

**IT'S THE PROSOCIAL THOUGHT THAT COUNTS:  
AUTHENTICITY, SINCERITY, AND PERCEIVED MOTIVES  
IN DYADIC EXCHANGE**

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**IT'S THE PROSOCIAL THOUGHT THAT COUNTS:  
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Cornell University 2013

Despite the importance of authenticity and sincerity in the public imagination, sociological investigation has been stymied by the murkiness of these concepts. In this dissertation, I clarify these concepts and situate them in a broader empirical literature. I then narrow my focus to investigate three questions related to the causes, consequences, and mediating role of perceived sincerity: What is the impact of perceived sincerity in exchange relationships? What informs these perceptions? And how does the study of perceived sincerity advance existing theoretical work in social exchange? I argue that prior explanations of reciprocity that refer to the norm of reciprocity fail to address the peculiarly human ability to perceive sincerity—i.e. to distinguish between others' behavior and the ostensible motives that underlie others' behavior. To address this shortcoming, I develop and test a theory predicting that perceptions of sincerity or the lack thereof have lasting consequences for the cohesion of emerging relationships. I also predict that recipients' own dispositions, as well as the prevailing organizational culture, are critical determinants of perceived sincerity, informing the intentions that recipients ascribe to favor givers. Using a combination of experimental, interview, and survey data collected in the United States, India, and China, I find that 1) cohesion between exchange partners is far more contingent on perceived intentions than the observable “mechanics” of exchange emphasized in traditional explanations of reciprocity, and 2) those holding prosocial values reciprocate more than those

adhering to proself values, yet not because prosocial values suggest a general selflessness, but because they are associated with a greater tendency for perceiving others as sincere. Taken together, these findings constitute a social cognitive perspective of reciprocity that helps explain the development of long term solidarity in dyadic relationships, with implications for the study of teamwork and organizational behavior, institutions, and social networks more broadly.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

Matthew Hoffberg received his Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Philosophy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He received his Ph.D. in Sociology from Cornell, where he also served as a Buttrick-Crippen teaching fellow. Matthew's research interests in motivation and social exchange stem directly from his experience prior to graduate school managing software development teams in Silicon Valley and New York City.

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Lillian Hoffberg. She passed away at age 96, midway through my time at Cornell. Her unconditional love of her grandchildren has been a lasting source of strength for me, and I credit her with nurturing my intrinsic motivation to learn about the social world around me. Though she never graduated high school, her curiosity and interest in the lives of others fed her own education. Even at the age of 95, she continued her daily practice of reading the New York Times, despite the significant visual and cognitive impairments that marked the end of her life, pausing after every sentence to offer her own commentary. If she were here to read this dissertation, I know she would.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*“My product manager—he's a punk...He's pretty smarmy. He's flip-floppy. You know, he's that kind of guy who he says one thing to one person, and then you hear him say the exact opposite to somebody else. It just depends on who's in the room...he's kind of a schmoozey used car salesman kind of guy, you know, so he always smiles when he's talking to you. But at first I really liked him, you know, 'cause I thought he was kind of genuine. He has kind of a likeable personality. But then you get this kind of, ‘Oh, I see what you're at. You're just kind of an opportunist kind of guy.’”*

*- GeoSoft engineer, interviewed for this dissertation*

Issues of authenticity and sincerity are fundamental to organizational life. Institutionally sanctioned objectives inevitably manifest in the personal interactions necessary to meet those objectives, resulting in sentiments like those expressed above. In particular, people in organizations are driven by self-interest to succeed in their roles, protect their jobs, increase their salary, and advance their careers (Baumeister 1989). The achievement of such self-interested endeavors is largely contingent on how people are perceived by others in the organization, causing people to actively manage their impressions while giving rise to questions of authenticity and sincerity. Am I compromising who I am? Am I believable? Is she believable? Is her helpfulness sincere? While people may have an aversion to feeling inauthentic, the demands of self-presentation permeate the most routine of interactions, as when a person reaches out to help another.

Existing research on social exchange—and in particular, research on reciprocity—has largely neglected the importance of such matters. I believe this oversight is due to two factors. First, authenticity and sincerity are murky terms in both vernacular and academic usages (Vannini 2007). They are often used interchangeably and with ambiguous meanings. This imprecision has led to a variety of contradictory prescriptions. Some, for instance, suggest that the pursuit of authenticity is misguided (e.g. Patterson 2006), while others suggest it is critical to meaningful relationships (e.g. Deci and Flaste 1995). Authenticity's sister concept, sincerity, can broadly mean mere truthfulness (e.g. the sincerity of a flattering remark) or more narrowly can refer to the alignment between one's self-presentation and one's self-concept (Erickson 1995).

Second, reciprocity has largely been taken for granted by exchange theorists, with the implication that it is under-theorized (Molm 2010). Perhaps due to its roots in behaviorism, social exchange theory has traditionally addressed primarily the mechanics of exchange (e.g. resources, alternative partners; cf. Blau 1964; Emerson 1976) rather than more social cognitive factors, such as the perceptions of an exchange partner's sincerity. With respect to why recipients choose to reciprocate favors, exchange theorists by and large point to the norm of reciprocity, a cultural "element" that when internalized causes people to experience a felt sense of obligation to reciprocate upon receiving a benefit (Gouldner 1960; Cialdini 1988; Flynn 2003). Evolutionary biologists have further argued that we are in fact biologically hardwired to feel such obligation due to its evolutionary advantages (Trivers 1971). Both of these explanations—normative and genetic—suggest that observable transfers of particularly-sized resources should inspire a corresponding transfer of a relatedly-sized resource. And both are limited by their inability to address the uniquely human capacity to distinguish between behavior and the intentions that may underlie behavior, or what can otherwise be called perceived sincerity.

This dissertation addresses each of these two factors in turn for the purpose of developing more precise predictions about real world exchange relationships. Chapter 2 is motivated by the assumption that rigorous investigation of authenticity and sincerity will continue to be stymied without clear distinctions and operationalizable definitions. My purpose in this chapter is thus to 1) lay the conceptual groundwork necessary for conducting further research on authenticity and sincerity and 2) to demonstrate their critical role in people's subjective experience of social life as well as the observable operations of social life more broadly. In Chapters 3 and 4, I restrict my focus to perceived sincerity, whereupon I develop and test a theory predicting the causes, consequences, and mediating role of perceived sincerity in reciprocal exchange relationships. The empirical findings from the studies in these chapters advance theoretical work in social exchange by demonstrating 1) the impact of perceived sincerity on reciprocity and cohesion in emerging relationships, 2) the factors that shape such perceptions of sincerity, and 3) the role perceived sincerity plays in explaining the relationship between prosocial values and reciprocity. Taken together, these findings constitute a social cognitive perspective of reciprocity that helps explain the development of long term solidarity in dyadic relationships, with implications for the study of teamwork and organizational behavior, institutions, and social networks more broadly.

## **OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION**

In defining authenticity and sincerity in Chapter 2, I distinguish between “self” and “other” points of view to clarify both the concepts and the relevant literatures in which they are situated. Authenticity is defined as a felt sense of alignment with oneself (Trilling 1972). As a self-referential concept, authenticity is solely experienced from the point of view of the self and not by others. Sincerity, by contrast, refers to the alignment between the self and one's outward

expression (Erickson 1995) and thus can be experienced by both the self (the focus of impression management) or by others (the focus of authentication processes, whereby others assess the sincerity of target actors).

Despite authenticity being a self-referential concept, the experience of (in)authenticity is influenced by one's social environment, as the values and interests of others may or may not align with people's self-definitions (Turner and Billings 1991). Nevertheless, some people may be more susceptible than others to experiencing inauthenticity in social contexts; in particular, people's degree of comfort with respect to these social influences may be largely contingent upon where they "anchor" their "true" self (Turner 1976; Turner and Schutte 1981). Some may feel most authentic when highly embedded in social obligations, norms, social roles, and the like (this is referred to as an *institutional* anchorage), while others may feel most authentic when completely free of social constraints (*impulsive* anchorage).

Regardless of one's anchorage, research conducted by identity theorists and positive psychologists indicates that the experience of (in)authenticity is largely an emotional one (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Burke and Stets 1999; Harter 2002). In particular, authenticity is often associated with a variety of positive emotions, including satisfaction and enthusiasm, while inauthenticity is often associated with negative emotions, such as anxiety and discouragement (Lenton et al. 2012). Perhaps because of this emotional valence, people may be innately driven to experience authenticity (Swann 1983; Riley and Burke 1995; Ryan and Deci 2000).

As with authenticity, sincerity is similarly influenced by social context (Goffman 1959). Yet whereas the effect of context on authenticity concerns one's felt orientation with respect to one's self-concept, the effect of context on sincerity concerns one's self-presentation to others (Leary and Kowalski 1990). Research on emotional labor nevertheless suggests how authenticity,

sincerity and social context are all intertwined (Hochschild 1983). Most notably, this research indicates that insincere self-presentations can lead to a felt sense of inauthenticity, resulting in negative mental health outcomes such as burnout and depression (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Erickson and Wharton 1997).

While studies of emotional labor approach sincerity from the point of view of the self, sincerity can also be approached from the point of view of the observer, as when individuals attempt to “authenticate” the sincerity of a target (Peterson 2005). Following Peterson, I use the term authentication to refer to the process by which observers attempt to vet a target’s sincerity via the target’s deliberate as well as unintentional expressions (Goffman 1959; Frank 1988). When authenticating a target, observers appear to pay foremost concern to the target’s ostensible *intentions* for engaging in the focal behavior (Reeder 2009; Reeder et al. 2004). Perceived intentions are of interest because they may provide clues as to the target’s self-values, which in turn make up the target’s self-concept (Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnis, and Trafimow 2002).

In this respect, assessing a target’s sincerity is akin to assessing the target’s underlying intentions for engaging in a particular action (Simpson and Willer 2008). For targets that are engaged in prosocial behavior (such as offering help to a colleague), perceiving altruism as the underlying motive is akin to perceiving the target’s sincerity, since an attribution of altruistic motives accords with the target’s prosocial self-presentation. It is further worth noting that authenticating a target’s sincerity is equivalent to authenticating a target’s authenticity. In either case, the observer is attempting to understand the target’s intentions via their interpretation of the target’s self-presentation. Moreover, given that authentication involves vetting the sincerity or intentions of a target actor, I often use the terms *perceived sincerity*, *perceived intentions*, and *perceived motives* interchangeably.

Having situated authentication and perceived sincerity in this broader literature on authenticity and self-presentation, Chapters 3 and 4 empirically investigate authentication processes in social exchange. In particular, I focus on favor exchange (such as giving or receiving help to finish a project), given its routine occurrence and importance for organizational productivity (Flynn 2003). Moreover, favor exchange is also interesting for social scientists, as it poses a social dilemma (Kollock 1998). To maximize gains, self-interested recipients of favors should not return favors, and givers of favors who anticipate this reaction should refrain from giving favors in the first place—leaving both parties worse off.

Theoretically, these chapters challenge existing explanations for reciprocity that attend to the observable mechanics of exchange rather than to social cognitive factors such as perceived intentions. In particular, I investigate three empirical questions regarding the causes, consequences, and mediating role of the perceptions recipients have of their exchange partners' sincerity: What is the impact of such perceptions on recipients' behavior? What informs these perceptions? And how does the study of perceived sincerity advance existing theoretical work on reciprocity?

In Chapter 3, I investigate the consequences of perceived sincerity in one-shot exchanges between random strangers. I chose these conditions as they exaggerate the shortcomings of traditional economic models of reciprocity, which suggest that reciprocity should occur only when future interactions would allow recipients to reap the benefits of a cooperative reputation (Yamagishi et al. 2007). Nevertheless, despite the lack of potential reward, people commonly reciprocate under such circumstances (Yamagishi et al. 2007; Flynn and Brockner 2003). The most common explanation for this behavior in the exchange literature refers to the norm of reciprocity, which states that upon receiving help from others, people experience a felt sense of

obligation to provide help in return (Gouldner 1960; Cialdini 1988). According to this account, more substantial favors result in greater temporary inequities, which in turn amplify recipients' desire to reciprocate out of obligation (Flynn 2003; Clark 1984). While this explanation assumes that recipients have internalized reciprocity norms, evolutionary biologists, in their more general theory of reciprocal altruism, have argued that adherence to reciprocity norms among genetically unrelated organisms incurs evolutionary advantages. After generations of exposure to selection pressures, many species—including humans—have thus become biologically hardwired to reciprocate prosocial behavior by restoring equity in their relationships (Trivers 1971; Axelrod and Hamilton 1981).

In their emphasis on behavioral mechanisms, these explanations overlook the uniquely human capacity to distinguish between behavior and the motives that may underlie behavior, or what can otherwise be called perceived sincerity. Combining insights from both evolutionary biology and social science, recent research on gene-culture coevolution suggests that perceptions of ostensible motives may portend significant consequences for cooperative behavior such as reciprocity (Tomasello et al. 2005; Boyd and Richerson 2004; Gintis 2011). Inspired by this research, I develop and test a theory of reciprocity predicting how the *intentions* ascribed to favor givers have lasting consequences within emerging relationships. In particular, I suggest that perceiving givers as altruistically rather than egoistically motivated may cause recipients to feel a greater sense of cohesion with their partners. This cohesion manifests not only in greater reciprocity in the focal exchange, but inspires recipients to engage in unilaterally generous behavior with their partners should future interactions unexpectedly arise. In an online experiment, I found support for these predictions. As expected, relational cohesion mediated the relationship between perceived intentions and both reciprocity and future generosity. In line with

explanations of reciprocity that rely on reciprocity norms, I also found that the size of givers' initial benefits impacted recipients' reciprocity in the focal exchange but had no influence on recipients' generosity in future unexpected interactions. Moreover, the size of givers' benefits had no influence on recipients' sense of relational cohesion with their partners. While supportive of reciprocity norm explanations that focus solely on the material aspects of exchange, these findings demonstrate the limited explanatory power of such explanations in predicting the development of commitment in emerging exchange relationships. These explanations suggest that relationships are "resolved" once recipients have restored equity with their exchange partners. In contrast, accounting for perceived motives allows us to make more precise predictions concerning reciprocity and the development of long-term solidarity.

In Chapter 4, I turn from assessing the impact of perceived sincerity on reciprocity to investigating personal and situation factors that shape such perceptions. Drawing from research on the false consensus effect (Ross, Greene, and House 1977; Krueger and Clement 1994) and social learning (Bandura 1977), I develop and test a theory predicting that people holding prosocial values, as well as members of groups that adhere to such values, will be more inclined to believe that others share their beneficent intentions. Possessing prosocial values at the individual or group level is thus expected to influence recipients' likelihood of perceiving favor givers' helpfulness as sincere.

These predictions received empirical support in a cross-national survey of employees in a large multinational company. Furthermore, I found support for the prediction that the tendency to perceive others as sincere explains the link between prosocial values and reciprocity established in prior literature (Van Lange and Kuhlman 1994; Triandis 1995; Chatman and Barsade 1995). Most explanations of this link suggest that prosocial values reflect a general concern for others,

implying that prosocial individuals as well as members of groups characterized by prosocial values are more likely to adhere to reciprocity norms (Chen, Chen and Meindl 1998; Perugini et al. 2003; Lester, Meglino and Korsgaard 2008). Yet in support of my prediction, I found that the relationship between prosocial values and reciprocity is best explained by the propensity for those holding prosocial values to view others as altruistically motivated. Since people tend to reciprocate more with others who appear to be motivated by altruism (as established in Chapter 3), favor receivers with prosocial motives at either the individual or group level are more inclined to reciprocate. As argued in Chapter 4, such findings have practical implications for organizations wishing to improve workplace productivity. If reciprocity is attenuated by perceptions of favor givers' self-interest and facilitated by receivers' prosocial values, it may be more important for organizations to screen for prosocial values rather than to rely more exclusively on situational factors that promote teamwork.

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## CHAPTER 2

### AUTHENTICITY AND SINCERITY:

#### “SELF” AND “OTHER” PERSPECTIVES

*This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou cans't not then be false to any man.*

*- Polonius, from Shakespeare's Hamlet*

*"I couldn't care less whether my neighbors and co-workers are authentically sexist, racist or ageist. What matters is that they behave with civility and tolerance, obey the rules of social interaction and are sincere about it.*

*- Orlando Patterson (2006), New York Times Op-Ed*

Authenticity and sincerity themes abound in popular discourse. PSY's "Gangnam Style," the most watched video in YouTube history with close to 1 billion views, is, for instance, a satire of insincere self-presentation.<sup>1</sup> In the year preceding the 2008 U.S. presidential election, the New York Times published over 300 articles and blog posts referencing the authenticity or sincerity of Hillary Clinton; over 200 were published on Mitt Romney preceding the 2012 election. Urban slang is rife with authenticity references ("keeping it real"), while the ubiquitous injunction, "be yourself," continues to be model advice for those entering into new and potentially uncomfortable situations. McLeod (1999) suggests that attention to authenticity is common in cultures "threatened" with assimilation (see also Peterson 2005; Trilling 1971), including a

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<sup>1</sup> As PSY told CNN, "people who are actually from [the 'hip' Seoul district of] Gangnam never proclaim that they are—it's only the posers and wannabes that put on these airs and say that they are—so this song is actually poking fun at those kinds of people who are trying so hard to be something that they're not" (Cha 2012)

variety of niche music cultures that become “mainstream” as a result of their success (e.g. country, hip-hop) as well as broader ethnic cultures (e.g. African-American culture in the U.S.).

In routine social interaction, authenticity and related concerns appear to be equally significant as in the arts and politics. The philosopher Charles Taylor cites the quest for authenticity as a defining trend of our time (Taylor 1992). Courses on self-presentation and authentic leadership are frequently taught in business schools. Books on authenticity and “personal branding” fill the virtual shelves of Amazon.com, with titles like “40 Days to Discovering the Real You: Learning to Live Authentically,” “Be Yourself, Everyone Else is Already Taken: Transform Your Life with the Power of Authenticity,” and “You Are a Brand! How Smart People Brand Themselves for Business Success.” These topics suggest ripe areas for sociological investigation, as they deal explicitly in the interactions between individuals and social context. Yet despite this promise and the ubiquity of authenticity and sincerity themes in popular discourse, authenticity and related concepts have received comparatively little recent attention in sociology (Franzese 2007; Vannini 2007).

This neglect is likely due to the elusive character of these concepts, which can be considered on at least three fronts. First, authenticity is often used in reference to cultural objects, such as diamonds on the black market or Navajo paintings. Yet people have a complexity of self that objects lack, raising the question of which aspect of people does the term “authenticity” reference—their identity, their motives, their appearance, their talent?<sup>2</sup> Second, social scientists historically have favored pursuing subjects such as inequality or social influence that can be readily observed. Frustrations by early scholars in the field that authenticity eludes measurement have persisted (cf. Brumbaugh 1971). The quest to define authenticity invariably involves an

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<sup>2</sup> While object authenticity and personal ethnic authenticity are outside the scope of this paper, the intersection of the two has been a ripe area of research among anthropologists (Handler 2001).

investigation into the existence of a self—i.e. is there a “true” self, and if so, how is it experienced and conceptualized? Critiques by post-modernists and others that the self is a socially constructed invention further complicate matters. Third, authenticity and sincerity are elusive in an experiential sense as well. While sincerity is a highly valued commodity and critical to communicate to others, explicit efforts to appear genuine can undermine one’s perceived authenticity, as when political figures demonstrate heartfelt emotion for political gain. Sincerity is thus a unique asset that loses value when it is instrumentally sought; hence the saying, “sincerity—if you can fake that, you’ve got it made.”

Despite this elusiveness, or perhaps because of it, the study of authenticity and sincerity tempts what Mills (1959) called the sociological imagination. Issues of authenticity and sincerity are at the nexus between self and society, amidst the interaction of individual sense-making and institutional structure. Indicative of these concerns, the first modern intellectual discussion of authenticity occurs in Sartre's (1944) essay about Jewish identity in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe, a case where person and situation are at variance, to say the least. The "authentic Jew," for Sartre, is the Jew who "asserts his claim [i.e. his Jewish-ness] in the face of the disdain shown toward him." As Erickson (1995) later observed, "people who make up the marginalized groups of a particular social context are more often faced with dilemmas that require them to choose between acting in accordance with their self-values or in accordance with the expectations of powerful others" (see also Steele 1990; Anzaldua 1987). In social life more broadly, these social expectations or norms often come into conflict with one’s values, thus challenging one’s sense of authenticity (Goffman 1959; George 1998; Franzese 2007:47).

This chapter reviews literature from sociology, psychology, philosophy, and critical theory to distinguish authenticity and sincerity. The purpose here is to clarify these concepts

while demonstrating their critical role in both people's subjective experience of social life and the observable operations of social life more broadly. I begin with a historical overview of authenticity and sincerity that situates the concepts and related ideas against prevailing structural forces of key time periods. In the next section, I discuss authenticity from the point of view of the self, first defining authenticity with respect to the self-concept (including related ideas of the "true" self and self-concept anchorage), and then introducing an alternative framing of authenticity from self-determination theory. I conclude this discussion with a review of studies that investigate both the drive to seek authenticity and the benefits associated with its achievement. In the following section, I address the self in interaction. I first review literature on sincerity and self-presentation from the self's point of view. I then switch points of view to discuss the authentication process, whereby people assess the sincerity of other's self-presentation. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of potential directions for future research.

