

GENEROSITY AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG TEENAGERS

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Abstract

The context of actual pandemic requires analyzing workers' proactive Generosity, a virtue that is desired in any society, involves choosing to sacrifice one's own resources, be talking about money or time, energy, etc. to help someone in need. Satisfaction with life, on the other hand, refers to the degree of contentment an individual has with his or her own life. The central objective of this paper was to investigate the relationship between the two concepts - generosity and life satisfaction among adolescents. The research included a sample of 4333 adolescents in 8th grade from a survey (MERPAS) conducted in the school year 2018-2019 in Bihor County, Romania. Regression analyses confirm the research hypothesis, showing the existence of a significant positive relationship between the level of generosity and life satisfaction of adolescents, controlling for the effects of the variables gender, socio-economic status, declared religiosity and place of residence.

Keywords: generosity; life satisfaction; giving; happiness; prosocial behavior

The values related to giving and helping are appreciated and nurtured in basically every society and, regardless of time period, being the fundamental basis for sharing resources and positive relationships.

Generosity, one form of prosocial behavior, is a value, a virtue by which individuals voluntarily and constantly aim to increase the welfare of those in need through various caring behaviors, by often giving them more than would be expected in such a situation (Collett & Morrissey, 2007; Herzog & Price, 2016). The word generosity comes from the Latin term "generous" which means of noble origin, which is why the quality of being generous is considered something noble, something that is not easily found (Science of Generosity, 2009).

We understand generosity as a constant trait, a stable characteristic of the individual (Collett & Morrissey, 2007). Generosity is frequently associated with concepts such as altruism, giving, philanthropy and prosocial behavior, and often throughout literature, the terms are used

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interchangeably, highlighting a gap in the literature in terms of clearly delineating these concepts (Komter, 2010). Although they all have in common the idea of helping those in need, being basically all placed under the umbrella concept of prosocial behaviors, what is specific to generosity is that it is not just an isolated behavior, but a constant disposition towards helping and implicitly giving/sharing one's own resources - the focus being on the constant individual characteristic and not on the behavior (Collett & Morrissey, 2007; Herzog & Price, 2016; Rojas, 2014).

People can show generosity at any age, but autonomously and consistently, it is only from adolescence onwards that individuals will be able to express generosity in a substantial way, when the necessary cognitive and emotional capacities are refined so that they allow the full assimilation of such a strong characteristic as generosity (Eisenberg et al., 2005; Hart & Carlo, 2005). Although children can show generosity from an early age, different studies (Eisenberg et al., 1995; Eisenberg et al., 2005; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998) show a great evolution throughout the years, and this evolution is more evident between children and teenagers. Also, sometime towards the end of adolescence, a certain stability in prosocial behavior is expected to occur (Eisenberg et al., 2005). Regarding the elements which have previously been mentioned, we could conclude that the period of adolescence is very important for the acquisition of values related to generosity, caring and prosocial behavior in general.

Although there have been concerns to find out why people choose to be generous, there are still many gaps (Collett & Morrissey, 2007). In this regard, the literature explains generosity in terms of psychological factors such as a higher level of empathy or mercy (Batson, 2010; Kolm & Ythier, 2006). On the other hand, explanations come from the perspective of reciprocal relationships, stating that people choose to help because they are convinced that they will be rewarded either directly by the same person, or by another person (indirect reciprocity), or divinity (Aronson et al., 2007; Chen, 2009; Trivers, 1971). Another factor explaining generosity is the desire to have a good image, and as such, the presence of an audience can contribute to an increase of the likelihood of a helping behavior taking place (Haley & Fessler, 2005). On the other hand, a feeling of guilt and/or the desire to show one's superiority towards others are also factors that may lie behind a generous act. Wealthy people who express generosity by sharing their resources are perceived by others as deserving their money and position, they are considered as being hard working individuals, and their success is attributed to internal factors. This is not the case for the less generous rich people who are often blamed for earning their money through dishonest ways (Hauge, 2016). In a similar manner to altruism, generosity assumes no expectation of benefit, from a socio-economic perspective the cost-benefit analysis carried out by the individual in such situations is the process by which he or she assesses the extent to which the help given,

although it will involve a sacrifice (a cost), will nevertheless be worthwhile in terms of the benefits (social approval, reciprocity, satisfaction, etc.) derived from it. Equally, generosity follows the rules of the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Bar-Tal, 1976; McDougall, 1908). Parents, or other family members, together with schools (Borgatta & Montgomery, 2000; Voicu, 2010) play an important role in this regard. By observing parents while they perform acts of generosity, a correlation with the children's level of prosocial engagement was found, this type of attitude towards prosocial behavior lasting until adulthood (Wilhelm et al., 2008; Yang et al., 2018).

