

Toward the Measurement of Interpersonal Generosity (IG): An IG Scale Conceptualized, Tested, and Validated

Christian Smith, University of Notre Dame

Jonathan P. Hill, Calvin College

© 2009

The Interpersonal Generosity Scale (IGS) described below is designed to measure the degree to which individuals spend themselves (i.e., their attention, time, emotion, energy, etc.) to enhance the well-being of others in interpersonal relationships. Interpersonal generosity (IG) can be conceptualized as relationship “work” that persons engage and through which they expend themselves in order to increase the good of the other(s) in the relationship and of the relationship itself. Our premise is that variance at the level of persons exists in IG, which is worth studying. Some people are extremely generous and others are more stingy when it comes to the giving of themselves in interpersonal relationships. We further assume that these differences have multiple, significant consequences in personal and social life. We believe that IG is an important, though neglected, form of generosity to which scholars who study generosity, altruism, helping, pro-social orientations, love, and related matters ought to pay greater attention. To that end, we have developed and tested the IGS, described as follows.

Conceptual Definition

Although IG is closely related to—and in certain cases overlaps—the concepts of altruism, pro-social orientation, helping, love, and other similar idea, IG involves several dimensions that give it a particular conceptual specificity. First, IG always involves and is expressed through *social relationships*. IG is not simply about a general orientation to life or people, as an abstract disposition toward some larger social “good.” Second, IG focuses on *behaviors* of giving, by asking directly about giving behaviors and indirectly about tendencies toward and identities related to giving to others. Third, what are generously given in IG are resources of the subjective self, not simply extrinsic or easily objectifiable resources such as money, labor, or even blood. In IG, persons always expend irreducibly *personal* goods, such as attention, emotions, and energy, not impersonal goods. Fourth, IG need *not* be purely altruistic. Since even the most loving relationships normally involve some amount of reciprocity, exchange, and mutuality, genuine IG can be expressed with the expectation, conscious or subconscious, in part that the giver in the relationships will also receive back in some way(s) and at some time. To be sure, we do not conceive of IG in terms of a strict, rational, immediate exchange designed to maintain relational equity or equilibrium. But neither do we, as a matter of principle, rule out the generous IG giver also benefitting from reciprocated giving and reward in the relationship.

Constructing the Scale

The final IGS instrument contains 10 items, measuring six identifiable dimensions of interpersonal generosity: attention, compassion, openhandedness, self-extension, courage, and verbal expression. Preliminary versions of the instrument contained up to 26 items (see Appendix A). Most of those questions were derived from established personality and value scales, in particular those developed by Penner et al. (1995) and McCullough and Bono (n.d.). Some of those items were slightly revised for present purposes, while some were used verbatim. A number of other items were written by us as original questions. Appendix A displays the 26 items used in the original,

preliminary IGS, down from which the final scale was narrowed.

The preliminary IGS was included as part of the 2008 Notre Dame Generosity and Giving Survey (NDGGS), which was administered by the survey firm Knowledge Networks between April 22 and May 2, 2008. The final sample, representing the U.S. adult population over the age of 18, consists of 1,001 respondents with a final survey response rate of 60%. Individual items are all scored identically, with a standard Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 6 (“strongly agree”). The dimensions of IG labeled below were not shown in the survey to respondents. The ordering of individual survey items was randomly generated to prevent any systematic bias in possible response patterns.

Using the 26 items in the preliminary instrument, factor analysis was performed on a matrix of polychoric correlations. This analysis revealed a single dominant factor with an eigenvalue of 6.3. After oblique promax rotation, this single factor accounted for 65 percent of the total variation with ten of the 26 items loading at .4 or above. The same 10 factors were dominant when orthogonal rotation was used. Additional reliability and validity testing confirmed that these 10 items successfully measure the construct of interpersonal generosity. Appendix B displays the 10 items included, as a result of these analyses, in the final IGS. Table 1 reports descriptive statistics.