## **AUTHENTICITY AND SINCERITY THROUGH THE AGES**

The word "authenticity" stems from the Greek *authentikós*, a root whose meaning of "one who does things himself" captures the word's current usage by focusing on the importance of individual agency and autonomy. Yet authenticity is often confused with sincerity, both in casual conversation and academic scholarship (Erickson 1995). In a series of talks given at Harvard University in 1970 and recorded in his book *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Trilling 1971), the literary critic Lionel Trilling provided an apt distinction between these concepts. Authenticity, Trilling notes, is a self-referential concept, whereas sincerity concerns one's social relations. In particular, authenticity refers to whether a person feels aligned with one's sense of true self, while sincerity refers to whether a person represents herself truly or honestly to others (Erickson

1995; Gecas 1994; Handler 1986; Franzese 2007).

Using literary evidence as a guide, Trilling notes that interest in sincerity arose during the European Renaissance, predating popular discourse of authenticity by about 300 hundred years (see also Baumeister 1986). As Rousseau ([1755] 1972) speculated, dissemblance (insincerity) was foreign to pre-lingual individuals, who freely did as their natures compelled them to without a strategic manipulation of their self-presentation. This hypothesis has not been refuted by evolutionary biologists, who note that evidence of non-human primates engaging in deliberately deceptive behavior has only been documented anecdotally (Whiten and Byrne 1988; Ulbaek [1998] notes that “deception” techniques among other animals, such as that of a bird feigning a broken wing to ward off a predator, are likely non-conscious). Rousseau suggests that with the rise of civilization, “it...became the interest of men to appear what they really were not. To be and to seem became two totally different things; and from this distinction sprang insolent pomp and cheating trickery, with all the numerous vices that go in their train” (Rousseau [1755] 1972:86). During the Renaissance, literature ranging from Shakespeare to politics and philosophy depicts sincerity from the point of view of the observer rather than the target (self), with observers demonstrating concern about the potential incongruence between appearances (external behaviors and other signals or cues) and the target’s felt emotion. Baumeister (1986) speculates that religious movements may have played a role in this newfound attention given to sincerity, since the ability to go to heaven depended on regulating one’s actions in accord to religious creeds (cf. Weber [1905] 2001).

Beginning with the European Enlightenment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and particularly apparent in the writings of Rousseau, Trilling notes an escalation in the salience of authenticity in Western cultural discourse. Romantics of the period sought the essential self, and artists who appeared

most tapped into this authentic self were the most esteemed (Trilling 1971). In his characteristically essentialist style, Rousseau framed authenticity as “le sentiment de l’existence.” He further speculated that experiencing this “sentiment” comes from the autonomous pursuit of one’s own desires, which one can experience only in the absence of the modern trappings of conformity and other societal pressures (as discussed below, this conception of authenticity embodies what Turner (1976) refers to as an “impulsive” self-concept anchorage).

Anthropologists, sociologists, and other cultural historians largely attribute the rise of authenticity during this period to the rise of commerce and the concomitant forces of rationalization and individualism (Trilling 1971; Taylor 1992; Weber [1922] 1968; Ritzer 2004). This shift—what Karl Polanyi referred to as the Great Transformation—was characterized by a shift from an economy characterized by redistribution, reciprocity, and householding to one characterized by more impersonal social contracts and relations (Polanyi 1957). This theme of moving away from local reciprocal exchange towards more impersonal market exchange appears in early sociological accounts of the Industrial Era (e.g. Durkheim [1933] 1965; Marx [1844] 1988, [1867] 1976; Tönnies [1887] 2001). Durkheim similarly recognized a corresponding shift in the rules of law during the Enlightenment, noting that just as divinity had experienced a historical shift from the local to the transcendent (as animism gave way to earthly gods and finally the abstract residence of the Judeo-Christian God), legal structures that were “linked at first to local circumstances, to particularities, ethnic, climatic, etc.” began to “free themselves” of their context and in the process became “more general” (Durkheim [1933] 1965:289).

Writing in the mid-1800s, Marx was concerned that in this new capitalist society, individuals were “simply and only conceived of as exchangers” and thus robbed of their life-bearing essence ([1867] 1963). The utilitarian logic proffered by David Hume, Jeremy Bentham

and John Stuart Mill further reinforced this sentiment. Individuals were seen as motivated solely by their own material interests, and Adam Smith's imagery of the invisible hand guiding such self-interested behavior to a greater social good suggested that individuals were operating in complete independence of other members of society. Marx ([1844] 1964) framed this state of affairs in terms of self-estrangement and alienation. Since Marx believed one's work is inseparable from one's true nature, he was concerned that industrialization and the loss of ownership of the production process isolated people from themselves.

With respect to these developments, the philosopher Charles Taylor (1992) argues that prior to the Industrial Era, people were more intricately tied to a broad social fabric consisting of their geographic community and their spiritual brethren. These ties provided a self-conception that was rooted within a "cosmic order," yet with the rise of modern capitalism, they gave way to a promise of social mobility that could transcend the operative power structures of the time. With this shift to a more vertiginous social orientation came a striving for personal authenticity, or the need to understand one's place in the new social order. Taylor (1992) sees this development as a loss, noting that what was a byproduct of modernity transformed into a goal in and of itself. In characterizing what he refers to as the "dark side of individualism," Taylor suggests that people have lost their "broader vision" of their place in their local culture. Instead, people now narrowly focus on their individual lives, thereby diminishing their concern for others and the larger collective. The modern instrumentally-driven society dislocates people from their sacred place in the great chain of being and reduces them to "raw materials or instruments for our projects" (Taylor 1992:5). The pursuit of authenticity, for Taylor, is misguided further, since human beings are "diological"—i.e. they evolve through relationships—such that attempting to identify the authentic self is a nonsensical activity at best, and at worst is a recipe for anomie and

isolation (Taylor 1992:34).

Subjective interpretations aside, if industrialization indeed disrupted the social fabric of everyday life, the rise of mass culture in the mid-twentieth century may have paradoxically provided a map to the new order. As Baumeister, Bell, and others have suggested, mass culture opened new doors for self-definition, and individuals increasingly faced new role opportunities and decisions, such that their identities became a matter of choice (Baumeister 1986; Bell 1976; Erickson 1995). This outcome—if causality can indeed be attributed—became the grist of the existentialist philosophers, whose discussions of authenticity suggested a way of resolving the tension between one’s conscious self and the pressures of the external world (Heidegger [1927] 1996; Sartre 1956). Both Heidegger and Sartre framed inauthenticity as a form of self-neglect (or even self-deception) caused by a yielding to extrinsic pressures. According to Heidegger, living according to the will of others “ensnares” people in inauthenticity. For Sartre, inauthenticity results from losing touch with one’s own (as opposed to society’s) moral compass. Authenticity, both argue, is only possible when choices are grounded in the self.

In addition to the rise of mass culture, the latter half of the twentieth century was marked by a shift from an industrial to a service economy (Bell 1976). In contrast to the possibilities for identity construction brought about by the rise of mass culture, Hochschild (1983) has argued that the shift to a service economy has constrained individuals in the service sector from following their own moral compass, at least at work. Like the labor of Marx’s alienated industrial worker, the emotions of post-industrial service workers are similarly commoditized. For Hochschild, authenticity will continue to be a central concern for service workers so long as employers profit from the emotions of their employees. Hochschild’s (1983) study of flight attendants and bill collectors was the first rigorous empirical investigation into authenticity. In

recent years, scholars inspired by Hochschild have conducted additional research on emotional labor, demonstrating significant effects of inauthenticity and insincere self-presentations on job burnout and depression (Erickson and Ritter 2001; Grandey 2003; see also Sloan 2007; Grant, Morales, and Sallaz 2009).

## **AUTHENTICITY**

In both sociological and psychological social psychology, the most prevalent conceptualization of authenticity refers to a felt sense of alignment with one's "true" self (Hoffberg 2012a; Turner 1976; Gecas 1994; Erickson 1995; Harter 2002; Lenton et al. 2012). Unlike sincerity, which concerns the relationship between one's internal experience and outward expression, authenticity is a self-referential concept, implying one's own experience of oneself (Erickson 1995; Trilling 1971). In this section, I attempt to ground this somewhat abstruse conceptualization in theoretically meaningful and empirically measurable terms, by reviewing a diverse array of relevant literature, ranging from the self-concept (Turner 1976; Gecas 1982) and identity (Stets and Burke 2003) to emotions (Hochschild 1983; Erickson 1995) and motivation (Deci and Flaste 1995; Ryan and Deci 2000).

First, I begin with a discussion of the self-concept and the "true" self—terms popularized by Turner (1976; Turner and Schutte 1981) that have become a significant focus in personality psychology (e.g. Cross, Gore, and Morris 2003; English and Chen 2007; Wakslak et al. 2008)—and discuss research indicating that the true self is primarily experienced affectively (Hochschild 1983; Lenton et al. 2012; Burke 1991). Second, I discuss the relationship between the self-concept and social context (Turner and Schutte 1981). As Turner believed the true self is best understood in relation to particular social environments (Turner and Billings 1991), he

distinguished between two “anchorages” where people locate their true selves: within social relations (*institutional* anchorage) and outside of social relations (*impulsive* anchorage). Turner developed measures for these anchorages and believed society was shifting towards a more *impulsive* anchorage (Turner and Schutte 1981). Third, I briefly review the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan 2000; Ryan and Deci 2000), which provides a complementary conceptualization of authenticity that focuses on one’s motivations and actions rather than one’s self-concept. Fourth, I review research from symbolic interactionism, identity theory, and positive psychology that suggests people are innately driven to feel aligned with their true selves and to seek environments that promote intrinsic motivation (Gecas 1986; Swann 1983; Harter 2002). I conclude the section with a discussion of recent studies linking authenticity with particular mental health and behavioral outcomes (Burke 1991; Harter et al. 1996; Wood et al. 2008; Burris 2012).

### ***The Self Concept***

The self-concept is a “folk concept,” insofar as it refers to a subjective order that individuals attempt to impose on their own experience rather than some objective reality (Turner and Schutte 1981; Malle and Knobe 1997). In particular, the self-concept refers to “the conception an individual has of himself or herself” (Gecas 1991). Its utility, both for orienting one’s own experience and for scholarly study, lies in its relative stability and transituational quality. Nevertheless, the self-concept is also informed by interaction with one’s social environment, such that a “working copy” of self-views is reflexively informed by situations (Higgins 1987; English and Chen 2007; Burke 1980). This combination of stability and fluidity has posed a major challenge for researchers attempting to understand self-views (Erickson 1995).

Accounting for this complication, Turner (1976) defines the self-concept as “the continuity—*however imperfect*—of an individual’s experience of himself in a variety of situations” (emphasis added).

Identity theorists have argued that the self-concept is composed of multiple identities made salient depending on context (Stets and Burke 2003). These “role identities” can be ranked hierarchically, such that identities of higher rank are more likely to manifest in a given setting (McCall and Simmons 1978; Stryker 1968, 1980). Network structure may influence this shuffling of identities, since behaviors are activated depending on one’s interaction partners. Homophilous networks, for example, may require a lower number of role identities while more diverse networks may increase the complexity of the self by expanding the number of operative identities (Smith-Lovin 2003). Despite this seeming disarray, the self-concept can be thought of as a “weaving” of multiple identities or of “self-values” that may sometimes be experienced coherently as one’s “true self” (Erickson 1995; Turner and Billings 1991; Gecas 1994).

Experimental, survey, and ethnographic studies suggest that the true self is indeed a robust experiential phenomenon, and notably one that is most apparent when it is violated (Lenton et al. 2012; Wood et al. 2008; Schlegel, Hicks, Arndt, and King 2009; Hochschild 1983; Erickson 1995; Turner and Schutte 1981). The “true” self, like authenticity, refers to the self’s experience of alignment with the self-concept — i.e. “being true to oneself” (Gecas 1994). Even Goffman, who frames the self primarily as acting in response to cultural scripts, seemed to believe in the existence of a subjectively experienced true self (Schwalbe 1993; Goffman 1963). He acknowledges, for instance, that people can begin to identify with their own performances (1959:81-82) to the point where “a person comes to feel estranged from himself.” Elsewhere he notes that people’s pursuit of particular professions provides “a means of insulating their inner

selves from contact with the audience” (20). Goffman further alludes to a core self when discussing self-deception, which “results when two different roles, performer and audience, come to be compressed into the same individual” (Goffman 1959:81). Sartre’s concept of “bad faith” (1956) is similarly couched in reference to a true self; people act in bad faith when they “conceal certain parts of themselves from themselves” (1944). Likewise, Hochschild (1983) suggests that whereas sincerity concerns fooling or not fooling others, authenticity concerns fooling or not fooling ourselves.

### ***Emotion***

If authenticity is the self’s experience of the self, obvious methodological challenges arise in studying it. To complicate matters, people can experience (in)authenticity “without being able to make a clear statement of one’s identity” (Turner and Schutte 1981). Yet Turner and his colleagues suggest that because (in)authenticity is experienced *affectively* rather than cognitively, it can be measured by surveying people’s emotions (see also Hochschild 1983). Since emotion is far easier for a subject to identify than self-related cognitions, assessing the presence of (in)authenticity using emotions provides researchers empirical purchase on an otherwise elusive concept.

Some authors speculate that (in)authenticity is a distinct emotion (e.g. Vannini 2006), yet there is little empirical evidence, if any, to support this. Most likely, authenticity and inauthenticity are subjective experiences that trigger positively and negatively valued emotions, respectively. Qualitative studies have shown that authenticity manifests in a positive affective state when people feel a congruence between a given situation and their values, preferences, and needs (Franzese 2007; Turner and Billings 1991; Vannini 2006). Inspired by Fridhandler’s

(1986:170) claim that “if a person is in a state he or she must be able to feel it,” Lenton et al (2012) measure authenticity via affect in both online and laboratory experiments. Their results correlate with those of qualitative studies, finding that participants associated authenticity with positive emotions (e.g. satisfaction, enthusiasm, enjoyment) and feeling inauthentic with negative emotions (e.g. anxiety, depression, discouragement).<sup>3</sup> Empirical studies on identity theory have found similar emotional associations when the self-verification process is successful versus not (Burke 1991; Burke and Stets 1999).

### ***Social Context And Self-Concept Anchorage***

The experience of (in)authenticity is largely conditional upon one’s social environment since this experience is contingent on whether people’s perception of their true self is aligned with the values, interests, and demands of those around them (Turner 1976). Turner’s empirical approach to understanding authenticity and the subjective experience of the true self was thus to identify the *social contexts* in which people felt more or less “real”; by contrast, more direct queries about subjects’ true self failed to yield consistent data (Turner and Billings 1991).

Using this method, Turner (1976; Turner and Schutte 1981; Turner and Gordon 1981) distinguishes between two dimensions, or “anchorage,” where people locate their real selves. Echoing Freud’s distinction between the id and the superego, Turner called these anchorages *impulsive* and *institutional* respectively. People with an *impulsive* self-concept anchorage feel most like their true selves in contexts that are free of social constraints and obligations. Finding institutional roles to be constraining (“cramping the expression of the true self”), *impulsives*

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<sup>3</sup> Authenticity and inauthenticity were defined for participants in the following terms: “According to psychologists, the sense of authenticity is defined as ‘the sense or feeling that you are in alignment with your true, genuine self.’ In other words, the sense of authenticity is the feeling that you are being your real self.” “According to psychologists, the sense of inauthenticity is defined as ‘the sense or feeling that you are in alignment with an untrue, false self.’ In other words, the sense of inauthenticity is the feeling that you are not being your real self.”

prefer to “discover” their true selves by seeking “out of role” experiences (Turner 1976). By contrast, those with an *institutional* anchorage feel most like themselves when embedded in social obligations, norms, social roles and the like; *institutionals* prefer “sentiments and activities of an institutional and volitional nature, such as ambition, morality, and altruism.” Authenticity for *institutionals* is “achieved” rather than “discovered,” particularly through the pursuit of institutionalized goals.

Turner’s distinction between *impulsives* and *institutionals* corresponds to the common distinction in psychology between two sets of cognitive processes that make up the self (Evans 2008; Haidt 2006; Vaisey 2008). Haidt (2006) frames these processes using an elephant (Type 1) / rider (Type 2) metaphor, whereby the “conscious, reasoning part of the mind [i.e. the rider] has only limited control of what the elephant [i.e. automatic processes] does.” Hochschild (1983) makes a similar analogy. After quoting a passage where a man is trying to quell his feelings of love for a woman who left him, Hochschild writes “these are almost like orders to a contrary horse (whoa, giddyup, steady now) [or] attempts to exhort feeling as if feeling can listen when it is talked to” (Hochschild 1983:39). In Turner’s typology, *impulsives* identify the animal as their true self, whereas *institutionals* identify the rider. Similarly, Evans (2008) cites over a dozen prominent dual process theories that frame the self using similar binaries (e.g. “automatic vs. controlled,” “associative vs. rule-based,” “impulsive vs. reflective”).<sup>4</sup> Had Evans’ analysis covered sociologists, he would surely have included Turner’s self-concept anchorages.

To operationalize the anchorages and people’s felt experience of authenticity, Turner developed the “True Self Method” (Turner and Schutte 1981). This method consists of a series of open-ended questions that ask respondents to characterize the circumstances that promote their

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<sup>4</sup> Similarly, while Freud located the self in the ego, Turner (1976) notes that many other of Freud’s contemporaries (e.g. Park 1927) thought that the real “home” of the self is the morally superior superego.

sense of authenticity and inauthenticity.<sup>5</sup> Turner (1975) also developed a similar measure for survey research that has been used in quantitative studies of self-concept anchorage (e.g. Sloan 2007).

These methods were developed in large part to test Turner's (1976) claim that society has been shifting from an *institutional* towards an *impulsive* locus of the self. Comparing prior studies that use similar measures (e.g. Kuhn and McPartland's [1954] Twenty Statements Test) with his own results using the True Self Method, he found preliminary support for his hypothesis that *impulsive* anchorages have been on the rise since the 1950s, especially in college populations (Turner 1976; Turner and Gordon 1981). Yet recent studies of select populations suggest this trend may have been short lived (Sloan 2007; Hoffberg 2012b). For example, Sloan (2007) found that *institutionals* accounted for 65% of her random sample of 1,377 state workers; by contrast, *institutionals* comprised less than a third of the population sampled in Turner and Gordon's 1981 study. As others have noted (cf. Pinker 2011:106-116), the 1960s through the 1980s were characterized by a widespread rejection of institutionally sanctioned behavior, followed by a reversal leading to greater moral rectitude (see also Gecas 1994). Turner's results are aligned with such explanations.

### ***Motivation / Action Framing***

In addition to conceiving authenticity as an emotion-laden experience of the self-concept, authenticity is also used in reference to the self's *motivations and actions*. This framing, most often found in research on self-determination theory, emphasizes outer manifestation rather than

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<sup>5</sup> For example, one of the questions asks: "On some occasions my actions or feelings seem to express my true self much better than at other times. On these occasions the person that I really am shows clearly. I feel genuine and authentic. I feel that I know who I am. Try to recall one such occasion when your true self was expressed. Please describe the occasion and what you did or felt in detail."

inner feeling (Deci and Flaste 1995; Ryan and Deci 2000; Deci and Ryan 2000). Both the self-concept and motivation interpretations are complementary; in the final chapter of this dissertation, I discuss areas of potential research at their intersection.

With respect to motivation, authenticity refers to “being the author of one’s actions—*acting* in accord with one’s true inner self” (Deci and Flaste 1995:4, emphasis added). This conception mirrors Sartre’s (1956) view of authenticity as primarily tied to one’s *choices*. The emphasis here is on autonomy and self-determination; motivations themselves are authentic when they come from within a given actor.

Authentic motivations (i.e. “intrinsic”) are thus manifestations of the self-concept (Gecas 1982). They occur when one’s basic psychological needs of autonomy, perceived competence, and connection are met, allowing for engagement in an activity in the absence of any award aside from the activity itself (Deci and Ryan 1985:34). Intrinsically motivated behaviors are those that “people do naturally and spontaneously when they feel free to follow their inner interests” (Deci and Ryan 2000).

By contrast, extrinsic motivations refer to instrumental desires to engage in behaviors explicitly to achieve rewards or to avoid punishments. Unlike intrinsic motivation, the locus of causality for extrinsically motivated behavior is external to the self. For instance, an employee who offers a coworker help so as to win favor in the eyes of a supervisor is extrinsically motivated, as the reward (external to the act of providing help) induced the behavior. Extrinsic motivation reduces one’s sense of autonomy and thus impedes self-determination and authenticity (Ryan and Deci 2000).

### *Internal Drive Towards Authenticity*

A core tenant of self-determination theory is that human beings have three innate psychological needs—for autonomy, competence, and connectedness—and are motivated to fulfill these needs. When these needs are met, intrinsic motivation and authenticity flourish (Ryan and Deci 2000; see also Etzioni 1968 and Nee 1998 for how structural conditions may catalyze intrinsic motivation). The presence of psychological needs suggests that people have an innate drive to experience authenticity (Gecas 1991). Scholarship on emotions associated with self-concept alignment lends support to this idea (cf. Swann 1983; Burke and Stets 1999; Gecas 1986). For example, self-verification theory—which holds that the verified self is the authentic self (Swann, De La Ronde and Hixon 1994)—suggests that people are driven to verify, validate, and sustain their self-views (Swann 1983).

