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Preliminary Validation of a Measure of Generosity

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Abstract

In 2006, there were 1.48 million non-profits in the United States. Of those, 190,000 were religiously oriented charities. Most charities rely at least in part on the generosity of others. However, review of the extant literature demonstrated a lack of scales designed to assess an individual's generosity. Therefore, a scale was developed in order to measure this construct and its related dimensions. A random sample of University students (n=106) from a small, Christian university and members of a local church (n=68) chose to participate for a total of 174 participants. The generosity scale was a 14 item self-report scale designed to possess three subscales: charitable (financial) giving (7 items), volunteerism (3 items), and donations of goods and services (4 items).

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the validity of the generosity scale by exploring its internal consistency, factor structure and relationship to a scale of spirituality. Results suggest that as originally conceived the subscales for Charity and Donations and the Generosity scale as a whole show adequate internal consistency. Comparison of student and church participants provides some validation for these scales as well. However, the Volunteerism subscale possessed inadequate . . .

Introduction

A review of the research on generosity suggests limited investigation into the complexity of giving behaviors and an extremely low number of validated measures designed to assess one's generosity. While numerous studies address generosity from a theoretical perspective, few actually attempt to measure various aspects of the construct including charitable giving. In addition, other forms of giving, such as volunteerism or donating goods, are usually dealt with as separate, unrelated constructs. As a result, a broad measure of generosity was constructed and designed to possess three subscales: charitable (financial) giving, volunteerism, and donations of goods and services. It was hoped that combining these variables into one instrument would provide both a general and more detailed understanding of the various forms of generosity.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the validity of this new generosity scale by exploring its internal consistency, factor structure and relationship to a scale of spirituality. Factor analysis will demonstrate whether this single instrument can delineate the three types of generosity—charitable giving, volunteerism, and donations of goods and services- that were intended to be measured as sub-scales. If this instrument is validated as a comprehensive measurement of generosity, it will help move this area of research forward by providing a measure of generosity that can be used in future research.

Methods

Participants: A random sample of University students (n=106) were selected from a list of graduate and undergraduate students from a small, Christian university in the Pacific Northwest. 48% of participants were undergraduate students and 52% were graduate students. In addition, 68 members of a local church also choose to participate for a total of 174 participants having a mean age of 32.8 years (s=12.6). Participants were sent an email, which detailed information about the rationale and procedure of the study. Those who consented self-administer an internet survey via SurveyMonkey. Non-respondents were sent two reminder emails before data collection was terminated.

Instrument: The measure of generosity is a 14 item self-report scale designed to possess three subscales: charitable (financial) giving (7 items), volunteerism (3 items), and donations of goods and services (4 items). Taken together, these three subscale scores yield a total generosity score for the individual .

Results

Internal consistency was above .70 for Charity, Donations, and Generosity, but was only .31 for Volunteering (see Table 1). A comparison of student and church participants revealed that no differences for Volunteering, but the church participants were both less variable in their responses and scored significantly higher on Charity, Donations, and Generosity as a whole.

Exploratory factor analysis of the 14 items was performed using Oblimin rotation. Results suggested that the items might load on three factors, but as many as five factors or more factors may be present (see Scree Plot). A forced three factor solution resulted in unsatisfactory loadings. Only 8 of the 14 items loaded cleanly on a single factor, four items loaded about equally on two factors, and two items did not load adequately on any of the three factors.

Table 1
Internal Consistency

Alpha Giving: all 14 items = .649
Alpha Giving: 13 items = .727 with "I don't find . . . R omitted (see inconsistency # 1)
Alpha Donate: 4 items = .731 with pro bono services omitted = .809
Alpha Volunteered: 3 items = .316
Alpha Charitable Giving: 7 items = .605

Results – Cont.