In order to share resources, there must be resources available for sharing, so generosity, according to most studies, is more common among people with higher socio-economic status (Deary et al., 2001; Korndörfer et al., 2015; Lazăr & Hatos, 2016; Lazăr & Hatos, 2019; Safra et al., 2016; Son & Wilson, 2017; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012; Wiepking & Maas, 2009). A higher socio-economic status is correlated with a better-paid job, but also with higher social capital, meaning that such individuals are more likely to be asked for help. Last but not least, a higher level of education facilitates a better analysis of the situation, a better understanding of it, better problem-solving and communication skills, as well as a higher level of empathy. Although we could say that the rich are more generous, sometimes acts of generosity arise from selfish motives related to personal benefits, such as reputation, reciprocity, guilt, desire for superiority, desire for positive feelings, etc. (Black & Davidai, 2020).

On the other hand, generosity is associated with a higher level of religiosity (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Eckel & Grossman, 2003; Graham & Haidt, 2010; Lazăr & Hatos, 2019; Ruiters & De Graaf, 2006; Wiepking et al., 2014; Will & Cochran, 1995). The explanations are directly related to Christian values which are known to promote unselfishness, caring and self-sacrifice acts. Moreover, the church itself can organise collections and thus facilitate a greater likelihood of the community of believers being asked for help, as compared to the less religious individuals. Closely related to this, one might say that generosity is more common in rural areas than in towns (Bekkers, 2010; Ma et al., 2015; Rochat et al., 2009). Another possible explanation could be that rural areas tend to be more traditionalist (work activities often involve cooperation) and less individualistic as in urban areas.

Studies conducted in the field of generosity and prosocial behaviour reveal the existence of gender specificities in the manifestation of these behaviors. Overall, most studies place women first when it comes to helping others in need (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011; Cox & Deck, 2006; Einolf, 2010; Flanagan et al., 1998; Lazăr & Hatos, 2016; Lazăr & Hatos, 2019; Piper & Schnepf, 2008; Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012). Women seem to be more empathetic, more caring, and empathy is known to be a very important factor in understanding differences in generosity (Cox & Deck, 2006).

Explanations also refer to the different way in which girls are educated within families as compared to boys in relation to this social responsibility (Flanagan et al., 1998).

Generosity, as a form of prosocial behaviour, is frequently linked to happiness, life satisfaction, well-being, higher self-esteem, and even longevity (Aknin et al., 2012; Kasser, 2005; Vogt et al., 2020). Based on this, it is considered that one of the reasons why people choose to be generous, even if it means sacrificing their own resources, is that these acts make them happy (Park et al., 2017).

"Life-satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as-a-whole" (Veenhoven, 1996, p. 6). The construct, even though widely used in positive psychology, refers to both cognitive and affective appraisals, both to the general satisfaction and emotionally felt pleasure, but it is mostly used when referring to cognitive assessment (Diener, 2009; Proctor et al., 2009; Veenhoven, 1996). Not uncommonly, instead of the term "satisfaction with life", the subjective well-being or happiness is used; what is more, life satisfaction scores are used to indicate the level of happiness (Proctor et al., 2009; Veenhoven, 1996). In this state of contentment, satisfaction can be both temporary as well as stable over time (Diener, 2009). Together with physical and mental health, life satisfaction is considered to be one of the indicators of the quality of life (Veenhoven, 1996). In very simple terms, satisfaction with life refers to how much a person likes his or her own life.

In terms of the life satisfaction of children and adolescents, studies show that they generally report being satisfied with their lives (Huebner, 1991; Kuntsche & Gmel, 2004; Myers & Diener, 1996; Park & Huebner, 2005; Proctor et al., 2009). Also, although life satisfaction remains high on average, it is found that during adolescence there is a certain decrease in satisfaction levels (Suldo & Huebner, 2004; Ullman & Tatar, 2001). High life satisfaction helps adolescents to better adapt to changes, it fosters optimal mental health, attenuates the negative effects of stressful life events and it has been found to decrease the chances of developing psychological and behavioural problems among young people (Park, 2004). Therefore, increasing life satisfaction among teenagers would bring many benefits to this rather challenging age group.