Elsewhere, Gecas (1986, 1991, 1994) has theorized that authenticity is one of three primary motivations that stem from the self-concept, with the other two being self-esteem and self-efficacy. According to Gecas, people have an innate desire to experience their true selves and to avoid feelings of falseness. Other sociologists have echoed similar sentiments. Hochschild [1983:190], for instance, suggested that “people want to be their ‘authentic’ selves”, and Fine (2003:153) observed that the desire for authenticity “occupies a central position in contemporary culture.” This conception of authenticity as a self-motive may be attributed to (in)authenticity’s emotional charge. As Lenton et al. (2012) concluded from their experimental results, “state authenticity feels relatively good, and state inauthenticity feels relatively bad.” Other studies similarly suggest that self-consistency is a fundamental human motive, whereby individuals strive for a sense of identity-related coherence (Lecky 1945; Epstein 1973, 1980). Yet Gecas suggests that it is not self-consistency we strive for, since people can successfully manage

disparate belief systems (Thoits 2003); rather, people strive for meaning and avoid anomie.

Along these lines, identity theorists have posited self-verification to be a motive attributed to the self, whereby people continually attempt to align their identities with their perceptions of the situation, and vice-versa (Swann 1983; Swann, Stein-Seroussi and Giesler 1992; Riley and Burke 1995; Stets and Burke 2003). In other studies supporting this idea, Harter and colleagues (Harter 2012; Harter and Monsour 1992) have found that adolescents struggle with issues of false-self behavior and continually evaluate whether their behavior is consistent with their own desires, suggesting “that behaving authentically is a value, a goal toward which they aspire” (Harter 2002).

### ***Benefits Of Authenticity***

Perhaps such aspirations are for good reason. Sartre, who brought intellectual attention to the subject, posed authenticity as essential to well-being and morality (Sartre 1956). A variety of studies relating to identity theory, self-determination theory, and personality psychology have found support for this claim (Burke and Stets 1999; Deci and Ryan 2000; Wood et al. 2008). In broad terms, authenticity is typically associated with positively valued traits and inauthenticity with negatively valued traits. In their study of newly married couples, for example, Burke and Stets (1999) found that authenticity via self-verification leads to greater trust and subjective and behavioral commitment in the self’s relationship with others. Moreover, successful self-verification manifests in positive affective states such as high self-esteem (Burke and Stets 1999; Cast and Burke 2002). When the self-verification process has gone awry, such that there’s an unresolved discrepancy between one’s perception of a situation and one’s relevant role identity, the resulting inauthenticity is apt to be experienced negatively as depression or distress (Burke

1991; Burke and Stets 1999), hostility (Cast and Burke 2002), or even anger (Bartels 1997).

In their review of three decades of studies on self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (2000) note that comparisons between people with intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation have shown that intrinsically motivated people have “more interest, excitement, and confidence, which in turn is manifest both as enhanced performance, persistence, and creativity ... and as heightened vitality ..., self-esteem ..., and general well-being... This is so even when the people have the same level of perceived competence or self-efficacy for the activity." In support of these findings, other psychological studies similarly reveal associations between authenticity and positively valued traits, including self-esteem, positive affect, hope for the future, and self-confidence (Harter et al. 1996; Snyder, Rand, and Sigmon 2002; Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, and Ilardi 1997; Goldman and Kernis 2002; Lenton et al. 2012; Wood et al. 2008). By contrast, inauthenticity has been shown to correlate with depression, job burnout and lack of self-esteem (Harter et al. 1996; Erickson and Ritter 2001).

Less common in the literature but nonetheless a ripe area for future research are studies demonstrating negative effects of authenticity and/or the utility of inauthenticity. With respect to authenticity, true-self behaviors in some contexts may elicit social sanctioning (Deci and Ryan 1995; Kernis and Goldman 2006). For instance, studies on employee voice have shown that employees acting upon their personal values and beliefs can pay significant personal costs—such as poorer performance evaluations—when challenging the status quo (Burriss 2012). Such behavior may result in negative emotions, despite experiencing these in conjunction with a felt sense of authenticity (Vannini 2006).

Experiencing inauthenticity, on the other hand, may be beneficial in learning processes (Harter 2002). As Lerner (1993:16) observed, “sometimes pretending is a form of

experimentation or imitation that widens our experience and sense of possibility; it reflects a wish to find ourselves in order to be ourselves.” Along these lines, research on self-determination theory similarly suggests that despite their association with inauthenticity, behaviors that initially feel extrinsically motivated or rewarded can be integrated with the self over time and, given a sufficiently supportive environment, may be brought into congruence with one’s other values and needs (Ryan and Deci 2000).

### **SELF-PRESENTATION: SINCERITY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE SELF**

In social interaction, the image of self that individuals present to others may or may not align with the individuals’ own experience of their true self. The degree of alignment is referred to as the individuals’ “sincerity” (Trilling 1971).<sup>6</sup> While some have framed this alignment as a form of authenticity (Kernis and Goldman [2006], for instance, call this “relational authenticity”), I follow Trilling (1971:2), who defines sincerity as “a congruence between avowal and actual feeling,” and Erickson (1995), who frames sincerity as “a congruence between one’s outward appearance and the underlying reality of the self” (see also Simpson and Willer 2008 for similar usage).

Sociological study of self-presentation and sincerity emerged in the work of Goffman (1959, 1963), who characterized sincere individuals as those “who believe in the impression fostered by their own performance” (1959:18).<sup>7</sup> Goffman frames the self as almost entirely constructed through interaction, where sincerity is a derivative of performance rather than vice

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<sup>6</sup> Sincerity can of course broadly apply beyond the domain of the self-concept (e.g. the sincerity of a flattering remark to another).

<sup>7</sup> I use the term self-presentation rather than impression management, as the former necessarily implies self-relevant depictions, whereas impression management does not (Schlenker 1980; Schneider 1981).

versa.<sup>8</sup> Insincerity, he writes elsewhere, occurs when an individual “adheres to the obligation of maintaining a working consensus and participates in different routines or performs a given part before different audiences” (1959:81). Goffman’s emphasis on performance appears to discount the potential for truthfully conveying one’s real motivations; he attends to the active work one does to manage an audience’s impressions rather than whether such impressions are reflective of one’s subjectively perceived self-concept. This perspective is evident in his distinction between the “front stage” of human interaction and the “backstage,” the latter being “a place, relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance *is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course*” (1959:112, emphasis added). Perhaps due to Goffman’s influence, sociologists often frame self-presentation as a form of theatrical deceit (e.g. Franzese 2007).

Yet recent work in psychological social psychology suggests that people consciously manage the impressions they give off for a variety of reasons, which may or may not involve deliberate deception (Leary and Kowalski 1990). In their review of the literature on self-relevant impression management, Leary and Kowalski suggest five factors—evident in the work of Goffman and others—that may influence one’s self-presentation: 1) the self-concept, 2) the idealized self, 3) the self’s current or potential social image, 4) the values and interests of a target observer, and 5) the self’s role identity within a particular context. While the first two factors are intrinsic to the self, the latter three are contingent on the external environment. Nevertheless, all five factors combine to influence the image that people attempt to convey to others. For instance, a product manager who enthusiastically helps his supervisor may be embodying all five factors, since helpfulness embodies a core self-value (1) that is also reflective of the manager’s idealized self (2); the manager may also be upholding his reputation for helpfulness (3) while being

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<sup>8</sup> Critical of Goffman on this account, Hochschild (1983:217) writes, “from no other author do we get such an appreciation of the imperialism of rules and such a hazy glimpse of an internally developed self.”

mindful of his supervisor's needs (4) and his own professional role as a "team player" (5).

### ***The Influence of Social Context on the Sincerity-Authenticity Relationship***

Social context can thus significantly influence both one's authenticity (felt sense of alignment with oneself) and sincerity (alignment between self and outward expression). The social pressures suggested by Leary and Kowalski's latter three factors challenge the pursuit of sincerity and provide friction to the internal drive towards authenticity discussed in the previous section; to the degree that these pressures are peripheral to one's self-values, they restrict autonomy, self-determination, and authenticity (Deci and Ryan 2000). This is not to say that inauthenticity and insincerity are inevitable byproducts of social interaction. Yet when strong social norms prevail, sincere self-presentation in accordance with these norms may come about only when the prevailing norms have been internalized. According to self-determination theory, this internalization—what Deci and Ryan (2000) refer to as a "deep, holistic processing"—occurs when individuals are psychologically free of pressures to behave in a certain way.

People's attempts at adhering to social etiquette and other norms for "fitting in" can illustrate this relationship between sincerity and authenticity (Goffman 1963). For instance, there are strong norms of how to act at a funeral; the expectations embodied by these norms may restrict the development or manifestation of more intrinsically motivated behavior (Leary and Allen 2011). As Goffman writes, these occasions possess "a distinctive ethos, a spirit, an emotional structure, that must be properly created, sustained, and laid to rest, [with] the participant finding that he is obliged to become caught up in the occasion, *whatever his personal feelings*" (1963:19; emphasis added). When "personal feelings" conflict with a situation's emotion norms, individuals are likely to form negative self-judgments that may have a bearing

on one's felt sense of authenticity (Thoits 1985).

The sincerity-authenticity connection is also prominent in groups with a strong group identity, given that group members may become depersonalized as they attempt to align themselves with group prototypes (Hogg 2001). In such cases, particular member behavior may be rewarded or punished based on members' alignment with the group's identity, such that alignment itself becomes an extrinsic motivator. As group identity increases in salience, intrinsic motivation may be further diminished (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993).

### ***Emotional Labor***

Hochschild's (1983) investigation of emotional labor among airline stewardesses is perhaps the most in-depth study of social context and its influence on the sincerity-authenticity relationship. Emotional labor arises when a given social environment is at odds with one's personal values and interests, thereby creating a tension between one's self-concept and one's self-presentation. In Hochschild's words, the term specifically refers to "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (1983:7).

Hochschild casts emotional labor in a negative light, suggesting it is detrimental to well-being and leads to job burnout. The ultimate culprit, she explains, is post-industrial capitalism: "perhaps it does take a capitalist sort of incentive system to connect emotional labor to competition and to go so far as to actually advertise a 'sincere' smile, train workers to produce such a smile, supervise their production of it, and then forge a link between this activity and corporate profit" (Hochschild 1983:186). While Goffman noted that people act sincerely all the time due to social incentives, Hochschild's point is that capitalism allows employers to profit from it. Echoing Marx, Hochschild's phrase, "the managed heart," reflects the impact of

structural forces on private authenticity. Yet whereas Marx attributed workers' alienation to the shift towards industrial modes of production, Hochschild's concerns largely reflect the rise in service-sector work brought on by post-industrialization.<sup>9</sup>

To engage in emotional labor, service workers either surface act or deep act. Surface acting entails mimicking affective displays while deep acting involves conjuring inner feelings that align with desired affective displays (Hochschild 1983; Grove and Fisk 1990). Deep acting is still acting—or “faking” (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987)—because the inner feelings are deliberately conjured without necessarily reframing one's self-concept. Importantly, the *intentions* behind surface and deep acting are notably different (Grandey 2003). Those who engage in deep acting are attempting to appear authentic to the observer; this method has thus been called “faking in good faith” (Rafaeli and Sutton 1987). Workers who merely engage in surface acting (“faking in bad faith”) have little empathetic intent to assist the observer; they fake to maintain their job (Grandey 2003).

Hochschild suggests that surface acting results in greater inauthenticity than deep acting, given the tension (“emotional dissonance”) between inner feelings and outward expression. Subsequent studies have confirmed this prediction, suggesting that the negative effects of emotional labor occur only when such labor is superficially enacted (see also Stets 2012). Several studies attribute more positive outcomes to deep acting relative to surface acting (Grandey 2003; Erickson and Wharton 1997; Ekman, Friesen, and O'Sullivan 1988). Ekman and colleagues (1988), for instance, have shown that surface acting, relative to deep acting, is negatively perceived when detected by observers. Erickson and Wharton (1997) demonstrated surface acting to be associated with job burnout and depression (see also Brotheridge and

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<sup>9</sup> Note that emotional labor has also been studied outside of service roles; for example, Grant, Morales, and Sallaz (2009) found that employees engage in emotional labor following organizational change initiatives.

Grandey 2002), and Grandey (2003) further found that deep acting is not associated with the stress that surface acting is. Moreover, relative to deep acting, surface acting is more strongly correlated with “breaking character” rather than with successful affective delivery (Grandey 2003). Not surprisingly, Grandey found that service workers who are less satisfied with their jobs are more likely to surface act rather than deep act, creating a reinforcing cycle whereby surface acting generates more emotional dissonance, which leads to greater stress and job burnout.

### **AUTHENTICATION: SINCERITY FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF OTHERS**

Authentication refers to the process of confirming that a target’s self-presentation accurately reflects the target’s genuine interests and motivations (Peterson 2005). Whereas the previous discussion of emotional labor concerned authenticity and sincerity from the point of view of the self (e.g. the flight attendants), this section covers these concepts from the point of view of others (e.g. the passengers). I do not distinguish between authenticating a target’s authenticity and authenticating a target’s sincerity; in either case, the observer is attempting to understand the target’s values, motivations, and beliefs via their interpretation of the target’s self-presentation. From the point of view of others, the terms authenticity and sincerity are thus often used interchangeably.

In public-facing professions, such as music performance and politics, authenticating processes are commonplace (Peterson 2005; Barker and Taylor 2007; McLeod 1999; Merkin 2007). Musicians, for instance, whose performances are thought to be extrinsically motivated rather than arising from within the self-concept are derisively categorized as having “sold out” (Barker and Taylor 2005; McLeod 1999). Perhaps because fans are seeking an emotional connection with artists (Peterson 2005), musicians castigated as sell-outs are treated as trust

violators or moral transgressors (Hughes 1992). As Barker and Taylor (2007:xi) note: “especially in the music aimed at white teenage males, authenticity is seen as the sine qua non of artistic success.” As if to heighten the stakes, many musicians—especially those in hip-hop, punk, and grunge—situate their identity in opposition to commercial mainstream. With the suicide of Nirvana’s Kurt Cobain as a case in point, the inauthenticity experienced by these artists can be unbearable when their commercial success challenges their long-standing values (Barker and Taylor 2007). At least in the performing arts, authenticity can thus be a double-edged sword: perceived authenticity may bring success, and success raises the potential of either being cast as a sell-out, or of feeling like one.

The entertainment business aside, the need to authenticate others in routine social interactions is well documented (Ames, Flynn, and Weber 2004; Goffman 1959; Read and Miller 1993; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation). Developmental psychologists have demonstrated that authentication processes begin early in life; by the age of two, children have begun understanding the intentions of others (Mele 2001; Meltzoff and Brooks 2001). This behavior, known as mind-reading or theory of mind, may run deep in evolutionary makeup, as being able to understand others’ underlying intentions helps us understand who can be relied upon to form mutually beneficial relationships (see Chapter 3 of this dissertation, as well as Cosmides 1989). As Goffman (1959:1) observed, “information about the individual helps to define the situation, enabling others to know in advance what he will expect of them and what they may expect of him. Informed in these ways, the others will know how best to act in order to call forth a desired response from him.” Authentication thus reduces the observers’ cognitive load by predicting a target’s behavior, which in turn can inform the observers’ own behavior and propensity for cooperation (Read and Miller 1993; Frank 1988; Swann 1983; see also Chapter 3 of this

dissertation).

Several studies have demonstrated these consequences of the authentication process (Ames, Flynn, and Weber 2004; Frank, Ekman, and Friesen 1993; Grandey et al. 2005; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation). For instance, people with sincere affective displays are rated more positively than those with insincere displays, as such displays are likely suggestive of a target's underlying intentions (e.g. Frank, Ekman, and Friesen 1993; Grandey et al. 2005; Frank 1988). Armed with information about the meaning of the target's actions, observers can correspondingly adjust their own behavior (Ames, Flynn, and Weber 2004; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation). In the study reported in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, I found that recipients of favors indeed adjusted their actions according to the intentions they attribute to their exchange partners. Not only did recipients reciprocate more with favor givers perceived to have altruistic rather than egoistic intentions, recipients were also more inclined to engage in generous behavior towards such partners when a future encounter unexpectedly arose.

Observers pay attention to two forms of expressions when authenticating a target: expressions "given" and expressions "given off" (Goffman 1959), or what signaling theorists call signals and cues, respectively (Donath 2007; Frank 1988). Both types are outward manifestations of inner motives and conditions, and as such, they provide observers with the most salient clues as to whether a target's self-presentation is aligned with his or her self-values. Expressions given (signals) are those that are consciously performed on the front stage of human interaction. Because they reflect intentional behavior, they provide clues as to the objectives, motives, and mental states of the target actor (Reeder 2009). Expressions given off (cues) are the unintentional cues that one does not control; they therefore can serve as the most reliable indicators of what is truly happening "backstage" (Goffman 1959).

Erickson (1995) suggests that when observers authenticate a target's expressions (both given and given off), observers tend to be seeking information suggestive of the target's *motivations*. A target's motivations are of particular interest for observers insofar as they reflect the target's self-values, which in turn make up the target's self-concept. In a series of studies, Reeder and colleagues found support for this claim, finding that motive attributions may play a far greater role in observers' decisions than the situational and dispositional factors that have become the primary focus of attribution theory (Reeder 2009; Reeder et al. 2004; Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnis, and Trafimow 2002; Reeder, Pryor, Wohl and Griswell 2005; see also Malle 1999). Reeder (Reeder et al. 2004) has demonstrated that perceiving others' motives is a central process of impression formation. For instance, perceiving another as having selfish motives informed general trait attributions of helpfulness. This finding accords with speculations by early attributions theorists, who believed motive attributions were antecedents of dispositional attributions (e.g. Jones and Davis 1965; see Reeder 2009).

In their awareness that outward expressions yield such valuable information, targets may attempt to strategically manipulate both their signals and cues so as to create desired impressions. Cues, for which the target actor "seems to have little concern or control," are the more costly to manipulate because they require studied technique to maintain their appearance as unintentional (Goffman 1959:7; Frank 1988). This costliness suggests that cues rather than signals are more reliable indicators of underlying intentions. This reliability in turn makes them the most desirable for a target to strategically manipulate, so long as the target is able to maintain the unintentional appearance of such expressions (Jones and Pittman 1982; Leary and Kowalski 1990). These payoffs provoke a game of sorts, whereby targets attempt to manipulate their behavior to achieve desired impressions, and observers (themselves impression managers in their

own right) are continually identifying new ways to spot put-on impressions. Goffman (1959:8-9) believed observers have the upper hand in this game, noting that “the arts of piercing an individual’s effort at calculated unintentionality” are more perfected than people’s capacity to manipulate their own behavior. This weakness on the part of targets may be due to the extreme costliness (i.e. difficulty) of mimicking certain facial cues that reflect underlying emotional states (Frank 1988:121).

While targets may have their own difficulties in shaping desired self-presentations, observers have a different set of challenges due to perceptual biases that shape how the motives of targets are perceived. For instance, observers may make positive attributions to those who support the observers’ viewpoints (Reeder et al. 2005) or to others who compliment them (Vonk 2002). Perhaps the most studied bias is the false consensus effect (Ross, Greene, and House 1977; Marks and Miller 1987; Krueger and Clement 1994), which refers to people’s tendency to overestimate the prevalence of their own attributes—including their intentions, values, and preferences—in others. The robustness of this bias has been shown in experiments demonstrating that people will continue to hold false consensus beliefs even after engaging in de-biasing efforts through feedback and education, such as being shown the statistical errors of their attributions (Krueger and Clement 1994). While the false consensus effect suggests that people project their own values onto others, social learning processes may cause people to project values of their group onto others as well (Bandura 1977). In a study of organizational employees, Hoffberg (Chapter 4 of this dissertation) found that employees projected both their own values and the values of their group onto fictional colleagues. Such biases can have significant consequences on group behavior, since perceived values can influence reciprocity and the development of long-term solidarity.

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**CHAPTER 3**  
**THE EFFECT OF PERCEIVED INTENTIONS**  
**ON DIRECT RECIPROCITY AND FUTURE GENEROSITY**

People often reciprocate help with utter strangers, even when there is no potential for future interaction. While such actions characterize our most idealistic notions of altruism, numerous experiments have shown this behavior to be commonplace among majorities of laboratory subjects (Fehr and Gächter 2002; Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, and Fehr 2003; Yamagishi et al. 2007). Reciprocity under these circumstances confounds traditional economic and game theoretic assumption of individual rationality, which predicts reciprocity should occur only when future interactions would allow recipients to reap the benefits of a cooperative reputation (Axelrod 1980). Yet people unfailingly reciprocate favors when their identities are anonymous and future interaction is impossible (Hayashi et al. 1999; Kiyonari et al. 2000; Watabe et al. 1996; Cho and Choi 1999). As these conditions prevent altruistic behavior for the purposes of social maneuvering, they provide a stark illustration of how traditional economic models of human interaction fall short and how such simple interactions help to address the Hobbesian problem of social order.

To explain people's propensity to reciprocate under such extreme conditions, exchange theorists by and large have pointed to the norm of reciprocity, a cultural "element" that when internalized causes people to experience a felt sense of obligation to reciprocate upon receiving a benefit (Gouldner 1960). Evolutionary biologists have argued that we are in fact biologically hardwired to feel such obligation due to its evolutionary advantages (Trivers 1971). Both of these explanations—normative and genetic—suggest that observable transfers of particularly-

sized resources should inspire a corresponding transfer of a relatedly-sized resource. Yet in their emphasis on behavioral mechanisms, a significant limitation is their inability to account for the uniquely human capacity to distinguish between behavior and the intentions that may underlie behavior. More recent scholarship at the intersection of evolutionary biology and social science on gene-culture coevolution suggests that such distinctions may portend significant consequences for cooperative behavior such as reciprocity (Tomasello et al. 2005; Feldman and Zhivotovsky 1992; Boyd and Richerson 2004; Gintis et al. 2003; Gintis 2011).