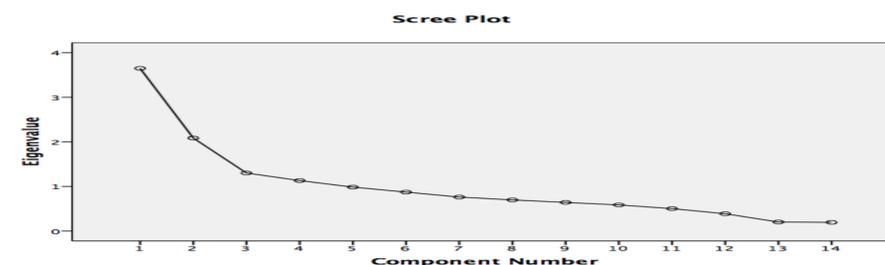
A forced four factor loading was somewhat more satisfactory (see Table 2); 5 of the 14 items loaded on a single factor with 4 of these loadings above .63 and one item at .44. The remaining items loaded 3 items on each of the remaining factors. Factor 1 included donations of clothing and household goods, giving to a food bank or drive, and providing pro bono professional services. Factor 2 loaded giving money to a church (two items) and volunteering at a church. Factor 3 loaded volunteering at school or giving money to someone in need. Factor 4 included giving money to a homeless person or volunteering at a homeless shelter. Buying food or drink for a friend loaded equally on Factors 3 and 4.

Generosity Scale Items (total score range 14-62)

Donation Subscale Items (subscale score range 4-16)
Provided professional services pro bono. ¹
Donated clothing. ¹
Contributed to a food bank or a food drive. ¹
Donated household items I no longer needed. ¹
Volunteerism Items (subscale score range 3-12)
Volunteered at my church. ¹
Volunteered at a school. ¹
Volunteered at a homeless shelter, hospital, food kitchen, or other social service agency. ¹
Charitable Giving Items (subscale score range 7-34)
I do not find it important to give money to churches. ² (R)
If someone I know is in need of money, I rely on someone else to take care of it. ² (R)
When I buy friend's food or drink I hope they will pay for me the next time. ² (R)
Gave a homeless person money when I passed by. ¹
Gave a portion of my monthly income to a church. ¹
Paid for my friend's food or drink. ¹
Gave money to a charitable organization. ¹
Note:
¹ = response options: frequently-never; scored 1-4
² = response options: strongly agree-strongly disagree; scored 1-6
(R) = reverse scored item

Table 2
Structure Matrix

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Gave a portion of my monthly income to a church.	.241	.899	-.042	.006
Paid for my friends food or drink.	.365	-.196	-.431	.523
Gave money to a charitable organization.	.629	.500	-.242	.063
Donated clothing.	.831	.158	-.024	.122
Donated household items I no longer needed.	.897	.120	-.141	.190
Provided professional services pro bono.	.441	-.028	-.154	.258
Contributed to a food bank or food drive.	.735	.278	-.090	.224
Gave a homeless person money when I passed by.	.121	.029	-.115	.573
Volunteered at my church.	.256	.797	.168	.130
Volunteered at a school.	.202	.045	.685	.313
Volunteered at a homeless shelter, hospital, food kitchen, or other social service agency.	.128	.000	.118	.697
When I buy a friend's food or drink I hope they will pay for me next time.	-.386	-.068	.504	-.468
If some one I know is in need of money, I rely on someone else to take care of it.	-.350	-.120	.662	-.296
I do not find it important to give money to churches.	.049	.825	-.139	-.047



Discussion

Results suggest that as originally conceived the subscales for Charity and Donations and the Generosity scale as a whole show adequate internal consistency. Comparison of student and church participants provides some validation for these scales as well. Volunteering results suggest those who volunteer one place tend not to volunteer other places; thus volunteering may be more a matter of degree than of where.

Factor 1 results suggest that donating clothing and household good, contributing to a food bank, and providing pro bono services may comprise a meaningful group of items. Similarly, Factor 2 results suggest that giving to a church and volunteering at church go together . Factor 4 results indicate that giving to homeless persons and volunteering at homeless shelters go together as well. Finally, Factor 3 results are puzzling as volunteering at school and letting others take care of persons who need money went together. Taken together, these results suggest that the structure of generosity may not be fully consistent with the initial conceptualization