One of the ways in which satisfaction with life could be increased is related to pro-social behaviours. For instance, researchers Aknin et al. (2012) talk about a loop that links the spending on others to well-being, showing that the more people help the happier they are, and that the happier they are, the more likely they will be to help someone in the future. The authors believe that this could be a path to sustainable happiness, given that "prosocial spending increases happiness which in turn encourages prosocial spending" (p. 347).

Participants in one research have promised to spend money in the following four weeks based on an investigation of brain mechanisms associating generous behavior to higher happiness. The experimental group made a public commitment to spend money on others, whereas the control group planned to spend money on themselves. The experimental group has shown stronger increases in self-reported happiness (more than the control group), and generous decisions have engaged the temporo-parietal junction (TPJ) more in the experimental group than in the control group (Park et al., 2017).

In another study (Van Asseldonk, 2009), the effect of acts of kindness on well-being was assessed in a test-retest experiment. Participants in three of five groups, of which two groups were controls, were asked to write down acts of generosity/kindness they showed to themselves, to other people or to the community. The researchers concluded that acts of kindness toward other people increased life satisfaction the most, more than for those who reported kindness toward the community or themselves. At the same time, the study has also shown that enumerating acts of kindness did not influence happiness or meaning in/of life.

Results from a study (Yang et al., 2017) of more than 2,000 adolescents has shown that prosocial behavior partially mediated the positive association between meaningful life and subjective well-being, or pleasure life and subjective well-being. Adolescents with a higher level of meaning orientation seem to have a better sense of social responsibility (Douglas, 2015). Thus, they end up being more likely to act generously because they attach greater importance to ensuring the well-being of others. These prosocial behaviors can help adolescents develop social skills and thus have better levels of subjective well-being (Tian et al., 2015)

Based on the numerous studies already conducted linking prosocial behaviors to life satisfaction, in the current study we intend to examine the extent to which there is a correlation between adolescents' level of generosity and their self-reported life satisfaction. In view of the previous studies, as well as of the previous analyses conducted on the same sample, we want to examine the relationship between generosity and life satisfaction under the control of several variables that we have observed to have an effect on generosity, namely: gender, socio-economic status, religiosity and adolescents' place of residence.

Thus, the hypothesis of the present research is the assumption that there is a positive correlation between the level of generosity and the level of satisfaction with life of adolescents in Bihor County, a relationship that exists even when controlling for the effect of gender, socio-economic status, level of religiosity and residence environment of adolescents.

Method

Participants

A sample of 4,333 adolescents (the initial sample included 4708 unfiltered responses but some compromise responses were excluded). The MERPAS survey, as we called it (the survey by which we managed to include the entire population of 8th grade students in the study) was coordinated by Prof. PhD. Habil. Adrian Hatos. The sample comprised of 50.8% - male and 49.2% - female. From the population of adolescents included in the sample, 55.4% came from a village/community, 13% from a small town and 31% from Oradea or another big city. Access to the MERPAS survey database was through being part of the team that collected the data (as technical and administrative manager). Prior to the data collection, agreements were obtained from school institutions and parents.

Data were collected on the basis of a broader questionnaire that included several themes such as school orientation, deviance, fat shaming, etc. The questionnaire was administered in paper form for approximately 1,000 participants, while for the rest of the adolescents it was administered online via PC/laptop in each school.

Measures and procedure

Generosity, included in the analysis as a dependent variable, was assessed using a scale developed by Hatos (2020). The scale was elaborated on the basis of the Kasser (2005) scale, where generosity is operationalized in terms of attitudes rather than actual behaviors. The scale includes 6 items; the confirmatory factor analyses has shown the unidimensionality of the 6 items. The items are: 1. I usually help those who truly need support/ 2. When someone asks for help, I do not think twice/ 3. Helping someone who is poor makes me feel good/ 4. I like sharing goods with other people/ 5. I like making donations for people in need/ 6. I would like to have a job where I could help as many people as possible. For each item, the student had to choose how much the option fits. The answers to the scale questions are based on a Likert scale 4 response type: It fits me very little, It fits me a little, It fits me somewhat, It fits me a lot. The scale was tested in 2011 and 2019 in both cases on samples larger than 4000 adolescents, proving to have good validity and fidelity (Cronbach Alpha greater than 0.7). In the current study, Cronbach's Alpha=.83.

Life satisfaction, as the independent variable, was evaluated by the classical question: *Thinking about your life and personal situation, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole?* The answers are possible on a scale from 0 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied).

