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I feel unique, therefore I am: The development and preliminary validation of the personal sense of uniqueness (PSU) scale

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ABSTRACT

Although the concept of uniqueness has always been special in psychology, there is no psychometric tool for measuring individuals' sense of uniqueness. The research reported herein aimed to develop and validate a self-report measurement tool to assess individuals' sense of uniqueness. Five studies were conducted to confirm the factor structure of the personal sense of uniqueness scale and to assess its construct validity. The results of the first ($n = 274$) and second ($n = 676$) studies showed that the sense of uniqueness is a one-dimensional construct. The results of the third study ($n = 45$) confirmed that the scores on this new measure are stable. The fourth ($n = 138$) and fifth ($n = 148$) studies showed that this one-dimensional construct was strongly related to positive mental health indicators as well as personality and basic psychological needs.

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1. Introduction

Uniqueness is one of the most important dimensions of personal identity and refers to individuals' private sense of experiencing the self that can only be acknowledged by the individuals themselves. Among many others, Rogers (1961, 1995), for example, stresses the therapeutic impact of understanding clients' unique/private ways of experiencing the world. He states that sense of personal uniqueness is developed through the giving of non-possessive love and caring by caregivers, which fosters self-actualization. Frankl (1959), similarly, states that the sense of personal uniqueness is a basic requirement for finding meaning in life and happiness.

Unfortunately, the concept of uniqueness itself appears to occupy a rather limited space in the field. The current research in positive psychology focuses only on the seemingly related concept of the need for uniqueness (Lynn & Snyder, 2002; Snyder & Fromkin, 1980). Based on a comparison with other people, the need for uniqueness (NfU) is defined on the extreme similarity and extreme dissimilarity continuum. According to this theory of uniqueness, a moderate level of similarity to others is defined as the healthy point on this continuum. A common result of this line of research is that when individuals perceive themselves as similar to others,

they have a NfU whereas when they perceive themselves as different, the need is to be similar.

The NfU is considered as a positive striving for differentness (Snyder & Fromkin, 1977). Research findings imply, however, that the NfU may be a defense mechanism, rather than a positive personal strength. As Lynn and Snyder (2002) state, research on the NfU showed that people are more willing to be unique on positive rather than negative traits, on abilities rather than opinions, and on normative rather than counter-normative behaviors. Similarly, research (Walsh & Smith, 2007) indicates that feeling similar or dissimilar is related to coping with fear of death. Moreover, the results of research give important clues that this motive to be unique may not refer to mental health at all, for example, a negative relationship between the NfU and homopositivity (Morrison & Bearden, 2007) has been found. A number of researchers, moreover, have criticisms about the construct because of its emphasis on risky displays of uniqueness (Lynn & Harris, 1997).

It is clear that there is a lack of a tool to measure individuals' personal sense of being unique. The basic assumption is that the sense of uniqueness (SoU) as a one-dimensional construct is different from the NfU and is associated with positive functioning and mental health. Although a personal sense of uniqueness is partly based on the individual's comparison of self with others, it also reflects one's private evaluation of one's sense of uniqueness rather than one's need to be different from others. The SoU, thus, reflects personal perceptions of self that are unique to the individual and different from others. The basic aim of this research is to develop

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and validate a measure in order to tap the personal SoU experienced by individuals.

Accordingly, in the first and second of the five studies the factor structure of the SoU was validated by data collected from samples of Turkish university students. The third study was conducted in order to obtain support for re-test reliability. The fourth study sought to determine the relationships of the SoU and NfU with such positive mental health variables as optimism, hope, and resilience. It was expected that the SoU would be correlated at least moderately with these variables, but weakly correlated with the NfU. The aim of the fifth study was to expand the validity estimates by calculating the correlations of this new construct with negative and positive mental health variables, as well as personality. It is indicated that positive conceptualizations of mental health do not refer to the reverse situations considered in negative conceptualizations (Snyder & Lopez, 2002). In other words, according to the positive psychology movement, well-being is not simply the reverse of ill-being. In accordance with these presuppositions, it is expected that sense of personal uniqueness is a personal characteristic that contributes to the positive indicators of mental health (e.g., self-esteem, autonomy, and extraversion) rather than negative indicators (e.g., depression and neuroticism). Convenience sampling method is used in all studies.