In this paper, I outline the limitations of behavior-contingent reciprocity—both theoretically as an explanation for reciprocal behavior and empirically as a potential foundation for developing long-term cohesion and solidarity—while demonstrating the complementary importance of reciprocity contingent on recipients’ perceptions of givers’ intentions. Bringing together theoretical research on evolutionary fitness and empirical social exchange research on relational cohesion, I develop three fundamental arguments: 1) recipients’ perception of givers’ intentions should influence both recipients’ reciprocity and their future generosity towards givers beyond the focal exchange, 2) relational cohesion, by way of social emotions, should mediate these effects, and 3) whereas the perceived *intentions* of givers in a focal exchange should influence recipients’ future generosity, givers’ actual *behavior* (the magnitude of their favor) in the focal exchange should not. I test these predictions in an anonymous online environment that inherently precludes the possibility of future interaction.

This paper attempts to make three main theoretical contributions. First, prior studies of prosocial behavior have supported the belief that “actions matter, not intentions” when considering the consequences for engaging in prosocial behavior (Ames, Flynn, and Weber 2004). The present study illustrates the fallacy of such thinking. I find empirical support for the

argument that despite observing the same prosocial “actions,” recipients will invariably adjust their reciprocal behavior depending upon the intentions they perceive to be driving those actions. Second, prior genetic and normative explanations of reciprocity fail to explain how cooperative behavior may extend beyond the focal exchange. The present study demonstrates how greater relational cohesion as a result of perceiving givers as altruistically motivated will inspire recipients to engage in generous behavior towards their partners should future encounters unexpectedly arise. Lastly, prior social exchange research, and most theorizing in sociology for that matter, has neglected the formative role of human evolution (Massey 2002; Machalek and Martin 2004). In detailing the evolutionary logic of reciprocity and how emotions help to reify cooperative relationships, this paper responds to Massey’s call for research that accounts for both rationality and our “preexisting emotional base.”

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### ***The Puzzle of Reciprocity***

Reciprocity occurs when one person helps another in response to receiving a benefit (Blau 1964). In direct exchange in particular, reciprocity is non-negotiated and oriented towards the original giver, rather than towards a third party as in indirect exchange (Sahlins 1972; Molm et al. 2007). Both the act of reciprocity and the initial prosocial act that inspired reciprocity are forms of cooperation, insofar as they represent costly behavior that increases the welfare of others (Boyd and Richerson 2009). For givers, the cost is positively correlated with the benefit provided and with the risk that their help will not be reciprocated; recipients, for their part, have already reaped their benefits, thus rendering reciprocity itself costly when potential future encounters are unlikely.

Given the costs of reciprocating, economically-rational recipients should thus hoard the benefits they receive rather than reciprocating them. Yet reciprocity is commonplace, even in the absence of potential future interaction (Fehr and Gächter 2002; Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, and Fehr 2003; Yamagishi et al. 2007). In laboratory experiments examining this phenomenon, reciprocity is often defined as cooperating in a prisoners' dilemma game, whereby participants are paired with a partner and are given a choice of whether to cooperate or not cooperate ("defect") with their partner (Schino and Aureli 2010). Both participants and their partners must make this choice, and in games where reciprocity is the focal behavior, this choice is made sequentially. According to the game's payoff structure, first-movers who cooperate risk receiving the lowest payoff, since second-movers may defect and reap the maximum reward; unilateral cooperation will reap the highest collective benefit, while unilateral defection the least.

If the game is repeated, second-movers may cooperate to build a reputation as cooperative, perhaps with the goal of defecting on a later round (Axelrod 1980). But second-movers in laboratory experiments routinely cooperate even in one-shot games with no such "shadow of the future." For instance, in sequential one-shot PD games where the first-mover cooperated, 61% of American participants (Hayashi et al. 1999), 62% to 75% of Japanese participants (Kiyonari et al. 2000; Watabe et al. 1996), and 73% of Korean participants (Cho and Choi 1999) acting as the second mover chose to cooperate. In all of these cases, participants knowingly reaped a lower benefit by reciprocating cooperation than they would have received if they had defected.

Predominant explanations of such findings have pointed to the normative and genetic basis for this form of cooperation. In the following sections, I address these explanations briefly in turn and then shift attention to the emerging "gene-culture coevolution" scholarship that

suggests a symbiotic relationship between genetic selection and cooperative norms provided the basis for costly cooperative behavior such as reciprocity. While the norm- and gene-based arguments emphasized the contingency of reciprocity on givers' *actions*, the gene-culture coevolution model suggests that recipients' perceptions of givers' *intentions* may be equally consequential. Drawing from recent empirical work on social exchange, I explain the influence of perceived intentions on reciprocity and future generosity by accounting for the presence of social emotions that reinforce relational cohesion and inspire cooperative behavior.

### ***Explaining reciprocity***

The de facto account of reciprocity in social exchange scholarship (cf. Buchan, Croson, and Dawes 2002; Kuwabara 2011) refers to the norm of reciprocity, which holds that people reciprocate out of a felt sense of obligation or indebtedness upon receiving an initial benefit (Gouldner 1960; Cialdini 1988). In his original thesis, Gouldner framed the norm of reciprocity as “an element of culture,” a prescriptive necessary to social order that mitigates opportunism when two parties engage in exchange: “when internalized in both parties, the norm obliges the one who has first received a benefit to repay it at some time; it thus provides some realistic grounds for confidence, in the one who first parts with his valuables, that he will be repaid.” While a convincing description of reciprocity in human populations, Gouldner's account does not address why this norm is ubiquitous in nearly every human society, merely that it is.

In developing the theory of reciprocal altruism, Trivers (1971) addressed this shortcoming by outlining the reproductive advantages for individuals that adhere to reciprocity norms, with the implication that reciprocity has become biologically hard-wired in our genetic makeup. The theory of reciprocal altruism suggests that social organisms (not just humans, but

also other cooperative organisms such as cleaner shrimp and vampire bats; cf. Wilkinson 1984) operate under the principle of “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours”—i.e. recipients reciprocate as a form of payback for receiving an initial benefit. Axelrod and Hamilton (1981) subsequently explained how this behavior can become evolutionary stable in small groups with weak levels of kin selection. In recent years however, reciprocal altruism as an explanation for cooperation has come under criticism. Simulations of large populations, for instance, have shown that reciprocal altruism cannot account for the evolution of reciprocity in larger groups more common in early hominid societies (Gintis 2009, 2011; Boyd and Richerson 1988, 1992, 2009; Gardner and West 2004). Moreover, the theory does not explain the widespread finding that humans will reciprocate even under conditions of anonymity with no potential for future interaction (Gintis et al. 2003).

Over the last decade, the idea that both norms and genes co-evolved to facilitate cooperation in human groups has been gaining widespread acceptance among evolutionary biologists as an explanation for why humans cooperate even in the absence of potential future rewards (Feldman and Zhiotovskiy 1992; Boyd and Richerson 2004; Gintis et al. 2003; Gintis 2011; Ihara 2011; Wilson 2012a). This research suggests that while those harboring cooperative genes may indeed have achieved greater reproductive success, human cultures simultaneously evolved to be more cooperative, and such environments in turn favored the reproduction of prosocial genes (Gintis 2011; Wilson 2012a). In this respect, both genes and culture promoting cooperation co-evolved in a process similar to Pinker’s (1994) account of the early evolution of language acquisition, whereby human’s functional ability to process language emerged along with cultural properties that facilitated transmission (Boyd and Richerson 2009).<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> An example of such coevolution in promoting cooperation is outlined by the cooperative eye hypothesis (Tomasello et al. 2007; Tomasello 2009). Experiments have demonstrated that the large, white sclera in human eyes

Gene-culture coevolution is congruent with the theory of multilevel selection, which holds that both individual and group selection effects influenced human evolution (Wilson 2012a; Traulsen and Nowak 2006; Nowak, Tarnita, and Wilson 2010). According to this theory, the onset of culture allowed humans to rapidly adapt to local environments. Such adaptations created stable variation in local groups that were competing for resources; and groups with cultures that facilitated cooperation won out over those that did not (Gintis 2011). Inherent in this cultural fabric of cooperative groups were “new social instincts suited to life in such groups, including a psychology which ‘expects’ life to be structured by moral norms... Individuals lacking the new social instincts more often violated prevailing norms and experienced adverse selection” (Boyd and Richerson 2009). Deviants within such cultures—ostracized or otherwise deprived of resources or mating partners—had less reproductive fitness than adherents, leading to a co-evolution of both cognitive and cultural changes that were mutually aligned (Sterelny 2011). While cultural norms that facilitated cooperation were selected for at the group level, psychological changes at the individual level took the form of social emotions, such as gratitude and guilt, that facilitated adherence to the new cultural mores (Gintis 2011; Frank 1988).

***From behavior-contingent reciprocity to intention-contingent reciprocity: the emergence of social intelligence***

Genetic adaptations (e.g. social emotions) to cooperative cultures were part of a broader “social intelligence” that allowed people to adjust their actions according to both the observable

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greatly facilitates the ability to read intentions. The cooperative eye hypothesis suggests this characteristic developed in humans embedded in cultural environment where reading intentions was an important consideration for cooperation. This is in contrast to the 200+ nonhuman primates—all of whom have dark eyes with barely visible sclera—who lacked the cultures that made such adaptations necessary.

*behaviors* of others as well as “theory of mind”-based deductions of others’ *intentionality* (Fehr and Gächter 2002; Yamagishi, Kikuchi, and Kosugi 1999; Tomasello et al. 2005). Of particular importance in emergent cooperative societies is the ability to distinguish between egoistic and altruistic intentions (Vanneste et al. 2007). The presence of this duality would be reinforced by multilevel selection, with individual selection favoring those who maximized their own resources while group selection pressures rewarded cultures that maximized collective benefits (Wilson 2012a; Wilson and Wilson 2007; Wilson 2012b). Given that a cooperative society—held in place by moral codes and the successful play against less cooperative groups—can be undermined by noncooperative actors (Axelrod 1980), the ability to detect not only noncooperative behavior, but also intentions such as egoism that might portend noncooperative behavior, would be evolutionarily advantageous.

In the context of reciprocal exchanges between two people, egoistic givers of benefits would be those who are more likely to give with the expectation of reciprocity, an expectation justified by the prevalence of reciprocity norms in cooperative cultures. Yet after the benefits have been conferred, reciprocating will be costly for recipients, especially in exchanges between nonrelated individuals who do not expect to interact again. Selection pressures at the societal level however would provide the circumstances for individuals to overcome such short-term thinking by reinforcing characteristics that allow people to reciprocate, as chance encounters between strangers are the contexts for emergent cooperative relationships between nonkin. Recipients would thus reciprocate if they perceive benefactors as having altruistic (other-focused) intentions, since this signals that the benefactors are contributing to a cooperative

enterprise; by contrast, recipients may be more hesitant if they believe benefactors are focused on self-gain.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, reciprocating under such circumstances would be evolutionarily advantageous within cooperative societies if recipients feel they are indeed contributing to a group enterprise—i.e. if they feel that their exchange partners are taking a collective or *relational* view of the partnership rather than one of pure self-interest. Recent work on perceived mental states lends support to this argument. Ames et al. (2004), for instance, found that recipients of favors who perceived givers as having affective rather than cost-benefit mental states believed the benefactor had a more positive view of the “nature of their relationship.” Recipients may feel compelled to honor—by greater reciprocity—what they perceive as the benefactors positive view of the relation (Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1996).

Social emotions such as gratitude may play a role in encouraging reciprocity when altruistic intentions are perceived. Recent laboratory studies have demonstrated that gratitude is lower when recipients perceive givers as egoistically rather than altruistically motivated (Tsang 2006a; Tsang 2006a; Watkins et al. 2006). As a motivator of prosocial behavior, gratitude may reinforce cooperative behavior by causing recipients who experience gratitude to reciprocate in kind (Tsang 2006a; Tsang 2006b; Bartlett and DeSteno 2006; McCullough, Kimeldorf, and Cohen 2008). Less directly, experiencing gratitude as a result of perceiving altruistic intentions may contribute to recipients’ sense of kinship or solidarity with their exchange partner, reifying the relationship itself and paving the way for longer-term cohesion should it have the chance to develop (Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1996; Lawler 2001; Ames et al. 2004). Relational cohesion should be highest in exchanges where recipients experience more gratitude as a result of the

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<sup>11</sup> Note that this discussion and the ensuing treatment of “perceived intentions” is from the point of view of the recipient, not the giver; moreover, emphasis is placed on *perceptions* of givers’ intentions rather than givers’ actual intentions.

initial transfer of benefits from the benefactor. As Lawler and colleagues have shown, relational cohesion in turn should manifest in commitment behaviors such as sacrificial contributions towards the relationship.

***Hypothesis 1a (“reciprocity effect”):** Recipients who perceive givers as having altruistic intentions will reciprocate more than recipients who perceive benefactors as having egoistic intentions.*

***Hypothesis 1b (“cohesion effect”):** Recipients who perceive givers as having altruistic rather than egoistic intentions will be more likely to characterize their relationship with the givers as cohesive and solidary.*

***Hypothesis 1c (“reciprocity mediation”):** Recipients’ feeling of relational cohesion should mediate the relationship between perceived altruism and reciprocity.*

When givers give very large (as opposed to smaller) favors, recipients may find it more acceptable for the givers to weigh the personal costs and benefits in giving such favors, as not to do so would seem a form of martyrdom (Ames et al. 2004). By manipulating the size of favors using vignettes, Ames et al. indeed found that recipients expected givers of very large favors to more carefully consider the pros and cons of giving with respect to the givers’ own welfare. By contrast, the ostensible intentions underlying smaller benefits can seem more emblematic of the relationship (Goffman 1961), and as a result, perceived intentions for less exorbitant benefits may be more likely to affect a recipients’ willingness to reciprocate.

***Hypothesis 1d (“exorbitant benefits”):** The effect of perceived intentions on reciprocity will be lower when the benefits are very costly to givers rather than less costly.*

If future interactions unexpectedly occur, recipients who have already reciprocated are no longer bound by reciprocity norms or the sense of obligation induced by receiving the initial

benefit. In this respect, the size of the givers' initial benefit in the "focal" exchange should have no bearing on recipients' future willingness to help their initial benefactors. This may be for two reasons. First, the size of the benefit merely makes reciprocity norms more salient, increasing recipients' desire to reciprocate but not necessarily influencing their willingness to help after reciprocity has occurred. Second, recipients' sense of relational cohesion is not expected to be higher for very large benefits versus more moderate ones. As argued above, what matters is recipients' view that givers' are other-focused (i.e. have altruistic rather than egoistic intentions). Moreover, Lawler and Yoon (1996) argue that relational cohesion should be highest when exchanges are "successful" from a collective standpoint (see also Lawler 2001). "Success" in this case may be measured by the total benefits that exist following reciprocation. Higher relational cohesion—resulting from perceiving benefactors as altruistically motivated and having successful exchanges—should in turn manifest as greater commitment towards the relationship even after recipients have "resolved" the focal exchange by reciprocating benefits (Lawler and Yoon 1996). This increased commitment should manifest behaviorally in recipients' willingness to provide unconditional help to givers after the focal exchange has taken place.

***Hypothesis 2a ("generosity effect"):** Recipients who perceive givers as having altruistic rather than egoistic intentions will be more generous towards givers should future interactions occur.*

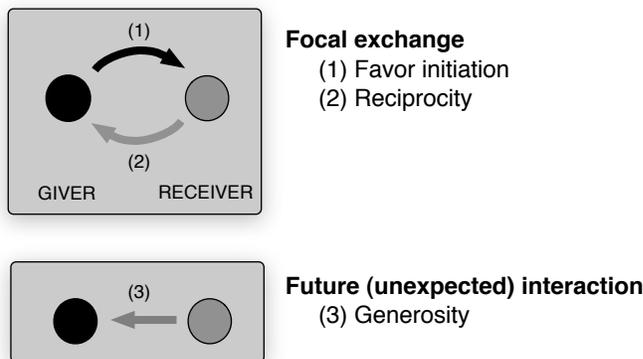
***Hypothesis 2b ("generosity mediation"):** Recipients' feeling of relational cohesion following the focal exchange should mediate the relationship between perceived altruism and recipients' future generosity towards givers.*

***Hypothesis 2c ("limitations of behavior"):** The size of givers' initial benefits should not influence recipients' future generosity towards givers.*

The giver's initial provision of a benefit, the recipient's reciprocity, and the recipient's future generosity are illustrated in Figure 3.1.

**FIGURE 3.1**

**Focal Exchange and Recipient's Subsequent Generosity**



**STUDY**

***Setting***

To test the above hypotheses, I conducted an experiment on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (AMT; [www.mturk.com](http://www.mturk.com)), a popular online crowdsourcing platform with over 100,000 registered users (Pontin 2007). AMT allows its users ("workers") to complete tasks online in exchange for small amounts of money. These tasks are posted by "requesters" who are able to reimburse workers while maintaining workers' anonymity. In recent years, AMT has been increasingly used by behavioral scientists for conducting experiments, given the large and easily accessible participant pool and the low cost for conducting research (Bohannon 2011; Lawson et al. 2010; Dodds et al. 2011; Suri and Watts 2011). Several recent studies have demonstrated the platform's reliability and validity (Horton, Rand, and Zeckhauser 2011, Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling

2011; Rand 2012). Traditional lab studies replicated on AMT have consistently found similar results (Paolacci, Chandler and Ipeirotis 2010; Horton et al. 2011; Suri and Watts 2011).

In addition to the increased reliability stemming from automated procedures, conducting the present study on AMT offers two important advantages over a traditional laboratory experiment using undergraduates. First, studies of AMT worker demographics demonstrate that worker populations are more representative of the general public along several dimensions, including age, education, and ethnic diversity, when compared to the undergraduate populations commonly used for experiments (Rand 2012; Ross et al. 2010; Buhrmester et al. 2011; for a detailed discussion of AMT's strengths and limitations, see Mason and Suri 2012). Second, because workers' anonymity can be ensured, there is no potential for future interaction between participants, nor are there potential demand effects caused by the physical presence of researchers.

### ***Subjects***

264 participants (149 females, 115 males) completed the study, which took 30 minutes to complete on average. Similar to prior studies requiring English fluency (cf. Eriksson and Simpson 2011), 70% of the participants were located in the United States, 22% in India, and the remaining 8% divided across the United Kingdom, Canada, and other predominantly English speaking countries. The median age was 28 and educational background was mixed (9% high school degrees, 34% associate degrees or some college, 38% bachelor degrees, 17% graduate degrees).

Participants were paid a flat base rate of \$2.50, along with a cash bonus corresponding to the amount of points (\$0.10 each) and gift coupons (\$0.05 each) they possessed at the end of the

study. The average resulting reimbursement per participant (\$3.55) was just slightly higher than payments for other AMT studies of similar length and involvement (see Mason and Suri 2010 for an explanation of AMT payment norms).

### ***Design and Procedure***

The study consisted of three parts. Participants first completed an Introductory Task (Part 1), followed by a single round of a two-step “give-some” game adapted from prior research to mimic favor exchange (Part 2; c.f. De Bruin and Van Lange 1999). After the round completed, participants were presented with an opportunity to give gift coupons (redeemable for cash) to their exchange partners from Part 2; the purpose here was to test whether perceived intentions in a given “focal” exchange might influence the participant’s future generosity (Part 3; cf. Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1996).

*Part 1:* Participants completed one of seven “Introductory Tasks,” which they were told had been randomly assigned to them. In reality all participants received the same task (entitled “Point Choice Decisions,” which consisted of selecting desirable point outcomes between oneself and an ostensible other).

*Part 2:* Participants were then told they would be paired with another AMT worker to engage in a two-step “interaction”; in actuality, the other worker was simulated. Prior to the interaction, participants were told both they and their partners would each be given 4 points and be randomly assigned to the role of first-mover or second-mover. Furthermore, participants were instructed that second-movers would receive the results of the first-mover’s Introductory Task as a way of gaining a bit more information about their partners; first-movers would not have access to second-movers task.

During the first step, first-movers would have an opportunity to give some or none of their 4 points to their partners. Any points given would be doubled upon receipt. During the second step, second-movers would have an opportunity to give some or none of their resulting points (the initial 4 points, along with any points accumulated during the first step) to the first-movers. Again, any points given would be doubled upon receipt.

After these instructions were given, participants were presented with ten 5-item questions to assess their comprehension. If a participant answered any one of the ten questions incorrectly, the instructions were presented again, and the participant was given a second chance to respond to any question(s) they had incorrectly answered.

Following the comprehension check, participants were told they had been randomly paired with the AMT worker and that they were now connected online; moreover, participants were told they had been “randomly” assigned a role as second-mover. As second movers, they were then presented with the “results” of the Introductory Task that had been assigned to their partner, with the assurance that their partner would not see the results of the participants’ Introductory Task. After a brief wait, participants were informed that the other had given them points, thus constituting the first move. A readout indicated how many points each partner had at the current juncture. The participants then decided how many (if any) points to give to their partner, after which they were told the exchange had ended and that they and their partner were no longer connected.