(Table 1)

Reliability

The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach’s alpha) for the 10 items included in the IGS is .87, which is well within the acceptable range. To further assess the reliability of the IGS, we included the instrument as an addition to the 2008-2009 Annual National Election Survey (ANES) Panel Study. The instrument was administered to a national sample of U.S. adults (over the age of 18) in July and August of 2008, with a final N of 1,109. For additional details on the 2008-2009 ANES Panel Study, see DeBell et al (2009). The IGS Cronbach’s alpha was identical in the ANES data (.87) to that measured in the NDGGS (.87), suggesting that these items have a high internal consistency across separate samples of the adult population.

Validity

The ten items that make up the IGS instrument have a high degree of face validity. The individual test items were chosen or created to be unambiguous measures of interpersonal generosity as conceptually defined above, as most reasonable people in at least most Western cultures would understand these matters. Additionally, we believe the IGS has a high degree of content validity, insofar as a variety of relevant domains entailed in IG were theoretically considered and are measured in the IGS, such that nothing of crucial conceptual importance about IG is being omitted.

Finally, to establish criterion validity, we examined whether the IGS instrument properly discriminated between interpersonal generosity and other forms of generosity. We empirically correlated the IGS with several potentially related behavioral outcomes. We expect interpersonal generosity to be moderately correlated with helping behavior that is primarily relational, empathic, non-institutional, and based on sensitivity to felt needs. We further expect interpersonal generosity to be weakly correlated with formal, institutional volunteering and with monetary giving. In both national surveys on which we fielded the IGS (NDGGS 2008, ANES 2008), the following questions were included to measure these three types of generous behaviors:

(1) In the last year, how much, if at all, did you help homeless people, needy neighbors, family friends, or other people in need, **directly, not** through an organization?

- A lot.....1
- Some.....2
- A little, or.....3
- None.....4

(2) In the last month, did you do any volunteer activity through organizations—that is, donate your time and energy not for pay?

- No.....0
- Yes.....1

(3) Altogether, what was the total dollar value of all donations (you and your immediate family) made in the past year towards religious and charitable purposes?

Dollar amount recorded: \$ _____

Item #3 was divided by reported total family income (asked by a different survey question) to calculate the *percent* of income donated to religious and charitable causes.

The results of the criterion validity tests are reported in Table 2. As expected, in both datasets there is a moderate, positive, relationship between the IGS and non-institutional, direct helping behavior. Also as expected, in both datasets the IGS is only weakly correlated with formal volunteering and financial giving—both being behavioral outcomes that we expect to correlate with other types of generosity. In sum, the IGS appears to enjoy high face, content, and criterion validity and so may be profitably employed in survey research on generosity.

(Table 2)

Conclusion

We believe the IGS is a useful tool for survey researchers to capture a critical dimension of generosity that is often neglected in standard conceptualizing of and research on generosity. The instrument employs a mere 10 items, is easy to administer, requires little time for respondents to complete, requires no special knowledge of statistics to score, and reflects high reliability and validity. We encourage researchers who are interested in the scientific study of generosity to field these IGS items on surveys, along with other measures of generosity, in order better to understand the sources, manifestations, and consequences of generosity both in interpersonal relationships and as IG relates to other forms of generous dispositions and behaviors. We also encourage further testing and refining of the instrument. We particularly recommend including the instrument alongside other measures of pro-social tendencies and measures of the “Big Five” dimensions of personality in order to assess the distinctiveness of the instrument and the ability of IGS to predict outcomes beyond these other established measures. Additional tests utilizing confirmatory factor analysis, assessing social desirability bias, and employing non self-reported outcomes would also serve to further strengthen the instrument and establish IG as an important dimension in the study of generosity.

References

DeBell, M., Krosnick, J., Lupia A., & Roberts C. (2009). *User’s guide to the advance release of the 2008-2009 ANES panel study*. Palo Alto, CA, and Ann Arbor, MI: Stanford University and the University of Michigan.

McCullough, M., & Bono G., “The Love Scale,” University of Miami, unpublished.