Five control factors were included in the study, all of which were found to have a substantial influence in prior research utilizing the same sample (Lazăr & Hatos, 2016; Lazăr & Hatos, 2019). Gender, variables

mother's degree of education and family economic status – as proxy variables for socioeconomic status, level of religiosity and place of residence are therefore introduced as control factors. Family economic situation was evaluated based on the sum of the affirmative answers regarding 10 expensive objects. Because the data revealed a substantial association between the mother's and father's educational levels, only the mother's educational level was included in the multivariate models to prevent multicollinearity.

In order to test our assumption, we have conducted a hierarchical linear regression, by using IBM Statistics SPSS 23. We chose this type of analysis because the method allows us to measure the individual effect of life satisfaction on generosity, controlling for the effect of other variables that influence generosity (as we know from previous studies).

To test the research hypothesis, the control variables were grouped in the first model and life satisfaction as a separate model:

- *Model 1* (control variables): gender, mother's education and financial status as proxies for socio-economic status, level of religiosity and place of residence
- *Model 2*: life satisfaction

Results and discussions

Table 1a. Generosity scale responses by gender (first 3 items)

Responses	Generosity item 1		Generosity item 2		Generosity item 3	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
It fits me to a great extent	33.3%	66.7%	36.5%	63.5%	36.8%	63.2%
It fits me in a certain way	39.9%	60.1%	44.3%	55.7%	38.3%	61.7%
It fits me a little	46.7%	53.3%	46.3%	53.7%	40.7%	59.3%
It fits me very little	55.1%	44.9%	55.0%	45.0%	55.3%	44.7%

Table 1b. Generosity scale responses by gender (last 3 items)

Responses	Generosity item 4		Generosity item 5		Generosity item 6	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
It fits me to a great extent	45.4%	54.6%	28.9%	71.1%	29.4%	70.6%
It fits me in a certain way	47.0%	53.0%	42.7%	57.3%	41.0%	59.0%
It fits me a little	47.9%	52.1%	46.7%	53.3%	48.7%	51.3%
It fits me very little	55.0%	45.0%	59.6%	40.4%	57.6%	42.4%

Tables 1a and 1b display the responses of adolescents to items assessing generosity, presented separately for girls and boys. The results indicate that girls, as compared to boys, are more likely to choose the It fits me to a great Extent suggesting already at this stage of the analysis possible differences between girls and boys in favour of girls.

Table 2. Religiosity

		n	%
Valid	I am definitely not religious, I have other beliefs	114	2.6
	I am not religious	299	6.9
	I am religious in my own way	2090	48.2
	I am religious, I try to follow the teachings of my church	1382	31.9
	Total	3885	89.7
Missing	Don't know whether I am religious or not	434	10.0
	System	14	.3
	Total	448	10.3
Total		4333	100.0

By analysing Table 2 we observe that most teenagers consider themselves to be religious, but in a form of their own - a moderate level of religiosity we would say (almost 50%), followed by those who say they are religious and try to follow the teachings of their church (about 30%). The least numerous (under 3%) are those who say they are not religious.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for life satisfaction and financial situation

Variable	N	M	SD	Range
Life satisfaction	4290	8.13	2.05	0-10
Financial situation	4333	5.98	2.42	0-10

In terms of life satisfaction, the descriptive analyses indicate that adolescents, at least at the declarative level, are quite satisfied with their life as a whole, with an average level of over 8, and a standard deviation of 2.05. In terms of financial situation, the average of items owned was 5.98 out of 10 items listed.

The descriptive analyses show that the majority of adolescents (40.7%) included in the analysis come from families whose mothers have completed 9 to 12 grades, including baccalaureate and vocational school, followed by adolescents with mothers with up to 8 grades (24.3%) and those with mothers with higher education (23.3%).

Table 4. Regression Coefficients of Life satisfaction on Generosity

Variable	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	SE	B	β	SE
Constant	-.38**		.08	-.75**		.10
Gender ^a	-.34**	-.17	.03	-.35**	-.17	.03
Mother's level of education1 ^b	.11*	.04	.05	.12*	.05	.05
Mother's level of education2 ^c	.05	.02	.04	.06	.02	.04
Mother's level of education3 ^d	-.06	-.01	.06	-.05	-.01	.06
Financial situation	.08**	.18	.00	.07**	.16	.00
Religiosity1 ^e	-.21**	-.10	.03	-.20**	-.10	.03
Religiosity2 ^f	-.55**	-.08	.10	-.48**	-.07	.10
Religiosity3 ^g	-.61**	-.14	.07	-.56**	-.13	.07
Place of residence1 ^h	.22**	.11	.04	.19**	.09	.04
Place of residence2 ⁱ	.05	.01	.05	.05	.01	.05
Life satisfaction				.05**	.09	.00
R ²		.09			.10	
ΔR^2					.10	

Note. N=3357. We examined the impact of life satisfaction on generosity, controlling for gender, socio-economic status, level of religiosity and place of residence.

