

# Filling the Gap: Directions for Further Understanding Generous Practices

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## Background

Generosity is both an identity and a social act and reflects an underlying emotional exchange in social relationships. (1) Acts of generosity are socially paradoxical and benefit both the giver and the receiver. (2,3)

The purpose of this project was to understand the complex contexts and practices of individual generosity based on a review of the existing literature.

## Research Question

- What are the current themes and gaps in the research literature related to human GENEROSITY and the behaviors and emotions related to GENEROUS PRACTICES of individuals?

## References

(1) Wuthnow, R. 1995. Learning to Care: Elementary Acts of Kindness in an Age of Indifference. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. (2) Smith, C. & H. Davidson. 2014. The Paradox of Generosity. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. (3) Tsvetkova, M. & M. Macy 2014. The Social Contagion of Generosity. PLOS ONE 9(2):e7275. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0087275>. (4) The Science of Generosity. White paper prepared for the John Templeton Foundation by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley (accessed April 26, 2019: [https://www.templeton.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Generosity\\_White\\_Paper-FinalJTF.pdf](https://www.templeton.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Generosity_White_Paper-FinalJTF.pdf))

## Methods#

We conducted a “top down” search of empirical studies published in the social sciences on “Generosity.” We also included research reviews and studies listed in “white papers” or policy-relevant research from private foundations or institutes, including the John Templeton Foundation & Greater Good Science Center. (4)

- We systematically eliminated all studies that emphasized “organizations” or “institutions” as agents of GENEROSITY.
- We found a total of 58 empirical studies of generosity and human behavior, emotion, and/or social organization.

Our team annotated each of the 58 articles, and then developed a coding sheet for team review of the article annotations.

- The coding sheet included review for research question, date of publication, disciplinary perspective, study method, target population & sample size, & study findings.
- The coding sheet was applied to all 58 articles and findings were summarized.

#Access to complete list of annotations & coding sheet available upon request (paternit@sonoma.edu)

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## Results

We systematically reviewed 58 studies-- published between 1967-2021-- related to the complex contexts and practices of GENEROSITY in the existing literature. Our findings were as follows:

### Disciplinary perspectives

Psychology/Health Psychology	55.0%
Sociology	15.5%
Economics/Consumer Research	12.0%
Other (Religious & Cultural Studies, Biology...)	15.5%

### Method of research@

Experimental Design	52.0%
Survey Research	31.0%
Interviews	5.0%
Other methods	12.0%

(math. modeling, hx/comp, meta analyses, fieldwork)

<sup>2</sup>more than one method used by some studies

### Target groups for study

US Adults	71.0%	General Pop.	69.0%
Children	17.0%	Students	22.4%
Couples	3.4%		
Other	8.6%		

## Directions for Empirical Research

The majority of studies used experimentally-based methods, were guided by perspectives in psychology, and used U.S. adult populations.

Further understandings of GENEROSITY & diverse practices and contexts should explore intensive interviews with diverse persons and circumstances.