Penner, L.A., Fritzsche, B., Craiger, J., & Freifeld T. (1995). Measuring the prosocial personality. In J. N. Butcher, & C. D. Spielberger (Eds.), *Advances in personality assessment*, (Vol. 12). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Endnotes

NDGGS		ANES		
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D
Q1	4.84	.98	5.24	.74
Q2	4.34	1.09	4.82	.91
Q3	4.67	1.05	5.09	.83
Q4	4.75	.97	5.10	.82
Q5	4.63	1.06	4.96	.83
Q6	4.85	.91	5.09	.80
Q7	4.63	1.04	4.93	.94
Q8	4.40	1.04	4.80	.94
Q9	4.17	1.02	4.73	.90
Q10	4.65	1.11	5.06	.92
IGS	45.94	6.94	49.83	5.91
N	965		1080	

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics on Individual IGS Items asked in Two National Surveys
Source: NDGSS 2008; ANES 2008.

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations between the Interpersonal Generosity Scale and Three Helping Behaviors on Two Surveys (weighted)

	NDGGS	ANES
Frequency of personal help to needy in past year ^a	.45	.35
Percent of family income donated	.20	.14
Volunteered during the past month ^a	.22	.10
N	923 - 963	981-1075

Source: NDGSS 2008; ANES 2008.

Notes: ^aPolyserial correlations were used with ordinal and dichotomous variables.

Appendix A: Preliminary Interpersonal Generosity Scale

Attention

1. When one of my loved ones needs my attention, I really try to slow down and give them the time and help they need.
2. I am known by family and friends as someone who makes time to pay attention to others' problems.
3. The people that know me would probably agree that I'm not the world's best listener.®
4. I'm probably a bit too preoccupied to be as compassionate as I could be with my friends and family members.®

Compassion

5. I'm the kind of person who is willing to go the "extra mile" to help take care of my friends, relatives, and acquaintances.
6. When friends or family members experience something upsetting or discouraging I make a special point of being kind to them.
7. If you asked my friends and family they would probably not describe me as a soft-hearted person. ®
8. I tend not to feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems. ®

Openhandedness

9. When it comes to my personal relationships with others, I am a very generous person.
10. It makes me very happy to give to other people in ways that meet their needs.
11. Realistically speaking, you have to take care of yourself first before worrying about the needs of others. ®
12. I mostly help other people when it benefits me too.®

Self-Extension

13. It is just as important to me that other people around me are happy and thriving as it is that I am happy and thriving.
14. My decisions are often based on concern for the welfare of others.
15. “Look out for number one” is actually a pretty good motto in life. ®
16. It is best not to give to other people more help or attention than they deserve. ®

Magnanimity

17. When I am tempted to get upset with others I often first work hard to try to imagine how things look from their perspective.
18. If I help other people, I expect to be appreciated for that. ®

Other-Investment

19. I keep a look out for books, movies, or experiences that might contribute to the personal growth of friends and family members.
20. I am not very interested in coming up with ways for friends and family members to create or find opportunities for themselves.®

Courage

21. I am usually willing to risk my own feelings being hurt in the process if I stand a chance of helping someone else in need.
22. I'm usually too timid or afraid to confront my loved ones when their behavior is hurting themselves or another person.®

Verbal Expression

23. I make it a point to let my friends and family know how much I love and appreciate them.
24. I often have a hard time expressing positive feelings for the people I care about. ®

Forgiveness

25. I don't hang onto grudges when someone I care about does something that hurts me.
26. When someone I know offends or hurts me, usually I am not interested in continuing a relationship with them. ®

Notes: ® Item is reverse coded

Appendix B: Final Interpersonal Generosity Scale

Attention

1. When one of my loved ones needs my attention, I really try to slow down and give them the time and help they need.
2. I am known by family and friends as someone who makes time to pay attention to others' problems.

Compassion

3. I'm the kind of person who is willing to go the "extra mile" to help take care of my friends, relatives, and acquaintances.
4. When friends or family members experience something upsetting or discouraging I make a special point of being kind to them.

Openhandedness

5. When it comes to my personal relationships with others, I am a very generous person.
6. It makes me very happy to give to other people in ways that meet their needs.

Self-Extension

7. It is just as important to me that other people around me are happy and thriving as it is that I am happy and thriving.

8. My decisions are often based on concern for the welfare of others.

Courage

9. I am usually willing to risk my own feelings being hurt in the process if I stand a chance of helping someone else in need.

Verbal Expression

10. I make it a point to let my friends and family know how much I love and appreciate them.