2. Study 1 (scale development, EFA, and initial reliability)

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants

The research sample used for the exploratory factor analysis was comprised of 274 undergraduate students (130 male and 144 female). The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 27 years with a mean age of 21.

2.1.2. Scale development and item generation

The purpose of this phase was to develop a set of items to tap the SoU and to explore the underlying factor structure of the items. We believed that the SoU is a one-dimensional construct referring to the personal/private perception of the self as distinct from others (e.g., Frankl, 1959; Rogers, 1961, 1995). Fifteen items were generated by the authors. Different items which have the same meaning combined into a single item, resulting in a final list of 10 items to be included in the final form of the scale, the personal sense of uniqueness (PSU) scale.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Factor structure of the PSU Scale

To determine the factor structure of the PSU Scale, a principal-axis factor analysis was performed on the 10 items. The number of components to be extracted was then determined by (a) eigenvalues above 1, (b) Cattell's scree-test, and (c) parallel analysis (Horn, 1965). Parallel analysis is a method used to decide the number of factors by comparing the size of the eigenvalues with those produced by a randomly generated data set. Principal components

factoring yielded two factors with eigenvalues above 1. The first factor, with a 4.464 eigenvalue, accounted for 45% of the variance, while the second accounted for 13%, with an eigenvalue of 1.34, which was reflected in an elbow formed at the second factor.

The results of parallel analysis also supported retention of only one factor. Only the first factor's eigenvalue (1.52) exceeded the criterion values produced from the random data matrix of the same size (274 × 10 items) while the second factors' (1.401) did not.

Based on these observations, the data were then extracted to one factor and reanalyzed. Two items had communality values lower than .15 in this analysis and were eliminated from the scale, resulting in a reduction of factor loadings (less than .30) and communalities (less than .20) of another three items. Consequently, these items were also deleted from the scale, and the results showed only one factor having an eigenvalue greater than 1.00 (2.87), accounting for 57.33% of the variance.

Table 1 represents the item factor loadings for the remaining five items. It is evident that the corrected item-total correlations, factor loadings, and communalities represent good validity estimates for the PSU Scale. Moreover, Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be .81.

3. Study 2 (cross-validation of factor structure)

Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were repeated on the data from a larger sample to investigate the stability of the one-factor solution obtained in Study 1.

3.1. Method

3.1.1. Participants

A sample consisting of 676 (323 male, 353 female, mean age = 22) graduate and undergraduate students was recruited from three universities. The age of the participants ranged between 18 and 26.

3.2. Results

3.2.1. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses

A principal components analysis was computed on the final version of the PSU Scale. The results showed that only one factor was extracted with eigenvalue of 2.26 accounting for 45% of the variance and all items loaded greater than .50 on this factor.

Confirmatory factor analysis was then performed using maximum likelihood estimation. The results indicated a nearly perfect fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 1.51$ ($p < .05$), $df = 5$, $\chi^2/df = 0.30$, GFI = 1.00, AGFI = 1.00, SRMR = .008, RMSEA = .000, and CFI = 1.00.

4. Study 3 (re-test reliability)

The purpose of Study 3 was to estimate test-re-test reliability. Although personal SoU seems to have intraindividual variability over time because of the context-dependency of personal

Table 1

Factor loadings, alphas, and item-total correlations for the items of the PSU Scale.

Items	Loadings	α	Com.	R
01. As people get to know me more, they begin to recognize my special features	.81	.75	.66	.67
02. I feel unique	.78	.77	.60	.62
03. I cannot think of many special characteristics that distinguish me from others. ®	.76	.78	.58	.61
04. I think that the characteristics that make me up are different from others'	.73	.78	.53	.57
05. I feel that some of my characteristics are completely unique to me	.70	.80	.50	.54

Notes: ® = reverse-scored item; α = alphas if item deleted; Com. = communalities; R = corrected item-total correlations.

evaluations, it was predicted that the PSU Scale scores would be stable over time.

4.1. Method

4.1.1. Participants

Forty-five undergraduate students (20 female and 25 male) completed the five-item PSU Scale. The age of the participants ranged between 18 and 23 years with a mean age of 21. The PSU Scale was administered on two occasions, 2 weeks apart.

4.2. Results

The correlation coefficient between the first and second implementation of the PSU Scale was .80. This finding suggests that the scores obtained through the PSU Scale are considerably stable over time.

