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Measuring individuals' need for identification: Scale development and validation

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ABSTRACT

We developed and validated a scale to measure individual differences in the propensity to identify with social groups. This tendency, termed need for identification (*n*ID), addresses a gap in current identification literature, which ignores the potential role of the individual. Item development and review was followed by item reduction through exploratory factor analysis ($N = 126$). A second sample ($N = 204$) was used to refine the measure, and to provide evidence for discriminant and convergent validity. A two-dimensional structure of the *n*ID construct was confirmed in a third sample ($N = 180$), and a final sample ($N = 40$) provided evidence of test–retest reliability. The first dimension (self-definition) was interpreted as a need for group memberships in order to define and understand the self. The second dimension (belongingness) was interpreted as a need for group affinity and relatedness. These dimensions may explain individual variation in identification, thereby advancing our understanding of social identification.

1. Introduction

In this article, we report on a scale developed to fill a gap in the current understanding of identity processes. Most research on identity is based on principles from social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner, 1982). This research has focused on identification, whereby an individual's beliefs about a group become self-referential and self-defining (Pratt, 1998). Social identity scholars emphasize the social nature of identity, proposing that identification depends on social context. This contextual focus, however, cannot explain why, in a similar context, people differ in their degree of identification. Thus it appears that consideration of the role of individual differences within social identity is warranted. To meet this challenge, we explore the role of the individual in identification processes by proposing that people vary in their propensity to identify with social targets, a construct we term need for identification (*n*ID).

1.1. Need for identification

We conceptualize need for identification as an individual's propensity to self-define in terms of group membership. This is not to say that identification with a target, as a consequence of *n*ID, remains constant across all situations. We propose that *n*ID is elicited when a social identity is made salient, or 'switched on', in accordance with the traditional contextual determinants of identification. Individuals are likely to identify strongly with a group when they have high *n*ID, but only when the context emphasizes this group. Therefore, *n*ID is conceptualized as a trait that generalizes across situations, yet is cued only when the context makes group membership, rather than individuality, salient; *n*ID produces identification *after* the context elicits a specific group.

Need for identification is related to a desire to balance both inclusiveness and distinctiveness. According to Brewer (1991), individuals aim for a state of optimal distinctiveness, balancing a desire for membership in social categories with a need for individuality based on differentiation from others. Individuals with high *n*ID are conceptualized as favoring inclusiveness above distinctiveness, whilst individuals with low *n*ID favor the reverse.

The *n*ID construct is consistent with research by Markus and Kitayama (1991), who posit that individuals differ in their self-construal. For some, the self-conception is that of an autonomous and separate individual – an *independent* construal of the self. Others with an *interdependent* construal of the self are more connected with others, so that these relationships define them. Similarly, individuals with high *n*ID are more likely to construe their self as interdependent and connected with others and, as a result, tend to draw from others, including groups, for self-definition. A more independent view of the self is reflected by low *n*ID, where the self is defined as an individual, separate from others.

1.2. Overview of our five studies

The present research developed a scale to measure *n*ID, and comprised five studies. Study 1 involved the generation and review

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of an item pool. Study 2 involved item reduction through exploratory factor analysis. In Study 3, we evaluated the scale using confirmatory factor analysis, and assessed discriminant validity. In Study 4, the scale structure was replicated in another sample. In the final study we assessed the scale's test–retest reliability.

2. Study 1. Item development

Items were developed using existing literature and specification of the *n*ID construct domain. Our starting point was a seven-item measure of need for organizational identity, developed by Kreiner and Ashforth (2004), which was reworded to reflect a generalized tendency to identify. The conceptual definition and presumed markers of *n*ID (e.g., visible identification cues; see Glynn, 1998) served as the basis for item generation, resulting in an additional 30 items that were revised in an iterative process. All items were short, addressed a single issue, were written in simple language, and were positively worded (see Hinkin, 1998). A five-point response scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) was used to promote adequate variance and scale reliability.