*Part 3:* At this point, a screen appeared indicating they had been randomly selected to receive 8 gift coupons, each valued at \$0.05 apiece. Participants decided how many of these coupons they would like to keep for themselves and how many they would like to be added to their partner’s cash bonus. To eliminate expectations of reciprocity, participants were told that

only they, and not their partner, had been given coupons and that there would be no future interactions or exchanges with their partner. Participants were further told that if they chose to give their partner coupons, their partner would not know how many coupons had initially been allotted to the participant. In addition, if no coupons were given to the partner, the partner would never know the participants had been given coupons.

After participants had decided how many gift coupons to give to their partners, the study concluded with a follow-up survey, where participants reported their sense of relational cohesion with their partner, the emotions they experienced upon receiving the initial benefit from their partners, and any suspicions they had regarding their partners or the experimental design. Participants were then given a monetary bonus based on the number of points and gift coupons in their possession at the completion of the interaction.

### ***Manipulations***

Partner's intention and benefit size served as binary experimental manipulations. These manipulations were crossed, yielding four conditions to which participants were randomly assigned.

***Perceived intention:*** Upon being connected with their partners during Part 2, participants were told that their partner's Introductory Task from Part 1 had been the "Motivation & Intention Diagnostic (MID)," which was described as "a highly reliable and validated measure of unconscious intentional tendencies (Diskanhaus & Gilovetch 2007)." Participants were further told that "the abridged version of MID used in this study specifically measures the following two motivational tendencies: concern for self (egoism) and concern for others (altruism)." In the Egoistic condition, participants were told that their partner had scored high on egoism (8.7 out of

10) and slightly below average (4.1) on altruism. These scores were reversed for the Altruistic condition (in a pilot study, participants reported not believing extremely low scores on either the egoism or altruism dimensions; hence “high” vs. “slightly below average” comparisons were used to create the manipulation). Upon receiving their partner’s scores, participants then answered a series of manipulation check questions.

***Benefit size:*** Participants received either 3 points or 4 points from their partners during the first step of the give-some game in Part 2. In the pilot study (26 participants), additional conditions of 1 and 2 points were included. Because of the doubling of points and the readily apparent advantages to mutual cooperation, those receiving 1 point in the pilot registered significant disappointment upon receiving such a “favor.” While those receiving 2 points were not disappointed per se, they did not characterize such a gift positively as a “favor” (unlike those who received 3 or 4 points). Since the scope of this study concerns benefits that are favorably perceived, 1 and 2 point conditions were not included.

### ***Measures***

***Gratitude:*** I measured gratitude using Tsang’s (2006a) three-item scale, which asks participants to report their emotions upon recalling a recent situation. Participants were asked to indicate how they felt after seeing the results of their partner’s decision in Step One. Participants rated their felt experience of nine emotion adjectives using a 7-point Likert scale, anchored at 1 = “Not at all” and 7 = “Very much.” The scale for gratitude was constructed from three of these emotions: “thankful,” “appreciative,” and “grateful” ( $\alpha = 0.89$ ).

***Relational cohesion:*** I measured relational cohesion using Lawler, Thye and Yoon’s (2000) relational cohesion index. Participants were asked to rate their relationship with their

partners on four bi-polar spectrums: distant/close, coming apart/together, fragile/solid, and divisive/cohesive. These responses were averaged together to form the index ( $\alpha = 0.93$ ).

***Joint outcome:*** As a measure of the exchange's collective "success," joint outcome was the cumulative point total resulting from the focal exchange at the end of Part 2 (calculated by doubling the benefit each partner gave to the other, adding the 8 points initially allotted across both partners, and subtracting the face value of the benefits each gave to the other).

***Reciprocity:*** Reciprocity was measured by the number of points participants gave to their partners in the second step of the give-some game (Part 2).

***Future generosity:*** The gift-giving opportunity following the focal exchange indicated participants' commitment to the relationship (Lawler et al. 2000). As in Lawler et al. (2000), these gifts were given unilaterally and "without strings or contingencies." Yet unlike the study by Lawler and colleagues, these gifts had more value than merely token gifts, as their purpose here was to demonstrate tangible generosity above and beyond a mere expression of commitment to the relationship (Collett and Morrissey 2007).

## RESULTS

### ***Comprehension and Suspicion Checks***

21 participants were removed from the analysis because they responded incorrectly to more than one of the ten comprehension questions on their second attempt. When prompted whether they found any part of the study "hard to believe," 11 participants clearly suspected they were not connected to another partner; their results were thus removed from the analysis. 26 other participants (10%) questioned whether they were really connected with a partner. Because many of these participants indicated they assumed the connection was real until encountering the

suspicion check question, their results were kept in the analysis (excluding them in a separate analysis did not significantly alter the results discussed below).<sup>12</sup> This left a usable sample of 232 participants (135 females, 97 males). I found no effect of gender on reciprocity or future generosity; the results below reflect the combined participant pool of males and females.

### ***Manipulation Checks***

Responses from the manipulation check questions confirmed that participants were convinced their partners were more egoistic in the Egoistic condition and more altruistic in the Altruistic condition. The first two manipulation check questions asked for the participants to rate their partners on a 7-point Likert scale for egoism and altruism respectively. As expected, the results indicate that participants in the Egoistic condition viewed their partners as high on egoism and relatively low on altruism, while participants in the Altruistic condition viewed their partners as high on altruism and low on egoism (for the egoism measure: Egoistic condition mean = 5.88 vs. Altruistic condition mean = 3.27,  $t$ -value = 29.28,  $p < .001$ ; for the altruism measure: Egoistic condition mean = 3.10 vs. Altruistic condition mean = 5.98,  $t$ -value = -33.36,  $p < .001$ ). Five subsequent questions, drawn from the Self Report Altruism Scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn and Fekken 1981), asked participants to rate how likely their partners would engage in a variety of different altruistic behaviors (e.g. “give money to charity,” “help push a stranger’s car out of the snow”) using a 7-point Likert scale. Results from these five questions were averaged and compared across conditions; the results further indicate the manipulations functioned as expected (Egoistic condition mean = 3.62 vs. Altruistic condition mean = 5.99,  $t$ -value = -21.47,  $p < .001$ ).

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<sup>12</sup> By contrast, many participants mentioned they found the study and their interactions with their partners to be deeply engaging, even though their interaction with their partners was limited solely to a single round of point exchange. The following comment from a participant was not atypical: “I felt this was a very different study and frankly, was surprised how much it was almost an emotional reaction to how my partner treated me and I treated them...which made this whole experience rather personal and also very weird!”

I further verified that the intentions participants attributed to their partners in the focal exchange were consonant with participants' perceptions of their partners' dispositional characteristics as induced by the manipulation. At the conclusion of the experiment, I asked participants to rate their partners' motivation for giving the amount of points they gave in Step One on a scale of 1 ("My partner was very concerned about himself/herself") to 7 ("My partner was very concerned about me"). Overall, participants in the Egoistic condition were more likely to rate their partners as giving out of self-interest rather than altruism (Egoistic condition mean = 3.74 vs. Altruistic condition mean = 4.93,  $t$ -value = -6.82,  $p < .001$ ). Finally, I assessed whether participants who perceived their partners as egoistic were more likely to believe their partners expected a payback as a result of providing their initial benefit. Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants rated their agreement with the following statement: "For Step Two, I believe my partner expected I would give at least the same amount of points that he/she gave me in Step One (not including the doubling effects)." The results indicate that participants in the Egoistic condition were more likely to believe their partners expected an equivalent or greater payback than participants in the Altruistic condition (Egoistic condition mean = 5.94 vs. Altruistic condition mean = 5.49,  $t$ -value = 2.60,  $p < .01$ ).

### ***Reciprocity***

Table 3.1 reports the mean values, standard deviations, and correlations for the study's main variables. Table 3.2 reports mean values for these variables across conditions. Because the distributions of reciprocated points ("Reciprocity") across conditions were not normal (Shapiro Wilk's  $W = 0.86$  and  $W = 0.85$  for the Egoistic and Altruistic conditions, respectively;  $p < .001$ ), I

used the Mann-Whitney U-test statistic rather than the t-test for the following reciprocity comparisons.

The “reciprocity effect” hypothesis (Hypothesis 1a) predicted that recipients will reciprocate more when benefactors are perceived to have altruistic rather than egoistic intentions. This hypothesis was supported by the data. Participants in the Egoistic condition gave an average of 2.90 (SD = 1.98) points to their partner, whereas participants in the Altruistic condition gave an average of 3.40 points (SD = 1.62;  $U = 7736.5$ ,  $z = -2.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ). I also examined the number of points reciprocated across the Egoistic versus Altruistic condition by controlling for benefit size using a linear regression model. The results are presented in Table 3.3. Consonant with the pairwise comparison noted above, Model 1 shows partner’s intention as a significant single predictor of reciprocity ( $\beta = .51$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ); Model 2 demonstrates that both the strength and significance of the coefficient is maintained after controlling for benefit size, which itself is also significant (partner’s intention:  $\beta = .53$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ; benefit size:  $\beta = .84$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ). These results add further support to the reciprocity effect hypothesis.

**TABLE 3.1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>1.</b>	<b>2.</b>	<b>3.</b>	<b>4.</b>	<b>5.</b>	<b>6.</b>
1. Perceived altruism	--	--	0	1						
2. Benefit size	--	--	3	4	-0.03					
3. Gratitude	5.94	1.17	1	7	0.11	0.10				
4. Relational cohesion	4.70	1.50	1	7	0.26*	0.06	0.33*			
5. Joint outcome	14.66	1.99	11	24	0.12	0.46*	0.19*	0.37*		
6. Reciprocity	3.15	1.82	0	12	0.14*	0.23*	0.18*	0.39*	0.97*	
7. Future generosity	2.66	1.92	0	8	0.10	-0.03	0.19*	0.19*	0.37*	0.42*

\* p<0.05

**TABLE 3.2**  
**Means and Standard Deviations across Perceived Intention and Benefit Size**

	<i>Egoistic</i> (n = 115)			<i>Altruistic</i> (n = 117)			<i>Benefit size = 3</i> (n = 114)			<i>Benefit size = 4</i> (n = 118)		
	<b>B = 3</b>	<b>B = 4</b>	<b>Comb.</b>	<b>B = 3</b>	<b>B = 4</b>	<b>Comb.</b>	<b>Ego</b>	<b>Alt</b>	<b>Comb.</b>	<b>Ego</b>	<b>Alt</b>	<b>Comb.</b>
<i>Gratitude</i>	5.59 (1.25)	6.02 (1.32)	5.81 (1.30)	6.03 (0.98)	6.11 (1.05)	6.07 (1.01)	5.59 (1.25)	6.03 (0.98)	5.82 (1.13)	6.02 (1.32)	6.11 (1.05)	6.06 (1.20)
<i>Relational cohesion</i>	4.16 (1.73)	4.45 (1.63)	4.31 (1.68)	5.03 (1.00)	5.15 (1.37)	5.09 (1.20)	4.16 (1.73)	5.03 (1.00)	4.61 (1.46)	4.45 (1.63)	5.15 (1.37)	4.79 (1.54)
<i>Joint outcome</i>	13.31 (1.51)	15.43 (2.20)	14.42 (2.17)	14.12 (1.26)	15.69 (1.88)	14.90 (1.78)	13.31 (1.51)	14.12 (1.26)	13.73 (1.44)	15.43 (2.20)	15.69 (1.88)	15.56 (2.04)
<i>Reciprocity</i>	2.31 (1.51)	3.43 (2.20)	2.90 (1.98)	3.12 (1.26)	3.69 (1.88)	3.40 (1.62)	2.31 (1.51)	3.12 (1.26)	2.73 (1.44)	3.43 (2.20)	3.69 (1.88)	3.56 (2.04)
<i>Future generosity</i>	2.22 (1.77)	2.72 (2.04)	2.48 (1.93)	3.20 (1.84)	2.48 (1.94)	2.85 (1.91)	2.22 (1.77)	3.20 (1.84)	2.73 (1.86)	2.72 (2.04)	2.48 (1.94)	2.60 (1.99)

**TABLE 3.3**  
**Results of Regression Analysis Predicting the Effects of Perceived Intentions on Reciprocity**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5 (B = 3)	Model 6 (B = 4)
Constant	2.90***	-0.08	-1.64*	-1.68*	2.31***	3.43***
Perceived intention <sup>†</sup>	0.51*	0.53*		0.18	0.81**	0.26
Benefit size (B)		0.84***	0.75***	0.76***		
Relational cohesion			0.46***	0.44***		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.07	0.20	0.20	0.08	0.00
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.07	0.19	0.19	0.07	-0.00
F	4.56	9.10	27.99	18.85	9.68	0.46
<i>df</i>	1, 230	2, 229	2, 229	3, 228	1, 112	1, 116

<sup>†</sup> 0 = egoistic, 1 = altruistic

+ p<0.10

\* p<0.05

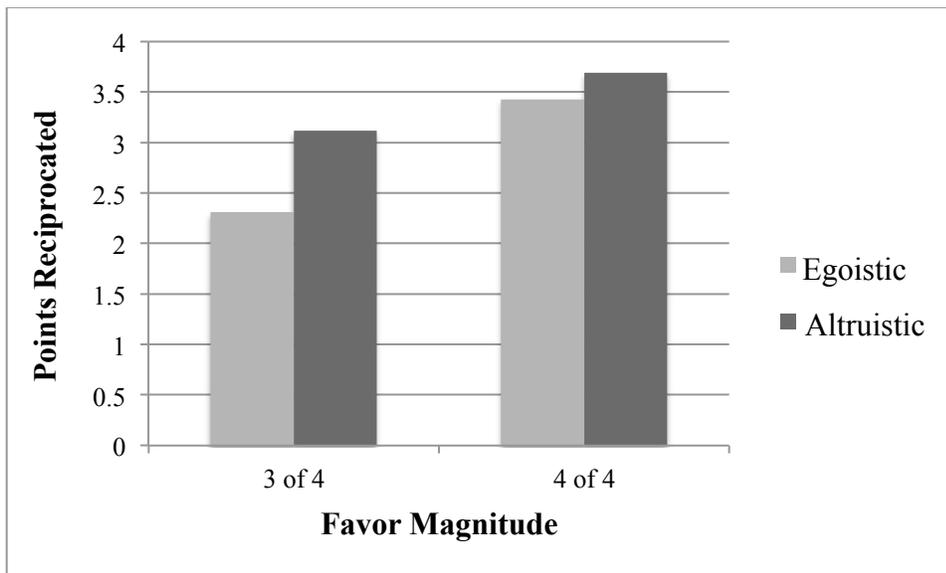
\*\* p<0.01

\*\*\* p<0.001

The “exorbitant benefit” hypothesis (Hypothesis 1d) predicted that the effect of perceived altruism on reciprocity would be lower when recipients receive benefits that are very costly to givers rather than less costly. Figure 3.2 illustrates the mean points given across the perceived intention and benefit size conditions. As predicted, partner’s intention was highly significant in the 3 point condition but not in the 4 point condition (Table 3.3, Model 5,  $\beta = .81, p \leq .01$ ; Model 6,  $\beta = .26, n.s.$ ). Of particular note is that partner’s intention had a similar effect on reciprocity in the 3 point condition (Model 5,  $\beta = .81, p \leq .01$ ) as the effect of benefit size across the 3 and 4 point conditions (Model 2,  $\beta = .84, p \leq .001$ ).

**FIGURE 3.2**

**Reciprocity by Perceived Intention and Benefit size**



***Relational Cohesion***

The “cohesion effect” hypothesis (Hypothesis 1b) predicted that recipients who perceive givers as having altruistic intentions will be more likely to characterize their relationship with

their partners as cohesive and solidary. The results strongly support this prediction. Participants in the Altruistic condition characterized their relationship with their partners as more cohesive than participants in the Egoistic condition (Egoistic condition mean = 4.31 vs. Altruistic condition mean = 5.09,  $t$ -value  $-4.07$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Table 3.4 shows that the effect of perceived altruism on relational cohesion remained significant after controlling for benefit size using multiple regression (Model 1,  $\beta = 0.78$ ,  $p \leq .001$ ); the size of the benefit participants received had no effect on cohesion (Model 2,  $\beta = 0.20$ , *n.s.*).

**TABLE 3.4**  
**Results of Regression Analysis Predicting the Effects of Perceived Intentions on Relational Cohesion**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Constant	4.31***	3.60***	1.19
Perceived intention <sup>†</sup>	0.78***	0.78***	0.62***
Benefit size (B)		0.20	-0.36+
Joint outcome			0.30***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.07	0.07	0.20
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.06	0.06	0.19
F	16.58	8.85	18.66
<i>df</i>	1, 230	2, 229	3, 228

<sup>†</sup> 0 = egoistic, 1 = altruistic

+  $p < 0.10$

\*  $p < 0.05$

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

An alternative explanation for the effect of perceived altruism on relational cohesion is that recipients who had more “successful” exchanges (i.e. where the collective outcome was the

highest)—perhaps as a result of perceiving altruistic intentions—would be more apt to characterize their relationships with the givers as cohesive. To rule this out, I controlled for joint outcome in Model 3. While the effect of joint outcome was significant (as predicted by Lawler [2001];  $\beta = 0.30, p < .001$ ), it did not reduce the significance or substantially alter the effect size of perceived intention ( $\beta = 0.62, p < .001$ ).<sup>13</sup>

The “reciprocity mediation” hypothesis (Hypothesis 1c) predicted that recipients’ feeling of relational cohesion would mediate the relationship between perceived altruism and reciprocity. The Sobel test for mediation provides strong evidence for this mechanism ( $z = 3.38, p < .001$ ). Relational cohesion positively predicts reciprocity after controlling for benefit size (Table 3.3, Model 3,  $\beta = 0.46, p < .001$ ); moreover, when perceived intention is added back to the model, its coefficient is reduced to non-significance while relational cohesion remains significant (Table 3.3, Model 4; perceived intention:  $\beta = 0.18, n.s.$ ; relational cohesion:  $\beta = 0.44, p < .001$ ).

### ***Future Generosity***

Table 3.5 presents results for the effect of perceived intentions on future generosity. The “generosity effect” hypothesis (Hypothesis 2a) predicted that recipients’ perceptions of givers’ intentions in the focal exchange should influence recipients’ future generosity towards givers should future interactions occur. This prediction received partial support. While the main effect for perceived intention on future generosity was not significant (Model 1,  $\beta = .36, n.s.$ ), perceived intention in the original exchange appeared to have a sizable effect on future generosity in the 3 point condition (Model 4,  $\beta = .99, p \leq .01$ ). No effect of partner’s intention was found in the 4 point condition (Model 5,  $\beta = -.23, n.s.$ ).

The “generosity mediation” hypothesis (Hypothesis 2b) predicted that recipients’ feeling

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<sup>13</sup> Note also that perceived altruism also did not correlate with joint outcome (Table 3.1,  $r = 0.12, n.s.$ ).

of relational cohesion would mediate the relationship between perceived altruism and recipients' future generosity towards givers. While no main effect exists for perceived intention on generosity, the Sobel test for mediation indicates a mediating effect of relational cohesion ( $z = 2.20, p < .05$ ). Moreover, relational cohesion positively predicts generosity after controlling for benefit size (Model 2,  $\beta = 0.24, p < .01$ ) and remains significant when perceived intention is added back to the model (Model 3,  $\beta = 0.22, p < .01$ ). The "limitations of behavior" hypothesis (Hypothesis 2c) predicted that the size of givers' initial benefit should not influence recipients' future generosity towards givers. As expected, benefit size had no effect on future generosity (Model 1,  $\beta = -.12, n.s.$ ).

**TABLE 3.5****Results of Regression Analysis Predicting the Effects of Perceived Intentions on Future Generosity**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4 (B = 3)	Model 5 (B = 4)
Constant	2.89**	2.13*	2.08*	2.22***	2.72***
Perceived intention <sup>†</sup>	0.36		0.19	0.99**	-0.23
Benefit size (B)	-0.12	-0.17	-0.16		
Relational cohesion		0.24**	.22**		
R <sup>2</sup>	0.01	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.00
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.00	0.03	0.03	0.06	-0.01
F	1.17	4.32	3.05	8.48	0.41
<i>df</i>	2, 229	2, 229	3, 228	1, 112	1, 116

<sup>†</sup> 0 = egoistic, 1 = altruistic

+ p<0.10

\* p<0.05

\*\* p<0.01

\*\*\* p<0.001

## DISCUSSION

I found that recipients who perceived benefactors as having altruistic intentions reciprocated more than recipients who perceived benefactors as having egoistic intentions, but only when benefactors gave moderate rather than large benefits. Recipients who perceived givers as having altruistic intentions were more likely to characterize their partner relationships as cohesive, and recipients in cohesive relationships reciprocated more than recipients in less cohesive relationships. These correlations contributed to the full mediation effect of relational cohesion on the relationship between perceived motives and reciprocity. Consistent with the theory of relational cohesion, joint outcome was positively associated with relational cohesion, yet this effect was separate from the influence of perceived motives on relational cohesion (Lawler and Yoon 1996; Lawler 2001).

The influence of perceived intentions on generosity was similar to that for reciprocity: perceived intentions influenced generosity only when givers had given moderate but not very large benefits. Relational cohesion appeared to explain this effect, whereby greater cohesion resulting from perceived intentions was more likely to result in commitment behaviors toward exchange partners, manifesting first as reciprocity in the focal exchange and later as generosity in the gift-giving opportunity. Importantly, relational cohesion did not correlate with the size of givers' initial benefit, only with the final outcome of the exchange. Thus, when givers gave larger benefits, there was no increase in relational cohesion to inspire recipients to make sacrificial contributions towards their partner (again, by reciprocity in the focal exchange or generosity in the gift-giving opportunity).