5. Study 4 (convergent and discriminant validity)

The aim of Study 4 was to provide data indicating that the SoU is related to positive mental health indicators. Moreover, the concurrent measure of a NfU was examined to get evidence for discriminant validity.

5.1. Method

5.1.1. Participants

The data were collected from 138 university students (86 female and 52 male). The age of the participants ranged between 19 and 29 years, with a mean age of 21.3.

5.1.2. Measures

5.1.2.1. Optimism. Optimism was measured with the life orientation test (LOT) developed by Scheier and Carver (1987). The LOT is a 12-items scale with four filler items and the ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly) for each item. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Aydin and Tezer (1991) who reported Cronbach's Alpha reliability of .72 and re-test reliability of .77. The coefficient of Alpha was .75 in this study.

5.1.2.2. Hope. Hope was measured with the dispositional hope scale (DHS), developed by Snyder et al. (1991). DHS is a well-known trait-based hope scale that measures one's global level of hope. It is a 12-item scale with four filler items. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Akman and Korkut (1993) and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was found to be .65. Alpha coefficient was .77 in this study.

5.1.2.3. Resilience. Resilience was measured by the Ego-Resiliency Scale, developed by Block and Kremen (1996), and consists of 14

items. The ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (does not apply at all) to 5 (applies very strongly). Cronbach's Alpha coefficient reported by Block and Kremen was .76. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Karairmak (2009). The factor analysis computed by Karairmak yielded three factors: personal strengths relating to recovery, positive self-appraisals, and openness to new experiences. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was estimated as .80 in the study by Karairmak, and .76 in this study.

5.1.2.4. Need for uniqueness. The self-attributed need for uniqueness scale (Lynn & Harris, 1997) was used to measure individuals' differences in the NfU. The scale consists of four items with statements designed to elicit the extent to which individuals see themselves as being different from others, the personal importance of being distinctive, the frequency with which they intentionally try to differentiate themselves from others, and the degree to which they need to be unique. The scale was translated into Turkish and back-translated by four bilinguals. The Internal consistency of the scale in this study was found to be .69.

5.2. Results

Table 2 presents the correlations among the variables used in this study. As expected, the correlation between the PSU and the NfU Scale scores was weak, indicating that these two variables are psychometrically distinct. The correlations between the PSU Scale scores and the measures of hope, and resilience were moderate, while that of optimism was relatively weak. Consistent with the predictions, when seeing themselves as unique individuals, people also experience higher levels of positive self-appraisal and are more open to experiences. On the other hand, the scores of the current measure of uniqueness, tapping the personal NfU, only weakly correlated with resilience.

6. Study 5 (further validation of the PSU Scale)

To obtain further validity estimates for the PSU Scale, additional data were gathered. Associations of the PSU Scale with personality and self-esteem were examined, in addition to negative and positive mental health indicators.

6.1. Method

6.1.1. Participants

Data were collected from 148 university students (88 female and 60 male). The age of the participants ranged between 18 and 24 years with a mean age of 19.9.

6.1.2. Measures

6.1.2.1. Personality. The 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI; Benet-Martinez & John, 1998) was administered to assess five personality

Table 2
Correlations among the PSU Scale, the NfU Scale, optimism, hope, and resilience.

	PSU	NfU	OPT	HOPE	RES	Psa	Ps	Op
PSU	1							
NfU	.29**	1						
Optimism	.25*	.07	1					
Hope	.43**	.16	.69**	1				
Resilience	.49**	.26**	.46**	.62**	1			
Positive self-appraisals	.39**	.22**	.46**	.53**	.71**	1		
Positive strength	.29**	.09	.44**	.55**	.66**	.41**	1	
Openness to experience	.40**	.26**	.22**	.37**	.82**	.34**	.31**	1

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

dimensions – neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (disagree strongly) to 5 (agree strongly) for each item. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Sumer, Lajunen, and Ozkan (2005) who reported Cronbach's Alpha reliabilities ranging from .64 to .77. The coefficients of Alpha were .68, and .80, respectively, in the data set used in this study.

6.1.2.2. Self-esteem. The 10-item Rosenberg self-esteem scale (RSES), a commonly used measure of global self-esteem, was developed by Rosenberg (1965). The respondents' levels of agreement with 10 self-evaluative statements are averaged to produce an index of self-esteem. Responses are specified on a five-point Likert-type scale. The RSES was first translated into Turkish by Tuğrul (1994). Tuğrul also reported a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .86. In this study, Cronbach's Alpha was defined as .87.