Our initial item pool was reviewed by experts to maximize content validity (DeVellis, 1991). Eight researchers in social/organizational psychology were provided with all 37 items, together with the construct definition of *n*ID. These experts were required to rate each item as *completely representative*, *somewhat representative*, or *not representative* of the *n*ID construct (inter-rater reliability $ICC_{(3,1)} = .70$). Points were assigned to each rating and summed to create an overall 'representativeness' index, ranging from 8 to 24 points. Seven items scored 14 or less on this index and were considered inadequately representative of the construct. These items were excluded from further scale development.

3. Study 2. Item reduction

3.1. Participants and method

Study 2 participants comprised 126 Australian undergraduate university students (77.8% female, mean age = 21.2 years, range 18–35), who were given an anonymous self-report survey during class. The survey contained thirty *n*ID items and standard demographic questions.

3.2. Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with Principal Axis factoring and oblique rotation was considered appropriate at this stage of scale development. We used multiple criteria to judge the number of factors to extract: the scree plot, parallel analysis test using O'Connor's (2000) method, and the interpretability of the factor structure.

3.3. Results and discussion

The overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) was .81, indicating the appropriateness of factor analysis on the data. Individual MSAs were also sufficient (>.60) with the exception of one item, which was removed. Inspection of the scree plot indicated two to four factors, but the three- and four-factor structures included many split loadings. A two-factor solution was selected on the basis of simple structure and factor interpretability, and this conclusion was supported by a parallel analysis test. Low factor loadings (<.30) and split loadings (>.40 on both factors) for 9 items warranted their exclusion. The final two factors accounted for 33.6% of the variance, and showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = .42$). In all, 10 items were removed during analysis, leaving 10 items loading on each of two factors.

Based on the results of Study 2, the 20 items of the *n*ID were found to comprise two related factors. The items of the first factor seem to reflect the role of groups in defining and understanding the self (e.g., "being part of groups provides me with an identity"). We termed this factor *nID–Self Definition* (*n*ID–SD). The items on the second factor were representative of group affinity and the relatedness of group members (e.g., "I have a lot in common with other members of my groups"), which we labeled *nID–Belongingness* (*n*ID–B).

4. Study 3. Scale refinement and evaluation

4.1. Participants and method

We employed a snowball sampling approach to recruit participants via e-mail to the researchers' population of contacts, including students and colleagues. Recipients were invited to participate in the web-based survey, and were encouraged to forward the e-mail to others. A total of 221 people completed the survey. Casewise deletion of missing data resulted in a final sample of 204 (50% female, mean age = 25.8 years, range 18–58 years).

4.2. Measures

4.2.1. Need for identification

The 20 items retained from Study 2 were used to assess *n*ID.

4.2.2. Personality

The Big Five personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness) were measured using the Big Five Inventory (BFI; John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). The 44-item BFI uses short phrases based on the trait adjectives known to be prototypical markers of the Big Five on a five-point Likert scale.

4.2.3. Need for affiliation

We used the 9 items from the Positive Stimulation component of the Interpersonal Orientation Scale (IOS; Hill, 1987) to measure need for affiliation on a five-point Likert scale. These items measure not only Murray's (1938) affiliative need but also affection, belongingness, and intimacy, and represented a more thorough test of the *n*ID scale than other, similar measures.

4.3. Results and discussion

We analyzed the data using both EFA and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). EFA provided an appropriate starting point to explore further the factor structure of *n*ID. CFA was used to then validate the factor structure.

4.3.1. Exploratory factor analysis

EFA using Principal Axis factoring and oblique rotation was conducted on the 20 *n*ID items. Both the overall and individual item measures of sampling adequacy were high, indicating the appropriateness of the data for factor analysis. Both the scree plot and parallel analysis test suggested a two-factor solution. Five items were removed on the basis of either low factor loadings (<.30) or split loadings (>.40 on both factors). The final structure contained 10 items on the *n*ID–SD factor ($\alpha = .87$) and 5 items on the *n*ID–B factor ($\alpha = .76$), and accounted for 41.5% of the variance. There was a moderate positive correlation between the factors ($r = .46$).