The influence of perceived altruism on reciprocity and future generosity demonstrated in this study is consistent with prior research on emotions and decision modes. Heider (1958), for

instance, argued that when expectations of reciprocity are made explicit, recipients should feel less gratitude than when such expectations are not present. In their vignette studies of perceived mental states, Ames et al. (2004) found gratitude to be predictive of recipients' "interaction attitudes," a relational construct whose measure asks recipients to rate their agreement with the following statements of desire to interact with their benefactors: "If I needed help in the future, I would ask X" and "I'd look forward to future interactions with X." In the same study, the researchers manipulated recipients' inferences of their benefactors' mental states — i.e. the perception that the benefactor helped the recipient out of "intrinsic concern and affection" or only after weighing the costs and benefits of providing such help. While gratitude was highly correlated with mental states, both constructs were separately predictive of interaction attitudes. The mediating effect of relational cohesion, as demonstrated in the present study, is consistent with Ames et al.'s argument that perceived mental states (affective vs. cost-benefit calculus) influences recipients' belief that givers have a positive view of the relationship, and recipients will be more inclined to interact with others who like them than those who do not.

Molm (2010) recently commented that reciprocity has been taken for granted in social exchange research. While recent theorizing may be relatively lacking, earlier theorizing largely attended to the value of the original benefit by focusing on power and dependence. The present study aims to address this gap. Data from this study strongly supports the general argument that perceived intentions influence reciprocity inasmuch as "actions" for recipients of non-exorbitant benefits. Whereas the norm of reciprocity focuses on feelings of obligation, perceiving altruistic intentions can transcend such norms to inspire not only greater reciprocity in the focal exchange, but future generosity towards the original benefactor as well. Participants in this study rewarded altruistic partners in the subsequent gift-giving opportunity, even after controlling for the

magnitude of the benefit originally provided by the partner. By contrast, the magnitude of the benefit originally provided by the partner had no effect on the recipient's subsequent generosity towards the benefactor. These results suggest that perceived intentions have lasting effects that manifest in future interactions.

Ironically, the norm of reciprocity—when made salient by perceiving the payback drive of the giver—actually impedes reciprocity. The norm of reciprocity, as a taken-for-granted societal dictum, does not accurately capture our tendency to reward when free of the obligation to reciprocate. In fact, when we feel obligated by benefactors to reciprocate – even when such obligations are not explicitly stated – we may be less inclined to do so. Moreover, in its implicit focus on a single mutual exchange, the norm of reciprocity as an explanation for reciprocity fails to capture the nuanced dynamics of the emergent relationship, where willingness to help one's partner can transcend the focal exchange.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

This study focuses on one-shot exchanges between strangers to provide a robust and extreme test of the power of perceived intentions in affecting reciprocity. While historically less commonplace, this type of interaction is increasingly frequent given the wide reach and anonymity of communication made possible by the Internet. Nevertheless, one limitation of adopting the present scope conditions is that many relationships initiated with strangers in the offline world have the potential to continue into the future. Further research may seek to examine how reciprocal behavior is correspondingly perceived as egoistic or altruistic, potentially inspiring feedback loops of egoism or altruism that cascade into relational disintegration or cohesion respectively.

In addition to restricting the shadow of the future, the present study solely examines the effect of perceived motives in direct reciprocal exchange. I chose this focus due to the increased uncertainty and risk in such exchanges—relative to negotiated exchange where both parties provide benefits to the other simultaneously—and thus the importance of perceived intentions should be paramount (Molm 1994; Molm et al. 1999). Yet as Lawler (2001) has argued, productive exchange is more likely to result in stronger emotional responses among exchange participants. As a result, it's possible that the consequences of perceived intentions on contributions towards the joint task may be of greater importance than in reciprocal exchange. Future research could examine such comparisons.

In the present study, recipients were given the opportunity to provide gifts to their exchange partners immediately after the focal exchange had been completed. To the degree that gratitude and other positive emotions associated with the altruistic benefactors was responsible for gift-giving, generous behavior beyond the focal exchange may be rather time-dependent. It should be noted that while gratitude was indeed correlated with future generosity, it did not mediate the relationship between perceived altruism and future generosity. Nevertheless, future research could examine how the dissipation of gratitude influences future generosity.

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**CHAPTER 4**  
**PROSOCIAL VALUES, RECIPROCITY, AND THE MEDIATING**  
**ROLE OF PERCEIVED MOTIVES IN FAVOR EXCHANGE**

Favor exchanges are social dilemmas. To maximize gains, self-interested recipients of favors should not return favors; and givers of favors who stop to think about this should refrain from initially giving favors, leaving both potential givers and recipients worse off. Yet favor exchanges occur frequently, and increasingly so in organizations as hierarchical forms of leadership give way to “flatter” models that emphasize worker involvement (Howard 1995; Morhman, Cohen, and Mohrman 1995; Flynn 2003). This trend, coupled with the growing body of evidence linking reciprocity with productivity at both the individual and organizational levels, has inspired renewed scholarly interest in the causes and consequences of favor exchange (Barr and Serneels 2009; Zhang and Epley 2009; Flynn et al. 2006; Buchan, Croson, and Dawes 2002).

Most explanations of why people reciprocate favors refer to the norm of reciprocity, which states that “(1) people should help those who have helped them, and (2) people should not injure those who have helped them” (Gouldner 1960:171). In outlining the popular theory of reciprocal altruism, Trivers (1971) further argued that adherence to this norm incurs evolutionary advantages, suggesting that humans are biologically “hard-wired” to reciprocate. Recent research on social value preferences has built on this earlier work, demonstrating that person and situation factors moderate people’s willingness to reciprocate in dyadic social exchange (Van Lange and Kuhlman 1994; Balliet, Parks, and Joireman 2009). At the personal level, people differ in their social value orientation – i.e. their preferences for outcomes that benefit themselves versus others – due to a combination of social learning and genetics (Van Lange et al. 1997). At the situation

level, groups may correspondingly differ in their emphasis of individualistic versus collectivistic values (Triandis 1995). At both of these levels, prosocial values are expected to promote reciprocity in favor exchange because reciprocating benefits the dyad. Put differently, the norm of reciprocity appears to be more strongly upheld by individuals and groups holding prosocial value preferences (Perugini et al. 2003; Lester, Meglino and Korsgaard 2008).

Yet people's propensity to return favors may also be influenced by their perceptions of favor givers (Buchan, Croson and Dawes 2002; Ames, Flynn and Weber 2004; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation). In their study comparing outcomes of direct and indirect social exchange, Buchan, Croson and Dawes (2002) conclude that reciprocity "seems to be motivated less by reciprocal norms (which suggest that proportions returned would not be influenced by the target of reciprocation), but instead by *a motivation to reward or punish a partner*" (emphasis added). A substantial body of game theoretic research on cooperation indeed has demonstrated that people in general are more inclined to reciprocate when others appear to be altruistically motivated (Rubin and Brown 1975; De Bruin and Van Lange 1999; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation).

If reciprocity is indeed more about rewarding favor givers and less about reciprocity norms, this raises questions about the nature of the link between prosocial values and reciprocity. Rather than increasing allegiance to reciprocity norms, prosocial values may promote reciprocity by affecting how exchange partners are perceived. Studies on the false consensus effect as well as research in organizational culture have demonstrated that people believe that their individual and group-level values are shared by others (Ross, Greene and House 1977; O'Reilly and Chatman 1996; Van Assen et al. 2006). This suggests the following deductive syllogism, predicting that the relationship between prosocial values and reciprocity can be explained, at least in part, by

perceived motives: (a) People with prosocial values at either the individual or group level are more apt to perceive others as altruistically motivated; (b) People in general are more willing to reciprocate with others who appear to be altruistically motivated; thus (c) People holding prosocial values should be more apt to reciprocate.

In this study, I develop and test a model of this syllogism. I further assess the stronger argument that (c) holds solely because of (a) and (b). That is, I test whether the link between receivers' prosocial values (at both the individual and group levels) and reciprocity is fully mediated by perceived motives. Using cross-national survey data of workers in a large multinational firm, I find empirical support for this mediating effect. These results suggest that prosocial values promote reciprocity not by increasing adherence to reciprocity norms, but by shaping how favor givers are perceived. Rather than an indication of general selflessness, prosocial values may be more aptly described as a lens by which others are viewed as having altruistic intentions, a view which in turn promotes selfless behavior.

This research offers important contributions to existing theories of reciprocity and prosocial values. Many recent studies of reciprocity in the social sciences have a material orientation, focusing on equity imbalances, implying that "actions matter, not intentions" (Ames et al. 2004). This study suggests that intentions, or motives, matter as well, not just because people respond differently to different intentions, but because relatively stable dispositions toward particular intentions – as reflected in prosocial value preferences – affect how others are viewed; and these views in turn impact reciprocity and productivity. This suggests a self-reinforcing property of prosocial motivations: prosocial receivers of favors are more likely to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated, and are thus more likely to reciprocate. Increased reciprocity manifests as greater trust and collegiality, which in turn encourage initiation and reciprocation of

subsequent favors (Kollock 1994; Flynn 2003). Conversely, proselves are less willing to reciprocate, as they are less likely to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated. Consequently, future opportunities to reciprocate are tempered by lower trust and solidarity.

## **THEORY AND HYPOTHESES**

### ***Prosocial Value Preferences and Reciprocity***

Favor exchange refers to the giving and receiving of resources between two parties (Blau 1964; Flynn 2003). These resources consist of “concrete” goods or services such as information, advice, or assistance, as opposed to “symbolic” resources such as love or status (Flynn 2003; Foa and Foa 1980). While the value of the resources being exchanged is typically indeterminate, most exchange theorists assume that the value of the help offered for the receiver is greater than the cost incurred as perceived by the helper (Blau 1964; Homans 1958). The frequent occurrence of reciprocity in favor exchange is often explained with reference to the norm of reciprocity, which holds that the receiver feels an obligation to restore equity in the relationship upon receiving the initial favor (Gouldner 1960; Blau 1964; Cialdini 1988). In general, the greater the imbalance of equity after a favor has been exchanged, the more obligated an individual will feel to reciprocate (Flynn 2003; Clark 1984).

In addition to equity concerns, a significant body of research from the last three decades suggests that people’s willingness to reciprocate favors is also contingent on individual- and group-level prosocial value preferences (McClintock and Liebrand 1988; Van Lange et al. 1997; Triandis 1995; Chatman and Barsade 1995). While this research has primarily focused on cooperation rather than reciprocity, reciprocity and cooperation are intricately linked. In rational choice terms, cooperation refers to “an individual behavior that incurs personal costs in order to

engage in a joint activity that confers benefits exceeding these costs to other members of one's group" (Bowles and Gintis 2003). Cooperation is often illustrated via the example of the prisoner's dilemma (hereafter PD), in which two parties are given the choice to cooperate or defect. While each has an incentive to defect, the greatest collective gain occurs when both cooperate. Favor exchange reflects a sequential version of this game. If we assume that the help offered has more value to the receiver than the cost incurred by the helper, then the payoff structure is analogous to the PD. In social exchange terms, direct reciprocity occurs when a second mover cooperates rather than defects (Kollock 1993; Buchan, Croson and Dawes 2002).

***Individual-level prosocial values.*** Both individual-level and group-level prosocial value preferences have been predicted to increase reciprocity in dyadic exchange. At the individual-level, social values reflect relatively stable preferences for outcomes that benefit the self versus others (McClintock and Allison 1989). While Messick and McClintock (1968) originally outlined six social value orientations, subsequent researchers often aggregate these into prosocial and proself orientations. People with prosocial orientations ("prosocials") prefer outcomes that maximize benefits between self and others and minimize corresponding inequalities (Brucks and Van Lange 2007; Simpson 2004). Those with proself orientations ("proselfs") prefer outcomes that maximize benefit for the self regardless of the outcome for others (De Cremer and Van Lange 2001; Liebrand et al. 1986).

In game theoretic studies of cooperation, prosocials and proselfs exhibit rather different behavior. Building on prior studies of subjective interpretation of social dilemmas (Kelley and Thibaut 1978; Kiyonari, Tanida and Yamagishi 2000), Simpson (2004) demonstrated that prosocials tend to transform the matrix of payoffs in PD such that the payoffs resemble an assurance dilemma (AD). In PD, the reward for defecting if the other cooperates is greater than if

both cooperate. By contrast, in AD, the reward for defecting if the other cooperates is lower than if both cooperate. Importantly, prosocials transformed the matrix in both simultaneous and sequential versions of PD. In this respect, prosocials can be expected to not only initiate cooperation more than proselfs, but also to reciprocate by cooperating more than proselfs.

***Group-level prosocial values (collectivism).*** Similar to those adhering to prosocial values at the individual level, members of groups emphasizing prosocial values are also expected to reciprocate more than members of groups emphasizing more individualistic values (Chen, Chen and Meindl 1998). At the group level, prosocial value preferences are commonly conceptualized using the individualism-collectivism typology (Hofstede 2002; Triandis 1995). Collectivism, much like individual-level prosocial value preferences, implies a preference for outcomes benefiting the group (Triandis 1995).

According to Triandis, groups emphasizing collectivistic values prioritize group goals over individual goals, whereas groups emphasizing individualistic values prioritize individual goals over group goals (Triandis 1995:43). Though widely used, this definition conflates task interdependence with community-oriented value preferences as factors responsible for group prioritization (Wagner 1995). Both task interdependence and community-oriented or prosocial value preferences are expected to promote reciprocity, but for different reasons. Task interdependence refers to “a relationship in which the goals of each individual or subunit can be achieved only if those of the others also can be achieved” (Chen, Chen and Meindl 1998; see also Deutsch 1949). In effect, groups characterized by task interdependence encourage reciprocity by material incentives. With respect to exchanging information, advice, and assistance, workers charged with interdependent tasks who fail to exchange these kinds of favors will find it difficult to be successful in their jobs. On the other hand, members of groups

emphasizing collectivistic values that promote prosociality would be expected to be more willing to reciprocate for different reasons. In such groups, members may reciprocate not because reciprocity is inherently required for their jobs, but because reciprocity reflects a widely shared preference for maximizing collective rather than individual outcomes (Chen, Chen and Meindl 1998; Chatman and Spataro 2005).<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Role of Perceived Motives***

While the prosocial values of receivers or the receivers' group may promote reciprocity, favor givers who are *perceived* as prosocial may also be more likely to inspire reciprocation. Social exchange theorists have often observed that receivers of favors cooperate or reciprocate based on particular views they hold regarding their exchange partners (cf. Buchan, Croson and Dawes 2002; see also Chapter 3 of this dissertation). In an early meta-analysis of 30 studies investigating the effects of others' strategies on one's own in iterated prisoner's dilemma games, Rubin and Brown (1975) noted that the vast majority demonstrated that participants' own cooperativeness significantly increased when others were deemed cooperative (see also McClintock and Liebrand 1988). In a simultaneous cooperation game, De Bruin and Van Lange (1999) similarly found that people gave five times more to others with other-regarding reputations than those who were thought to have self-interested motives.<sup>15</sup> Hoffberg (Chapter 3 of this dissertation) found that recipients who perceived givers as altruistically motivated were more likely to characterize their relationship with givers as cohesive, such that cohesion fully mediated the effect between perceived altruism and recipients' reciprocity in one-shot exchanges

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<sup>14</sup> While this discussion treats tasks interdependence and collectivistic (prosocial) values as conceptually distinct, these attributes are likely highly correlated.

<sup>15</sup> The authors coded reputation as moral/immoral; their definition of morality, however, primarily concerned self-versus other-regarding preferences.

(these effects were observed for moderate favors; perceived motives had no effect on reciprocity when very large favors were received from givers). Moreover, relational cohesion from an initial exchange influenced recipients' generosity towards their original partners in a subsequent unexpected interaction.

### ***Revisiting the Relationship Between Prosocial Values and Reciprocity***

***Individual-level prosocial values.*** Prosocials' transformation of the PD payoff matrix has been hypothesized to occur because prosocials by definition prefer outcomes that benefit others (Simpson 2004; Van Lange 1997). In particular, Van Lange et al. (1997) suggest prosocials are predisposed to prioritize others due to a combination of social learning and genetics (see also Bogaert et al. 2008). This prioritization is often framed in terms of an aversion to equity imbalance (Van Lange 1999; Liebrand et al. 1986; Simpson 2004). For instance, the widely adopted measure used to assess participants' prosociality in experimental studies asks participants to rank a series of inequalities between self and other by preference (Van Lange et al. 1997). Those who maximize joint gain and equality of outcomes are considered prosocial. This framing suggests that prosocials are more inclined than proselves to feel a sense of obligation to return a favor after one has been given so as to restore equity in the relationship. In other words, prosocials may be more apt than proselves to adhere to the norm of reciprocity (Perugini et al. 2003; Lester, Meglino and Korsgaard 2008). If prosocials are more willing to reciprocate than proselves because they are more sensitive to equity imbalances, then we would expect prosocials to be equally willing to reciprocate regardless of the target (giver).

Yet consistent with research indicating the influence of perceived motives on reciprocity, I predict that the relationship between individual-level prosociality and reciprocity is more

accurately explained by an inclination for prosocials to view others as altruistically motivated.<sup>16</sup>

Research on the false consensus effect has demonstrated that people tend to overestimate the prevalence of their own preferences in the wider population (Ross, Greene and House 1977; Marks and Miller 1987; Dawes and Mulford 1996). This effect has been found to hold for a variety of preferences, including social value preferences (Iedema and Poppe 1994; Simpson and Willer 2008). Prosocials are thus more likely than proselves to perceive others as altruistically motivated; conversely, proselves are more likely than prosocials to view others as egoistically motivated. Prosociality may thus promote reciprocity not because of a general predisposition of selflessness, but because prosociality causes people to view others as prosocial. This suggests the following hypotheses:

***Hypothesis 1a:** Prosocials will be more likely to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated.*

***Hypothesis 1b:** Prosocials' tendency to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated will mediate (explain) the relationship between prosociality and willingness to reciprocate.*

Prosocials and proselves may also differ in how they respond to particular attributions. While prosocials are more likely to view a given favor as altruistically motivated, they are also more likely to favorably respond to such an attribution (Van Lange and Kuhlman 1994). Research on the “might-over-morality” hypothesis has demonstrated that prosocials view other prosocials in positive terms as moral and honest (Liebrand et al. 1986; Smeesters et al. 2003). By contrast,

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<sup>16</sup> I use the term “altruistically-motivated” to refer to the intention to increase another’s welfare; “egoistically-motivated,” by contrast, refers to the intention to increase one’s own welfare, regardless of the other. These definitions are similar to the prosocial/proself construct; however I use the altruism terminology to distinguish the perceived intentions of others from one’s own social value preferences. Importantly, perceived motivation is conceptualized as two-dimensional: a favor may be perceived as driven by both egoism and altruism. This study concerns the relative weight by which individuals perceive these respective motivations.

proselfs perceive prosocials as unintelligent and weak. This suggests an interaction between prosocial value preferences and perceived motives, as follows:

***Hypothesis 1c:** Prosocial receivers of favors will be more willing to reciprocate than proself receivers when a favor giver is perceived to be altruistically motivated. By contrast, prosocial receivers will be less willing than proself receivers to reciprocate a favor perceived to be egoistically motivated.*

**Group-level prosocial values.** Social value preferences held at the group level are distinct from individual value preferences. For a value to be a “group value” or reflective of the group’s culture, it must be held by the majority of group members (O’Reilly and Chatman 1996). The potential influence of these values is reflected in O’Reilly and Chatman’s (1996) definition of organizational culture as “a system of shared values defining what is important, and norms, defining appropriate attitudes and behaviors, that guide members’ attitudes and behaviors.” Importantly, while some members may perceive their group’s culture as embodying different values than their own, such members may still be influenced by their group’s culture. As Chatman and Barsade (1995) note, a group’s culture “may help individuals anticipate other members’ likely reactions to their attitudes and behaviors.” This observation reflects the process of social learning, whereby people come to form expectations of others’ behavior by extrapolating from past experiences (Bandura 1977). These expectations can be particularly influential when individuals have ambiguous information about a particular situation at hand (Tesser, Campbell and Mickler 1983; Kelley 1967).