6.1.2.3. Life satisfaction. Life satisfaction was measured using Diener et al.'s (1985) Satisfaction with life scale (SWLS) to identify individual differences concerning the cognitive evaluation of one's life. The scale is designed to enable individuals to evaluate their lives according to their own subjective criteria. The internal consistency of the scale was .87. Durak, Gençöz, and Senol-Durak (2008) translated the scale into Turkish and reported satisfactory internal consistencies ($\alpha = .86, .82$). Cronbach's Alpha was .83 in this study.

6.1.2.4. Basic psychological needs. This study used the basic psychological needs scale (BSNS), developed by Deci and Ryan (2000). It consists of 21 items concerning the three needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Ratings are indicated on a scale from 1 (not at all true) to 5 (very true) for each item. Since no Turkish translation of the scale existed, it was translated using a back translation procedure by four bilinguals. The internal consistency for the scale was found to be .82.

6.1.2.5. Depression and anxiety. The brief symptom inventory (BSI) was used in order to measure the negative mental health of the individuals. The scale was developed by Derogatis (1992) as a shortened version of the SCL-90-R and was adapted to Turkish by Sahin and Durak (1994). It consists of 53 items rated on a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 = not at all distressed to 5 = extremely distressed. The adapted version of BSI revealed 5 sub-scales as a result of an exploratory factor analysis: anxiety, depression, negative self, somatization, and hostility. Only the anxiety and depression sub-scales were used in the present study. The Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficients have been found to be good, .95 to .96 for the Turkish form. The internal consistency coefficient

for anxiety and depression for the present data was .90 and .93, respectively.

6.2. Results

Table 3 shows correlations between the PSU Scale scores and other variables in this study. It can be seen that The PSU Scale scores have the highest associations with extraversion and openness to experience. Conscientiousness is the other personality dimension that has a remarkable correlation with the PSU Scale scores. As expected, neuroticism was only weakly correlated with the PSU Scale since the SoU represents a positive characteristic. The last dimension, agreeableness, had no correlation with the SoU.

When it comes to positive mental health indicators, the results were quite encouraging. It is evident that the SoU is strongly correlated with both life satisfaction and basic psychological needs in addition to a high correlation with self-esteem, which is consistent with the findings of Snyder and Fromkin (1977). Finally, as expected, the PSU Scale scores were only weakly correlated with negative mental health indicators of anxiety and depression.

Additional regression analyses were conducted to test whether the PSU Scale scores accounted for unique variance in mental health beyond that already captured by personality dimensions. To test this hypothesis, the PSU scores were entered into the second block of a hierarchical regression model, in which personality factors composed the first block. According to the results (Table 4), the PSU Scale scores accounted for unique variance in all criterion variables beyond that already captured by the personality dimensions. In these regression analyses, the greatest variance accounted for is in self-esteem and the least variance in relatedness.

7. Discussion

The aim of the present research was to develop a short, concise scale for measuring the personal SoU and to show that this construct could be considered as a personal characteristic, with important implications for research on positive conceptualizations of mental health.

Studies 1 and 2 show that the five-item measurement model of the PSU Scale produced strong validity and reliability estimates in addition to the high re-test reliability obtained from Study 3. The results of the confirmatory factor analyses produced perfect goodness of statistics, showing that the SoU is a one-dimensional construct reflecting the perception of oneself as an individual with special personal characteristics different from others. This new construct, thus, is conceptually quite different from the NfU, which

Table 3
Correlations among the PSU Scale, personality and mental health indicators in Study 5.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. PSU	1												
2. Extraversion	.45**	1											
3. Agreeableness	.08	.17*	1										
4. Conscientiousness	.31**	.19*	.43**	1									
5. Neuroticism	-.28**	-.40**	-.41**	-.48**	1								
6. Openness	.41**	.42**	.20*	.32**	-.30**	1							
7. Self-esteem	.65**	.44**	.15	.46**	-.40**	.32**	1						
8. Autonomy	.59**	.39**	.16*	.42**	-.38**	.36**	.64**	1					
9. Competence	.58**	.42**	.04	.46**	-.36**	.41**	.75**	.59**	1				
10. Relatedness	.41**	.29**	.34**	.41**	-.15	.39**	.53**	.48**	.32**	1			
11. Life satisfaction	.53**	.44**	.15	.42**	-.39**	.24**	.64**	.51**	.60**	.42**	1		
12. Anxiety	-.29**	-.22**	-.13	-.31**	.55**	-.18*	-.49**	-.42**	-.41**	-.29**	-.22**	1	
13. Depression	-.27**	-.25**	-.02	-.33**	.50**	-.07	-.48**	-.36**	-.45**	-.15	-.41**	.79**	1

