evaluate generosity scenarios.

Measures

Generous identity. Six items from Study 2 were used to create a composite score of generous identity (Appendix IV). Response options were on a 6-point Likert scale.

Generosity scenarios. We created nine generosity scenarios that include different types of commodities, expectations, and anonymity. For each scenario, participants were asked to evaluate how generous each target actor is being on a 4-point scale from “not generous” to “very generous”. The scenarios are: 1) People living on an adopt-a-street road noticed that someone has cleaned up trash along the street. 2) John's daughter gave him a ride to the airport, even though she had a big work meeting later that day. 3) Joe helped a stranger with directions even though he was running late to his blind date. 4) Jane's parents paid for her tuition to a private university. 5) Jim raised \$200 for his favorite charity. 6) A politician held a charity fundraiser in their community. 7) Jordan spent 40 hours working at a charity as required community service. 8) Dan donated bone marrow to his brother. 9) A wealthy family donated \$1 million to a local university to build a much-needed music building.

Results

Table 5 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of Study 4’s variables. There is adequate variability for each variable. Generous identity has a positive correlation with all

scenarios, which indicates that as people perceive themselves to be more generous, their perceptions of the extent to which others' acts of generosity are generous increase.

Table 5. Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of Study 4 variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Generous identity	4.74	.76	—								
2. Scenario 1	3.45	.66	.18**	—							
3. Scenario 2	2.60	.87	.22**	.38**	—						
4. Scenario 3	2.99	.75	.24**	.32**	.22**	—					
5. Scenario 4	2.37	1.27	.10*	.20**	.27**	0.08	—				
6. Scenario 5	3.74	.53	.14**	.38**	.19**	.14**	.18**	—			
7. Scenario 6	3.54	.69	.21**	.25**	.37**	-.01	.15**	.17**	—		
8. Scenario 7	2.98	.79	.30**	.22**	.23**	.34**	0.09	.08	.13**	—	
9. Scenario 8	3.02	.81	.16**	.28**	.22**	.35**	.11*	.19**	.17**	.41**	—
10. Scenario 9	3.40	.83	.09	.20**	.24**	.07	.15**	.20**	.26**	.18**	.36**

Note. $N = 418$. ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Generous identity is a mean composite score on a 6-point scale. Generosity scenarios were evaluated on a 4-point scale.

Results from the linear regression analyses in which we use generous identity to predict generosity perceptions of different scenarios are presented in Table 6. The results indicate that we are able to predict how people evaluate generosity of others' actions based on their own level of generosity, depending on the circumstances of the action. For example, the largest effect size was for Scenario 1, which involved an anonymous actor who cleans up a street for the benefit of the larger community without being expected to do so ($b_1 = .31, p < .001$). This large effect size means that people who differ on generous identity view this scenario with different lenses—those high on generous identity can emphasize with and appreciate the generosity of the actor. On the other hand, the lowest effect size was for Scenario 8, which was about Dan donating bone marrow to his brother ($b_1 = .09, p < .01$). We posit that due to the complicated nature of this scenario (not everyone understands the sacrifice of donating bone marrow), generous identity could not strongly predict how generous participants perceive this act to be.

Table 6. Predicting Generosity Perceptions from Generous Identity.

	b_1	SE	b_0	R^2	F
<i>X₁: Generous Identity</i>					
Y ₁ : Jim raised \$200 for his favorite charity.	.16***	.04	2.71***	.03	14.42***
Y ₂ : A politician held a charity fundraiser in their community.	.25***	.05	1.40***	.05	21.47***
Y ₃ : Joe helped a stranger with directions even though he was running late to his blind date.	.23***	.05	1.90***	.06	24.33***
Y ₄ : Jordan spent 40 hours working at a charity as required community service.	.17*	.08	1.54***	.01	4.53*
Y ₅ : Dan donated bone marrow to his brother.	.09**	.03	3.30***	.02	7.71**
Y ₆ : A wealthy family donated \$1 million to a local university to build a much-needed music building.	.18***	.04	2.65***	.04	18.61***
Y ₇ : People living on an adopt-a-street road noticed that someone has cleaned up trash along the street.	.31***	.05	1.54	.09	39.74***

Y ₈ : John's daughter gave him a ride to the airport, even though she had a big work meeting later that day.	.17***	.05	2.21***	.03	11.11***
Y ₉ : Jane's parents paid for her tuition to a private university.	.10	.05	2.92***	.01	3.62

Note. $N = 418$. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$. Generous identity is a mean composite score.

OVERALL DISCUSSION

We proposed and developed a scale for generous identity in an emic manner based on responses from participants. We explored the nature of the scale items on a small sample, and then validated the structure of the scale on a larger sample. Our results from Study 4 suggest that the scale has predictive powers. We recommend that researchers use the generous identity scale in future studies on prosocial behaviors, as generous identity can be an important and overlooked control variable that predicts how people perceive and engage in prosocial behaviors. Thus, the incremental validity of other prosocial constructs as predictors could be more meaningful.

Future research could include additional items to the generous identity scale that were removed from Study 3 due to space constraints. For example, a study could include the items derived from Study 1: “I consider myself an open person” and “I am mindful of myself.” These items were removed from this study due to space constraints, but participants in Study 1 talked about generosity in terms of being open-minded and mindful. Therefore, including these items in future studies could help determine whether they should be added to the generous identity scale.

Validation is a process (Cronbach, 1971), and this paper is the first step in accumulating evidence in support of the construct validity of the generous identity scale. Future research can find more evidence for the criterion-related validity of the generous identity scale. For example, a study can explore how generous identity can predict behaviors in specific contexts, such as religious organizations and workplace settings. Such studies can look at prosocial behaviors (e.g., donating money to charity or helping a coworker) as the outcome variables with generous identity as the predictor. We believe that the generous identity scale we propose here will be helpful for such research questions.

Future research can also examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the generous identity scale as it relates to other prosocial behaviors and personalities. For example, a study on organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs) can include generous identity and citizen role identity (Finkelstein & Penner, 2004) as predictors, and analyze whether all three predictors are related to OCBs, but citizen role identity and generous identity are unrelated (discriminant validity support) while prosocial personality battery and generous identity are related (convergent validity support).

In conclusion, we contributed to the prosocial behaviors and personalities literatures by proposing and beginning the validation process of a generous identity scale. This scale can be used in research related to prosocial behaviors as an important control variable, and may help leaders of generosity-based organizations predict levels of participation. We are sharing the items with the scientific community in hopes that other researchers use them in related research and help contribute to the ongoing validation process of the scale.

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