As applied to this study, I predict workers will form judgments about prevailing norms based on their interactions with others in their group, and these judgments will set expectations for the behavior of new interaction partners. In this respect, I expect the relationship between

collectivism and reciprocity to be explained by the perceptions of collectivist group members that others are altruistically motivated (i.e. embodying group-level prosocial values). Thus, I hypothesize:

***Hypothesis 2a:** Members of groups emphasizing collectivistic values will be more likely to perceive a favor as altruistically motivated.*

***Hypothesis 2b:** The tendency for members of groups emphasizing collectivistic values to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated will mediate (explain) the relationship between membership in such groups and willingness to reciprocate.*

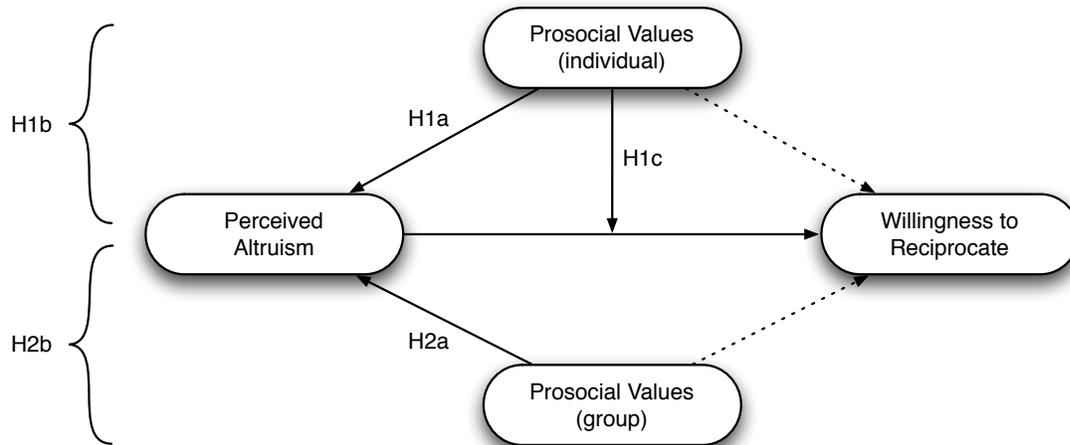
Because a group's shared values form expectations regarding other members' behavior, I expect these predictions to hold even after controlling for group members' prosocial value preferences at the individual level.

Because members of interdependent groups must reciprocate favors to complete their routine tasks, I predict that members of such groups will be equally willing to reciprocate favors regardless of the motives they attribute to favor givers. Accordingly, I hypothesize:

***Hypothesis 2c:** Members of groups characterized by interdependent tasks will be equally willing to reciprocate regardless of the motives attributed to favor givers.*

Hypotheses 1a through 2b are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

**FIGURE 4.1**  
**Theoretical Model Illustrating Prosocial Values, Perceived Altruism, and Willingness to Reciprocate**



## STUDY

### *Research Setting, Sample, and Procedure*

I used quantitative survey data from 188 workers of a large multinational technology company to assess the degree to which perceived motives mediated the effects of both collectivism at the group level and prosocial value preferences at the individual level on workers' willingness to reciprocate favors. To control for extraneous differences between coworkers that would likely exist if respondents were to think of specific individuals in their group, workers in the study engaged in a hypothetical exchange with two fictional coworkers from their group, described in two separate vignettes. Because all survey participants engaged in the same hypothetical exchanges, variation in response due to pre-existing person and situation factors could be assessed.

The site for this study was a large multinational technology company, referred to hereafter as GeoSoft, headquartered in California. GeoSoft was ideal as a field site for several reasons. First, because it is engaged in developing technology, a substantial portion of GeoSoft's workers work on tasks requiring a high degree of interdependence. Some of these groups emphasize collectivistic values while others do not.<sup>17</sup> Second, GeoSoft has similarly structured technology product teams located in the U.S., India, and the People's Republic of China, allowing for country-level comparisons that were expected to influence workers' individual-level social value preferences – a key explanatory variable in the model. Importantly, GeoSoft has standardized policies and practices across its global operations, keeping country-level effects other than those specified in the model to a minimum. Third, there are several departments other than product teams where independent goals are prioritized above group goals, yet where collectivist norms may still be emphasized. This variation in both task interdependence and group-level prosocial values allowed me to investigate how the presence of these factors affected both the perceptions of favor-giver motives as well as workers' willingness to reciprocate favors.

### ***Sample and Procedure***

To control for the effects of power, dependence, and organizational responsibility on perceived motives, the sample was limited to individual contributors (those without managerial responsibilities) and their managers.<sup>18</sup> The target population was stratified along two dimensions: office location (country) and task interdependence (by group). The country-level stratification was intended to introduce greater expected variation of individual-level prosocial values, as

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<sup>17</sup> These characteristics were described by members of GeoSoft's Human Resources department and further corroborated by the subsequent survey.

<sup>18</sup> Managers who had other direct reports that were also managers were excluded (this rule prevented workers at the senior director level or above from participating).

studies by Van Lange and colleagues (1997) indicate that prosocial value preferences are more common in highly interdependent and collectivist societies, as in Asia.<sup>19</sup> The stratification by task interdependence allowed for a comparison between groups that varied on this predictor. Group-level prosocial values were expected to moderately but not fully correlate with task interdependence, such that the sample was expected to contain a fully crossed set of groups marked by interdependence versus group-level prosocial (i.e. collectivistic) values.<sup>20</sup>

Prior to the survey, a senior GeoSoft executive notified department managers of the upcoming survey and requested their cooperation. The executive then sent an electronic message to email distributions lists covering the target sample inviting the workers to complete the survey online. Workers were offered compensation for completing the survey. We emphasized the survey's confidentiality by hosting the survey on a secured server, adopting my academic institution's branding rather than GeoSoft's, and providing follow-up contact information to my university's Institutional Review Board at the outset of the survey. The combined distribution lists contained 742 subscribers. 243 workers responded, suggesting a response rate of 32.7%. As workers may have belonged to more than one distribution list, this response rate reflects a conservative estimate. While the survey was active, GeoSoft underwent an unannounced restructuring, resulting in a significant layoff of its workforce. No further surveys were submitted following the restructuring, thereby limiting the potential response rate. Of the 243 workers who submitted surveys, 55 were dropped due to missing data, yielding a usable sample of 188 respondents (94 from the United States; 30 from India; and 64 from the PRC).<sup>21</sup> Given the low

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<sup>19</sup> The cross-national sample also allowed me to test whether collectivism at the national cultural level was influential in the theoretical model (no significant effects were found).

<sup>20</sup> I stratified the sample by task interdependence rather than group-level prosocial values because task interdependence could be more accurately and objectively assessed by the Human Resources personnel in my discussions with them prior to the survey.

<sup>21</sup> As demographic data was collected at the end of the survey, I was not able to compare whether these respondents differed from those in the final sample.

response rate, it is possible that bias due to self-selection may have influenced the results. If present, such bias would likely have reduced the variance in prosocial values at both the individual and group levels, resulting in a conservative statistical effect.

### ***Survey Design***

Prior to this study, I interviewed 18 GeoSoft workers from the United States and India branches to identify common coworker interactions and pilot test questions to be used in the survey. Surveys distributed to workers in the United States and India offices were written in English, as English is the spoken and written language at work in these branches. The survey distributed to PRC workers was translated into Chinese. Accuracy of all translated terms and phrasing was ensured through multiple iterations of back-translation (Brislin, Lonner and Thorndike 1973).

The survey contained two vignettes, the descriptions of which were a composite of typical workplace interactions mentioned by employees during the preliminary interviews (see Appendix). Each vignette described details involving a colleague who has offered the respondent help with a particular task. After reading each vignette, respondents then answered a series of question concerning the ostensible motivations of the colleague and the respondents' willingness to reciprocate help with the colleague in the future. To assess the ecological validity of each vignette, participants then rated the following statement on a 5-point Likert scale: "I could easily imagine this kind of scenario taking place in my group."

Using vignettes in this context provided a degree of experimental control while involving subjects and contextual factors particular to the field setting. This method eliminated the extraneous differences between coworkers that would likely have existed had respondents been

asked to think of specific colleagues from their group who have recently given them favors. Two vignettes were included rather than one to provide alternative contexts under which favors are given. The vignette characters' motivations for providing a favor were deliberately ambiguous and could be explained by "two plausible stories" or some combination thereof: self-interest (egoism), altruism, or a combination of these motives (see Vargas et al. 2004 and Menon et al. 1999 for similar designs). For each of the scenarios, respondents were asked to assess the relative likelihood of each rationale and answer related questions regarding the respondents' willingness to reciprocate the favors. Unlike most vignettes in traditional lab experiments, the survey vignettes did not contain a manipulation. Following Vargas et al. (2004), differences in the dependent measures were attributed to pre-existing person-situation factors, namely the social value preferences of both the respondents and their respective groups.

### ***Measures***

Except where noted, all measures use a five-point Likert-type scale, anchored at 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.

***Prosocial values - individual level.*** Individual-level prosocial values were assessed using items from Grant's (2008) measure of prosocial and intrinsic motivation and from Miller and Bersoff's (1994) measure for perceived motivation. The corresponding prompt read, "When I help others in my group, I usually do so because..." Respondents rated the following four randomized responses: 1) "It is important to me to do good for others," 2) "I genuinely care about benefiting others," 3) "Helping others ultimately benefits me," and 4) "I'm expected to help others." I measured prosocial values by averaging the first two responses, as these statements reflect internalized intrinsic or value-driven other-regarding preferences.

***Prosocial values - group level (collectivism).*** The measure for group-level prosocial values was derived from the Organizational Cultural Profile (OCP), developed by O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991). The OCP asks respondents to rate their agreement with a list of characteristics describing their group's culture (described as "behaviors or ways of doing things that are generally accepted, valued, or rewarded within your group at GeoSoft"). Respondents rated the following seven items of the OCP associated with the individualism-collectivism dimension: collaborative, people-oriented, individually-demanding (reverse-scored), fair, competitive (reverse-scored), team-oriented, and supportive (Chatman and Spataro 2005).

***Task interdependence.*** The level of task interdependence corresponding to the respondent's group was measured using three items adapted from Wageman, Hackman, and Lehman 2005. The first item asked, "Is the work in your group performed mainly by individuals or by the group as a whole?" (1 = "Each member has his or her own individual job to do; there is no real need for coordination among members; 5 = "The work is a real group effort, requiring a great deal of coordination among members"). The second item asked, "Are individuals in your group expected to help each other or to work things out on their own" (1 = "People are almost always expected to work things out on their own"; 5 = "People are almost always expected to help each other"). The third item asked, "Are individuals in your group evaluated primarily on progress towards individual goals or group goals? (Group goals require the contributions of others; individual goals do not)." (1 = "Evaluation is based primarily on progress towards individual goals," 5 = "Evaluation is based primarily on progress towards group goals"). Responses to these three items were first standardized and then averaged.

***Perceived motives.*** I assessed respondents' perception of the vignette coworkers' motives using a measure similar to the one used for the respondents' prosocial values. The prompt read as

follows: “Please indicate your agreement or disagreement with the following reasons for why [coworker name] may be motivated to help.” Respondents were asked to rate the following four randomized statements: 1) “Because it is important to [coworker name] to do good for others,” 2) “Because [coworker name] genuinely cares about my needs,” 3) “Because people are expected to help in my group,” 4) “Because [coworker name] is benefiting [himself/herself] by offering and providing me help.” Responses from the first two items were averaged and then standardized, yielding a measure of the respondent’s perception of the vignette character’s prosocial motivation. To further assess whether the respondent perceived the vignette coworkers’ favor as genuinely motivated by altruism, this measure was averaged with a standardized measure of sincerity adapted from Larzelere and Huston’s (1980) dyadic trust scale, which asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement of the following statement, “[coworker name] is likely sincere.”

***Willingness to reciprocate.*** I adopted Ames et al.’s (2004) measure for willingness to reciprocate to assess respondents’ willingness to reciprocate each vignette coworker’s favor. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement with the statement, “I’d be willing to do a favor for [coworker name] in the future.”

***Control variables.*** While the gender of the vignette characters was randomized, I also controlled for the respondents’ sex to eliminate potential bias due to same-sex or opposite-sex pairings. I also controlled for the respondents’ ethnicity to ensure any variance in prosocial values introduced by ethnicity could not be attributed to extraneous factors related to ethnicity. Lastly, research on general trust suggests that individuals with high levels of generalized trust may be more inclined to reciprocate with strangers, such as new members of a worker’s group (Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994). Generalized trust, while expected to be strongly correlated

with prosocial value preferences, is conceptually distinct. Generalized trust reflects a proclivity to trust unknown others, whereas prosocial value preferences refer to a desire for outcomes that benefit others (in addition to benefitting the self). Generalized trust was added as a control as a robust test that the effects of individual-level prosocial values were not due to a possibly related predisposition for generally trusting others. I adopted the standard measure for generalized trust used in the General Social Survey (“Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful dealing with people”; Glaeser et al. 2000).

## RESULTS

Table 4.1 reports means, standard deviations, and correlations among the primary variables in the model. While I had included a cross-national sample to maximize variance in social value orientation, the direction of correlation between social value orientation and country was opposite of predictions suggesting that prosocial values are more common among Asians than non-Asians (cf. Van Lange et al. 1997). Among GeoSoft workers, Asians were less likely to report prosocial values than non-Asians. This discrepancy appears due in large part to the significant variance in age across the two ethnicity categories. In their 1997 study, Van Lange and colleagues found empirical support for their hypothesis that age and prosocial values should be positively correlated. Among GeoSoft workers, more than half of the Asian workers were under 30 years of age; by contrast, the majority of non-Asian workers were over 30, with nearly half over the age of 41. After controlling for age, workers’ ethnicity loses significance as a predictor of prosocial values ( $\beta = -.07$ , n.s.).

Across both vignettes, more than 75% of respondents indicated they could imagine the scenarios described occurring in their group (mean = 3.84; SD = .76). Respondents however rated

Scenario 2 as more likely to occur in their group than Scenario 1 (Scenario 1 mean = 3.69 vs. Scenario 2 mean = 4.00,  $t = -4.67$ ,  $p < .001$ , two-tailed). As the majority of respondents indicated both scenarios could realistically occur in their group, responses to the post-vignette questions were averaged together for the analyses discussed below.

I used ordinary least squares regression to test the main hypotheses in the study; results are reported in Tables 7 and 8.

**TABLE 4.1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

Variable	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Sex											
Male	56.76%										
Female	43.24%										
2. Age			.14								
18 - 30	34.76%										
31 - 40	40.11%										
41+	25.13%										
3. Ethnicity			-.18*	-.53*							
American	45.16%										
Asian	54.84%										
4. General trust	1.35	.75	.06	.03	.11						
5. Prosocial values - individual	4.23	.67	-.07	.17*	-.17*	.22*					
6. Prosocial values - group	3.44	.57	-.07	.02	.01	.16*	.34*				
7. Task interdependence	.00	.99	-.12	-.19*	.31*	.19*	.06	.28*			
8. Perceived motive (altruistic)	-.02	.98	.05	.06	.03	.37*	.34*	.41*	.19*		
9. Positive anticipation	4.06	.57	-.04	-.13	.10	.18*	.20*	.29*	.31*	.56*	
10. Willingness to reciprocate	4.18	.56	-.01	-.03	-.03	.17*	.22*	.26*	.19*	.55*	.68*

\* p<0.05

**TABLE 4.2****Results of the Standardized Regression Analysis Predicting the Effects of Prosocial Values on Perceived Altruism**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sex (0 = Male; 1 = Female)	.06	.06	.04	.08
Ethnicity (0 = American; 1 = Asian)	.05	.00	-.05	.03
General trust	.29***	.31***	.34***	.26***
Prosocial values - individual (PV-I)	.28***			.19**
Prosocial values - group (PV-G)		.36***		.30***
Task interdependence			.15*	.05
R <sup>2</sup>	.20	.26	.15	.29
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.18	.25	.13	.26
Overall F	11.13	15.93	8.04	11.87
<i>df</i>	4, 178	4, 180	4, 180	6, 176

Beta coefficients are standardized.

+  $\leq .10$

\*  $p \leq .05$

\*\*  $p \leq .01$

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

All tests are one-tailed.

**TABLE 4.3****Results of the Standardized Regression Analysis Predicting the Mediating Effects of Perceived Motives on Willingness to Reciprocate**

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Sex (0 = Male; 1 = Female)	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.05	.01	-.04	-.05
Ethnicity (0 = American; 1 = Asian)	-.01	-.06	-.12+	-.06	-.05	-.07	-.07
General trust	.13*	.13*	.13*	-.05	.10	-.05	-.04
Prosocial values - individual (PV-I)	.18*				.12+	.01	.04
Prosocial values - group (PV-G)		.22**			.15*	-.01	-.01
Task interdependence			.20**		.13*	.10+	.13*
Perceived motive (altruistic)				.56***		.56***	.52***
PV-I x Perceived motive							.18**
R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.07	.06	.30	.10	.32	.35
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.05	.04	.28	.07	.30	.32
Overall F	2.69	3.61	2.98	19.31	3.37	11.97	11.9
<i>df</i>	4, 178	4, 180	4, 180	4, 180	6, 176	7, 175	8, 174

Beta coefficients are standardized.

+  $\leq .10$

\*  $p \leq .05$

\*\*  $p \leq .01$

\*\*\*  $p \leq .001$

All tests are one-tailed.

*Effects of perceived motives.* To test the mediating effect of perceived motive, I followed the procedure recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). They argued that three conditions must be upheld to demonstrate full mediation. First, both the mediating variable (perceived motive) and the independent variable (prosocial values) must be significantly related to the dependent variable (willingness to reciprocate) when regressed separately. As shown in Table 4.3, this condition is supported by the data. Workers were significantly more willing to reciprocate when the vignette coworkers were perceived to be altruistically motivated (Model 4,  $\beta = .56, p \leq .001$ ). Workers in groups characterized by prosocial values were significantly more willing to reciprocate favors (Model 5,  $\beta = .15, p \leq .05$ ). When regressed in isolation, individual-level prosociality was significantly related to willingness to reciprocate (Model 1,  $\beta = .18, p \leq .05$ ), however this relationship diminished somewhat after controlling for group-level prosocial values and task interdependence (Model 5,  $\beta = .12, p \leq .10$ ). This is likely due to the significant interaction effect between individual-level prosocial values and perceived motive (Model 7,  $\beta = .18, p \leq .01$ ; discussed below).

Second, the relationship between the independent variable and the mediating variable must also be significant. This condition is also supported by the data, as shown in Table 4.2. As predicted in Hypothesis 1a, prosocial workers were more likely to perceive the fictional coworker's favor as altruistically motivated (Model 4,  $\beta = .19, p \leq .01$ ). Respondents in groups emphasizing collectivistic values were also more likely to perceive favors as altruistically motivated, as predicted in Hypothesis 2a (Model 4,  $\beta = .30, p \leq .001$ ). Notably, this analysis included controls for individual-level prosocial values as well as the level of task interdependence of the respondents' group.

Third, the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable must lose significance when the mediating variable is added to the model. If this condition, along with the previous two, holds, then the mediating variable is said to “explain” the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable (Baron and Kenny 1986). Table 4.3 illustrates support for this condition. As predicted in Hypothesis 1b, perceived motive mediated the relationship between individual-level prosocial values and respondents’ willingness to reciprocate. This mediation effect is demonstrated by the loss of significance for individual-level prosocial values when perceived motive is added to the full model (Model 5,  $\beta = .12$ ,  $p \leq .10$ ; Model 7,  $\beta = .04$ , n.s.). This indicates that prosocial respondents’ increased willingness to reciprocate favors can be explained by their inclination to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated. Correspondingly, Hypothesis 2b predicted that perceived motive would mediate the relationship between group-level prosocial values and respondents’ willingness to reciprocate. This hypothesis was supported as well, as indicated by the loss of significance for group-level prosocial values when perceived motive is added to the regression equation (Model 5,  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p \leq .05$ ; Model 7,  $\beta = -.01$ , n.s.). The tendency for respondents in groups emphasizing collectivistic values to perceive favors as altruistically motivated explains why these respondents were more willing to reciprocate than those in groups which do not emphasize such values.

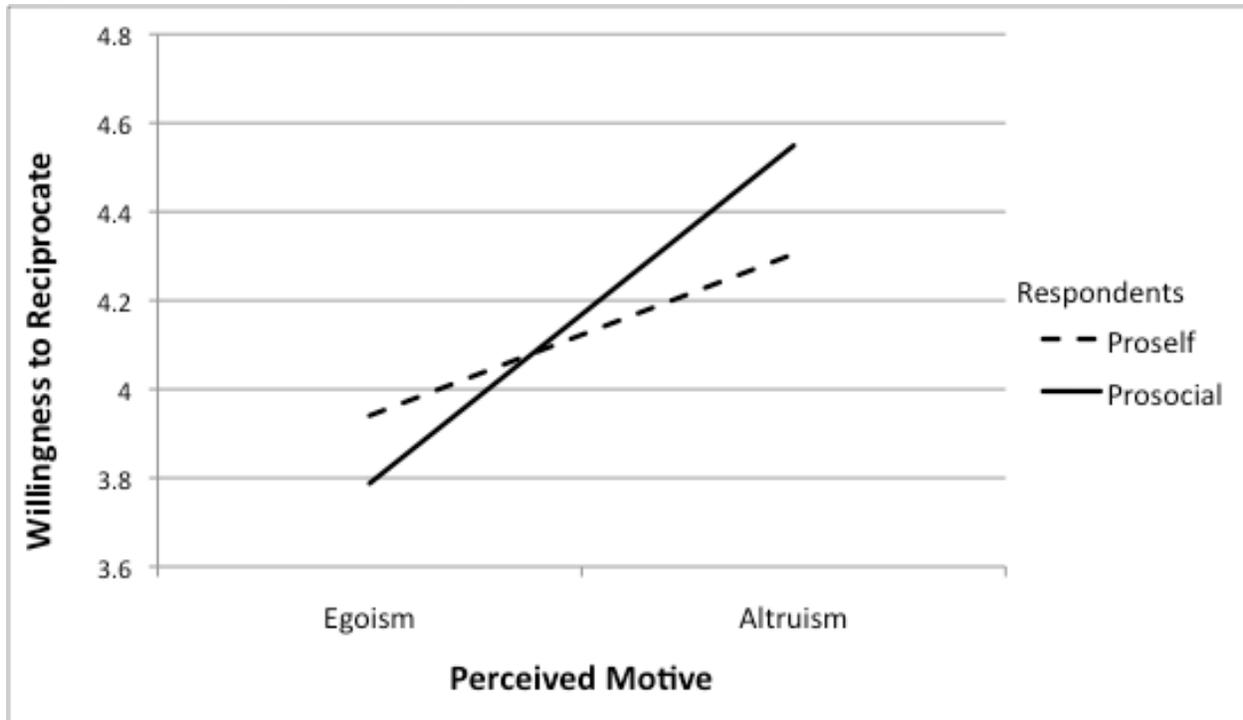
By contrast, Hypothesis 2c predicted that perceived motives would not mediate the relationship between a respondent group’s level of task interdependence and the respondent’s willingness to reciprocate. In other words, respondents in groups marked by task interdependence were expected to be equally willing to reciprocate favors regardless of the motive they attribute to favor givers. This hypothesis was also supported. Model 5 (Table 4.3) indicates that task interdependence was a significant predictor of respondents’ willingness to

reciprocate ( $\beta = .13, p \leq .05$ ), yet the significance remains when perceived motives is added in the full model (Model 7,  $\beta = .13, p \leq .05$ ). Moreover, while members of groups emphasizing collectivistic values were more likely to perceive others as altruistic, this was not the case for interdependent groups. After controlling for the respondents' individual and group-level prosocial value preferences, Table 4.2 indicates respondents in groups marked by task interdependence were no more likely to attribute altruistic motives than egoistic motives (Model 4,  $\beta = .05, n.s.$ ).