^aMale=1, Female=0. ^b Mother's level of education1 (Up to 8 classes) = 1. ^c Mother's level of education1 (grades 9 to 12, including baccalaureate and vocational school) = 1. ^d Mother's level of education1(Technical school, post-secondary, college) = 1, Mother's level of education (University studies) = 0. ^e Religiosity1 (I am religious in my own way) = 1. ^f Religiosity2 (I am not religious) = 1. ^g Religiosity3 (I'm definitely not religious, I have other beliefs) = 1, Religiosity (I'm religious, I try to follow the teachings of my church) = 0. ⁱ Place of residence1 (rural) = 1. ^j Place of residence2 (small city) = 1, Place of residence (town) = 0.

*p<.05. **p<.01

By analyzing the regression table, we have observed that as far as the effect of the control variables is concerned, the results show, as expected, differences between girls and boys in terms of generosity, with girls being overall more generous, the effect remaining the same in both models.

With regard to the relationship between socio-economic status and generosity of adolescents, significant differences are found only between adolescents from families whose mothers have completed up to 8th grade and those whose mothers have higher education. Adolescents whose

mothers are university graduates have higher levels of generosity. The results show no significant differences in the level of generosity between adolescents whose mothers have a high school or post-secondary education and adolescents whose mothers have a college degree. Also, as expected, adolescents with greater financial possibilities have higher levels of generosity.

Still in the area of control variables, also in this study, less religious people are found to have lower levels of generosity than those who declare themselves as being more religious. In terms of place of residence, there are significant differences between adolescents from rural areas and those from larger cities, in that adolescents from rural areas are more generous.

As regards the independent variable analyzed, the results indicate a positive correlation between life satisfaction and generosity, with control for gender, socio-economic status, declared religiosity and place of residence. Additionally, we have found that the regression model explains 10% of the variance in generosity. Because the overall purpose of the study was hypothesis testing, we do not go into more detail about the explanatory power of the model.

Discussions and conclusions

Generosity and prosocial behavior in general are the foundations for a well-functioning society. The life satisfaction of an adolescent is important for a harmonious development, for a good adaptation to changes and also for the avoidance of engaging in certain risky behaviors. The main objective of the present study was to investigate the relationship between the two concepts - adolescents' generosity and their reported level of life satisfaction. Following the analyses carried out on a sample of 4,333 adolescents from Bihor County, the hypothesis of our study was confirmed. Thus, controlling for the effect of the variables gender, socio-economic status, declared religiosity, and place of residence, the results of the regression analysis show that the level of generosity correlates significantly positively with the level of satisfaction of adolescents.

The results are consistent with other studies in the field (Aknin et al., 2012; Douglas, 2015; Huebner, 1991; Tian et al., 2015; Van Asseldonk, 2009; Vogt et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2017), pointing out that a strong link between values related to generosity and prosocial behaviors and life satisfaction is observed already during adolescence, when the foundation of values related to generosity and prosocial behaviors takes place. Frequently people choose to be generous in order to feel that inner warmth, that satisfaction (Elster, 2013). On the other hand, happier people are more generous (Aknin et al., 2012). Although the present study does not allow us to establish a causal relationship, we embrace the idea of circular influence

stated by the authors Aknin et al. (2012) whereby engaging in acts of generosity leads to increased levels of happiness, and this in turn leads to a new willingness to help. Beyond the relationship of causality, one aspect is certain and that is that we can increase the level of satisfaction with life of adolescents through the internalization of values related to generosity. Thus, both at home and at school, by fostering situations in which adolescents behave pro-socially, we could help them to have a better satisfaction with life. It is known that this has multiple benefits both by encouraging new acts of generosity and by perpetuating this high level of satisfaction with life, as well as in terms of adapting to changes, reducing the risk of depression and the tendency to engage in risky behavior, etc.

The present study, although it involved the analysis of a large sample and rigorous analyses, has certain limitations that must be considered. In this regard, we would like to mention the desirability of the responses regarding both generosity and satisfaction with life. Also, the generosity scale, even if it is well grounded in the literature, does not consider factual behaviors, only attitudinal ones. Nonetheless, although often encountered in this form, satisfaction with life was operationalized on the basis of only one question.

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