***Interaction effect.*** Hypothesis 1c predicted an interaction effect between individual-level prosocial values and perceived motive on respondents' willingness to reciprocate. In other words, prosocials who attributed altruistic motives to favor givers were predicted to be more willing to reciprocate than proselfs who similarly attributed altruistic motives; by contrast, prosocials who attributed egoistic motives to favor givers were predicted to be less willing to reciprocate than proselfs who attributed egoistic motives. This hypothesis was supported, as indicated by the significant interaction effect in Table 4.3 (Model 7,  $\beta = .18, p \leq .01$ ). Figure 4.2 illustrates this effect using the method described by Aiken and West (1991) while keeping the control variables in the analysis. While the overall interaction effect is significant, the difference between prosocials' and proselfs' willingness to reciprocate is only significant when the favor giver is perceived to be altruistic ( $t = 2.50, p \leq .01$ ) rather than when the favor giver is perceived to be egoistic ( $t = 1.10, n.s.$ ).

**FIGURE 4.2**

**Interaction effect of Perceived Motive and Individual-Level Prosocial Values on Respondents' Willingness to Reciprocate**



## **GENERAL DISCUSSION**

I found empirical support for the mediating role of perceived motives in the relationship between prosocial values and willingness to reciprocate. As expected, prosocial values at both the individual and group levels were associated with respondents' increased willingness to reciprocate favors. Prosocial workers were also more likely to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated, even when controlling for prosocial values at the group level. Similarly, members of groups emphasizing prosocial (collectivistic) values were more likely to perceive favor givers as altruistically motivated, even when controlling for prosocial values at the individual level. The tendency for those holding prosocial values at either level to view favor

givers as altruistically motivated explained the relationship between prosocial values and willingness to reciprocate.

This study provides empirical support that prosocial values are not indicative of a generalized selflessness; rather, prosocial values may shape the lens by which adherents view others. Such other-perceptions in turn may promote prosocial behavior. In particular, this study investigated the possibility that the relationship between prosocial values and reciprocity can be explained by the propensity for those holding prosocial values to view others as altruistically motivated. Since people tend to reciprocate more with others who appear to be motivated by altruism, favor receivers with prosocial motives at either the individual or group level are more inclined to reciprocate.

These findings suggest the importance of perceived motives in social exchange. Most social exchange research has not considered the effects of such perceptions. One exception is Hechter's (1987) work on solidarity. Hechter suggests that prosocial motives may help reduce monitoring costs. For example, if it is known that you are prosocial, others can expect your cooperation without overseeing your behavior or incurring costs of enforcement. One implication of the current study is that possessing altruistic motives confers other advantages as well: not only are others more likely to reciprocate with such individuals, but those holding prosocial values are more likely to perceive others as altruistically motivated – and this in turn affects the quality of relationships and productivity. Another implication is that this dynamic can result not just through possessing internalized prosocial motives, but also by belonging to a group that emphasizes prosocial values, even if one does not subscribe to these values oneself. In short, context matters.

While workers characterized by prosocial values at either the individual or group level were equally likely to perceive others as altruistically motivated, the underlying mechanisms are likely different for individual-level versus group-level prosocial values. Research on the false consensus effect suggests that people tend to overestimate the degree to which others share their own values. While this may explain why prosocials tended to view favor givers as altruistically motivated, it does not explain the same perceptions for members of *groups* emphasizing collectivistic values. Rather, members of collectivist groups may be more likely to perceive others as altruistically motivated through a process of social learning. Even for group members who do not hold internalized prosocial value preferences, people in collectivist groups may come to expect altruistic motives based on prior experiences within the group environment. Because a majority within the group shares these values, group members come to form expectations that others within the group will hold such values, unless there is sufficient evidence to the contrary. One area of future research is to further investigate the conditions under which group members who have not internalized widely shared group-level value preferences nevertheless “project” these value preferences onto others.

### ***Managerial Implications***

This research has practical implications for organizations seeking to improve their workgroup productivity. If reciprocity is attenuated by perceptions of favor givers’ self-interest and facilitated by receivers’ prosocial values, it may be more important for organizations to screen for prosocial values rather than to rely more exclusively on situational factors that promote teamwork. Organizations that do not screen for such person-level value preferences will have mixed populations of prosocials and proselves. Such heterogeneity may be more problematic

for groups emphasizing collectivistic values than for groups that feature interdependent tasks, as the members of the former will be more sensitive to motives when exchanging favors.

### ***Limitations and Future Directions***

Because no behavioral measure of reciprocity was used, a positive relationship between self-reported willingness to reciprocate and actual reciprocity has been assumed. Future studies could test the hypotheses with actual exchanges in more controlled conditions, perhaps by pairing workers in sequential prisoners' dilemma games that simulate favor exchange. Such studies would need to account for the magnitude of the resources exchanged, as prior research has indicated perceived motives may play a less substantial role in reciprocating very large favors (Ames et al. 2004).

Given the difference in my results for interdependence versus group-level prosocial values, one implication of the findings is the importance of distinguishing among various definitions of collectivism in studies of group culture. Many studies of collectivism conflate a group's degree of task interdependence with prosocial value orientation. Yet these dimensions are conceptually independent and are measured quite differently. While task interdependence can be more objectively assessed by outside observers, assessing a group's values requires a more informed inventory. One limitation of my study is that collectivism was self-reported. While prior research has shown high correlations between self-report measures and management-reported measures of collectivism, future studies could employ more robust measures of collectivism by using group members' aggregated assessments of their culture (Chatman and Barsade 1995; cf. Chatman and Spataro 2005).

In the present study, favor exchange was analyzed between individuals who lack a relationship history, thereby eliminating confounding effects related to reputation. Moreover, the propensity for future interaction (the “shadow of the future”) was ambiguous. Workers would likely interact with this individual again, but not necessarily so – a context that mirrors many exchanges within large organizations. A wide range of research on social dilemmas indicates that people’s strategies for cooperation may differ depending on the likelihood of future interaction (cf. Axelrod 1980). Future research could examine whether perceived motives matter to the same degree in ongoing relationships.

On a related note, motives perceived in one exchange may be influential in future exchanges with others. Research on negotiations has shown that performance in past negotiations influences one’s performance in future negotiations with other partners (O’Connor, Arnold and Burris 2005). Similarly, research on indirect reciprocity has demonstrated that people reciprocate more with others who have behaved altruistically in previous exchanges (Simpson and Willer 2008). These studies suggest that perceptions of motives may have contagion effects. If proselves tend to perceive others as egoistically motivated, reciprocity is diminished, with a corresponding attenuation in trust and solidarity. Conversely, reciprocity is reinforced when individuals and groups characterized by prosocial values view others as altruistically motivated. Future research might examine potential contagion effects of such perceptions in exchange networks.

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## APPENDIX

SCENARIO 1<sup>22</sup>. Please read and consider the following:

You've been working hard on an upcoming presentation that requires you to share your work for the first time with a group of senior directors. If you do well, it may help your chances to temporarily fill in for a senior coworker while he's away for three months (this would allow you to earn greater pay without much additional responsibility). But because you're not familiar with your audience, you're having a difficult time preparing for the presentation.

[Scott / Nicole]<sup>23</sup>, another experienced employee who is also being considered to fill in for the senior colleague, has recently joined your group and has experience presenting to the senior directors. [Scott / Nicole] knows the directors' expectations. After hearing from a coworker about your presentation, he stays late one day to help you for a few hours.

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SCENARIO 2. Please read and consider the following:

You've been working hard on a project for the last several weeks. It is taking longer than expected because you are unfamiliar with ProWare, a software package required to complete the project. You mention this at Tuesday's weekly group meeting. The group meeting is attended by the other members of your group, your manager, and the vice president of your department, who has dropped in to hear how things are going.

[Scott / Nicole], another member of your group, speaks up at the meeting and says that he would be more than happy to help out. Afterwards, [Scott / Nicole] spends a few hours working with you to solve some of the ProWare issues you're having.

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<sup>22</sup> The order of these two scenarios was randomized.

<sup>23</sup> The coworker's name for the first scenario was randomly selected from this pair; the unselected name was then used in the second scenario. The names used in the India and China surveys were culturally appropriate for those locales.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

As focused arenas where social structure and individual agency come together, organizations are rife with incentives that contend with people's values and influence people's self-presentations (Baumeister 1989; Hochschild 1983). Motivated by this observation, this dissertation has investigated what happens when institutionalized incentives inform routine social interactions, such as reciprocal exchanges between coworkers. To gain purchase on this inquiry, I cast light on the hazy terrain of authenticity and sincerity, clarifying these terms while situating them in a broader empirical literature. I then examined existing theories of reciprocity, noting how they neglect to address the human ability to distinguish behavior from the motives that underlie such behavior. I developed a complementary theory of reciprocity whereby people's ability to distinguish between behavior and motives is predicted to influence cohesion between exchange partners. I hypothesized that this cohesion in turn not only informs recipients' reciprocity, but transcends initial encounters to influence recipients' generosity towards their partners in subsequent interactions. These predictions received empirical support in the online experiment reported in Chapter 3.

Having demonstrated the importance of perceived motives in reciprocal exchange, I investigated personal and situational factors irrespective of favor givers themselves that may shape such perceptions. In particular, I developed and tested a theory predicting that perceptions of sincerity are informed by (a) individual differences in recipients' social value preferences (e.g. proself, prosocial) and (b) situational differences in the collectivism of a recipient's group. These predictions were supported by cross-cultural survey data I collected from employees in a large

multinational firm. The results were also consistent with the hypothesis that prosocial value preferences at the individual level moderate the degree to which perceived sincerity manifests as increased reciprocity. Lastly, I found support for the further prediction that perceived sincerity mediates the relationship between prosocial values and reciprocity.

The findings from these two empirical studies shed new light on existing theories of reciprocity in two important ways. First, this research challenges normative and genetic theories of reciprocity that merely attend to the observable mechanics of exchange. In particular, both the norm of reciprocity and reciprocal altruism lack the explanatory breadth to account for recipients' future generosity toward favor givers beyond a focal exchange. Rather, these explanations suggest that upon restoring equity to the relationship by reciprocating, recipients have "resolved" the exchange; following the focal exchange, recipients should thus exhibit the same degree of commitment towards their exchange partner as if the focal exchange had never taken place. Moreover, both the norm of reciprocity and reciprocal altruism emphasize how the potential payback of giving makes the giving of favors worthwhile. Yet this logic assumes an intention of egoism, an intention that paradoxically limits reciprocity if perceived by recipients. In other words, the norm of reciprocity—when made salient by perceiving the payback drive of the giver—actually impedes reciprocity. The reciprocity model offered in this dissertation moves beyond these behaviorist explanations to account for the impact of such perceptions on exchange outcomes. In accounting for this impact, more accurate predictions can be made with respect to exchange outcomes and the development of long-term cohesion.

Second, this research challenges the widely held perspective that prosocial values and group collectivism reflect a general concern for others. I find support for an alternative argument, namely that prosocial values held by individuals or groups promote reciprocity not because such

values reflect a general selflessness, but because such values inform how the motivations of others are perceived. At the individual level, prosocial values are routinely framed as an aversion to equity imbalance. This framing suggests that prosocials are more inclined than proselfs to feel obligated to return a favor after one has been given, so as to restore equity in the relationship. In other words, prosocials may be more apt than proselfs to adhere to the norm of reciprocity (Perugini et al. 2003; Lester, Meglino and Korsgaard 2008). Yet if prosocials are more willing to reciprocate than proselfs because they are more sensitive to equity imbalances, then we would expect prosocials to be equally willing to reciprocate regardless of the target giver. Similarly, members of collectivist groups are commonly thought to prioritize group goals over individual goals. If this were the case, we would likewise expect members of collectivist groups to be equally willing to reciprocate regardless of the giver.

Yet findings from the study in Chapter 4 suggest otherwise. Given that recipients holding prosocial values at the individual or group level appear to project these values onto favor givers, recipients are more likely to reciprocate—not because they are generally more selfless, but because they are more likely to perceive their partners' helpfulness as altruistically motivated. Since people reciprocate more in general with those having altruistic intentions (as illustrated in Chapter 3), people holding prosocial values inevitably reciprocate more. Importantly however, such reciprocity occurs under recipients' assumption that givers share their prosocial values. When prosocial recipients encounter favor givers who seem egoistically motivated, such recipients actually reciprocate at lower levels than proself recipients. As argued in Chapter 4, these findings suggest the importance of screening for prosocial values when forming groups, rather than relying on extrinsic incentives to promote teamwork.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH**

In Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss potential areas of future research with respect to perceived sincerity in reciprocal exchange. I thus now return to the arena of authenticity and sincerity more generally, suggesting four areas of potential research that warrant further inquiry.

### ***Macro-micro Investigations***

With respect to global trends, such as urbanization, increased mobility, and virtual communication, the study of authenticity and sincerity will be of increasing concern going forward, yet the nature of this macro-micro intersection remains unclear. At present, virtually no work exists on the micro-macro link between authenticity, sincerity, and macro-level phenomena. With respect to the macro-micro link, several questions remain. Will authenticity be facilitated by an increase in options to pursue self-values, or will it be impeded by the increasingly complex social contexts brought about by globalization? Will people develop greater tolerance for inconsistencies between self-presentation and self-concept (both from the POV of the self and the observer), or will globalizing trends bring a need for stronger authentication standards and measures? Answers to such questions will no doubt fuel the need for more micro-level studies of authenticity.

### ***The Intersection of Authenticity and Sincerity***

Investigating authenticity and sincerity together rather than in isolation likely reveals how they function. The creation of the self-concept, for instance, is a dynamic process, occurring within an ongoing interplay of social interactions, one of which is the authentication process. In the authentication process, people are judged by the perceived verity of their self-presentations;

these judgments in turn likely inform the self-concept and one's feelings of authenticity.

Furthermore, the self-concept can inform the authentication process, as when employees project their self-values onto their colleagues and deduce sincerity accordingly (see Chapter 4 of this dissertation). Further research could investigate the influence of other types of self-values on the authentication process, such as one's own capacity or comfort for dissemblance.

More research is also needed to better understand the link between insincere self-presentation and inauthenticity suggested by studies of emotional labor. Given the stark portrait of economically disadvantaged workers in the service sector compromising their authenticity to pay the bills, research on emotional labor has contributed to a broader sociological understanding of the fallout of economic inequality (Schwalbe et al. 2000). But the impact of emotional labor on authenticity is not well understood. For instance, inauthenticity may be less likely to result from insincere self-presentations in interactions between strangers, relative to those with coworkers or friends (Kádár and Mills 2011). Along these lines, perhaps some forms of insincere self-presentation strategies (such as insincere facial signals) may be less apt to weaken privately felt authenticity than other forms (such as insincere verbal statements), just as deep acting is less likely to negatively affect authenticity than surface acting. Moreover, more research is needed to understand both directions of the causal link between sincere self-presentation and authenticity. Do sincere self-presentations yield greater felt authenticity? Conversely, are people who feel authentic more sincere, or are they more apt to engage in insincere self-presentations given their own comfort? Because self-presentation can in turn influence others' behavior, investigation into these questions may yield insight into how and whether feelings of authenticity are prone to diffusion across networks.

### ***Self-Concept Anchorage***

A third area warranting further research concerns self-concept anchorage. As with other personality typologies, self-concept anchorage is meaningful insofar as it reflects a transituational quality with micro and/or macro-level consequences. Certainly more long-term studies are needed to assess the robustness of anchorage over time and place. With respect to its consequence, I believe distinguishing between *impulsive* and *institutional* anchorages may yield productive findings for organizational behavior and institutional design more broadly. With respect to institutional design, Turner (1976) argued different mechanisms of social control are needed for *institutionals* versus *impulsives*. Current social control methods—with their emphasis on internalization and enforcement of norms and values—appear to assume a populace with an *institutional* anchorage. While norm enforcement may be effective for *institutionals* who see norms as an opportunity to act on their values (e.g. integrity, patriotism), other means are required for *impulsives*, who see norms as cramping the expression of the true self. Further research is needed to identify what these means might be.

Scholarship on person-organization fit could use authenticity measures (e.g. Kernis and Goldman's [2006] Authenticity Inventory) as a key indicator for assessing fit, with self-concept anchorage distinctions providing additional insight into the alignment between person and organizational values. In this respect, *impulsives* may represent a particular challenge in institutionalized settings, given their desire to be free of role obligations. Sloan (2007) found that *impulsives* are indeed more likely to feel inauthentic (and correspondingly burned out with their jobs) in workplace settings in general, yet her survey of state employees aggregated a vast array of roles and contexts. Further research could help identify the work contexts in which *impulsives* can feel authentic while nevertheless operating in a bureaucratic structure.

With respect to authenticating peers, variation in self-concept anchorage could help explain how and when people differ in their interpretations of others self-presentations. For instance, if self-concept anchorage is prone to the false consensus effect, then *impulsives* may be more apt to see others who enthusiastically embody social norms as insincere, since *impulsives* would be projecting their own authenticity desires onto others. Similarly, *institutionals* may have difficulty understanding others who seek freedom from institutional constraints, since *institutionals* feel most at home in such conditions.

More research is also needed to understand what causes anchorages to form. Are anchorages passed on genetically, or are they a response to cultural upbringing? Or are they merely reflective of an individual's current social circumstances? *Impulsives* feel most authentic when acting free of social obligations, norms, and other social structural constraints—i.e. the same environmental conditions in which *institutionals* thrive and feel most at home. Perhaps *institutionals* are more apt to internalize external norms such that the locus of causality feels internal rather than external when adhering to them. If this is the case, *institutionals* (in contrast to *impulsives*) may simply be functioning in environments where their psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and connectedness are being met, as these are the conditions by which extrinsic norms are most likely to be integrated with the self (Ryan and Deci 2000). Further research is needed to test such a claim.

### ***Flexible Self-Conceptions***

The fourth area of potential research concerns the robustness of the true self as it is subjectively conceived. Post-modernists have critiqued the idea of the true self, arguing that self-conceptions are mere social constructs (Gergen 1991). Turner (1976) and others have responded

by suggesting that whether or not there is a true self is irrelevant—what matters is that people perceive there is a true self. Yet recent research on self-construal (Cross, Gore and Morris 2003) suggests that the post-modernist critique applies to self-perceptions as well, since many individuals hold disparate, relationally-contingent identities that may all “feel” authentic. If people can manage multiple true selves, further research is needed to understand how people resolve these identities when they appear to be in conflict within a particular situation. English and Chen (2007) suggest that culture plays a critical role. In their study of cultural influences on self-concept stability, they found that Asian-Americans are more prone to holding context-specific self-views relative to European-Americans. Furthermore, authenticity for Asian-Americans was experienced as remaining true to established relational identities rather than feeling aligned with a more unified self-concept. English and Chen attribute these cultural disparities to the “dialecticism” of East Asian culture—i.e. its acceptance of contradiction and change.

Cultural variation in how authenticity is experienced also raises questions about the generalizability of research on emotional labor. Most studies of emotional labor have been conducted in western countries, where the effects of post-industrialization (including the increase of women in the workforce) in the latter half of the twentieth century have been most prominent. Now that East Asian countries are experiencing similar trends, new research on emotional labor in these contexts is needed. For instance, it is unclear whether the negative effects attributed to emotional labor may be mitigated by the more relationally contingent view of the self-concept among East Asian populations. More research is also needed to better understand the cultural factors responsible for more socially malleable self-conceptions. To what degree, for instance, does a population’s heterogeneity with respect to values, ethnicity, etc. reify self-conceptions or

alternatively make them more flexible?

With respect to learning, Lerner's (1993) observation that imitation is necessary for discovery suggests that flexible self-conceptions may facilitate the learning process. In the experiments conducted by Lenton et al. (2012), participants were asked to describe situations where they experienced feeling inauthentic. The article provided two example descriptions given by participants, both of which were situations where the participant was in a new situation that he or she had not yet mastered (one was a job interview, the other was a student's first day at university). Additional research could investigate this potential link between experiencing inauthenticity and learning, the results of which could raise awareness about the risk-reward balance of discovery.

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