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

Table 4
Hierarchical multiple regressions: personality and the PSU Scale scores as predictors of positive mental health.

Criterion/predictors entered by step	β_1	β_2	R	R ²	Adj. R ²	ΔR^2
<i>Autonomy</i>						
Step 1			.56	.31	.29	–
Extraversion	.22**	.08				
Neuroticism	–.13**	–.11				
Openness	.12	.04				
Agreeableness	.07	.02				
Conscientiousness	.32**	.22				
Step 2			.66	.44	.41	.13**
Sense of uniqueness		.42**				
<i>Competence</i>						
Step 1			.66	.44	.41	–
Extraversion	.23**	.16*				
Neuroticism	–.14	–.12				
Openness	.19*	.13				
Agreeableness	–.27**	–.22**				
Conscientiousness	.39**	.31**				
Step 2			.72	.52	.50	.08**
Sense of uniqueness		.35**				
<i>Relatedness</i>						
Step 1			.57	.32	.29	–
Extraversion	.17*	.10				
Neuroticism	.22*	.23*				
Openness	.23**	.19*				
Agreeableness	.23**	.26**				
Conscientiousness	.31**	.25**				
Step 2			.60	.36	.33	.04**
Sense of uniqueness		.23**				
<i>Life satisfaction</i>						
Step 1			.57	.33	.30	–
Extraversion	.32**	.19*				
Neuroticism	–.16	–.15				
Openness	.01	.07				
Agreeableness	–.10	–.05				
Conscientiousness	.32**	.23**				
Step 2			.65	.43	.40	.10**
Sense of uniqueness		.38**				
<i>Self-esteem</i>						
Step 1			.62	.39	.37	–
Extraversion	.30**	.13				
Neuroticism	–.16	–.14				
Openness	.07	.02				
Agreeableness	–.15*	–.09				
Conscientiousness	.38**	.26**				
Step 2			.75	.56	.54	.17**
Sense of uniqueness		.49**				

Notes: N = 106. β_1 , β_2 = standardized beta coefficients for Steps 1, 2.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

places the individual on a continuum defining similarity or dissimilarity to others. PSU, however, also focuses on individual perceptions of uniqueness in addition to and independent from similarity to others. The results of Study 4 show that the SoU is also psychometrically distinct from the NfU.

The correlations of the PSU Scale scores to optimism, hope, and resilience indicate that this new construct has a close connection to positive conceptualizations of mental health. High correlations of individuals' SoU with hope and resilience indicate that this new construct, indeed, contributes to one's positive mental health as a personal strength. The highest correlation between the SoU and self-esteem supports such a claim.

The correlations between the PSU Scale and other variables in Study 5 extended the validity estimates obtained in Study 4. The results show that the personality characteristics of individuals

are associated with their scores on the PSU Scale. The high correlations of the PSU scores to extraversion and openness to experience indicate that individuals who have a higher sense of personal uniqueness are those who seek out stimulation and the company of others, in addition to showing a willingness to undergo a variety of experiences. The correlation between the PSU scores and conscientiousness indicate that a SoU is also related to self-discipline, thoroughness, and a need for achievement.

On the other hand, the individuals' SoU had high correlations with life satisfaction and basic psychological needs. Life satisfaction refers to one's evaluation of life cognitively and reflects a positive outlook on life, lived by the individuals (Diener et al., 1985). Though the reverse direction is also possible, it is more likely that having a SoU reflects on one's evaluation of life and also makes the life unique for individuals. For the basic psychological needs, both causal directions are more likely to be the case. It seems theoretically possible, for example, to argue that support for autonomy would be reflected in one's SoU. As Jacobsen (2007) states, seeing individuals as unique is accepting their tendency to be self-determined in realizing their potential. Having a strong SoU, on the other hand, would allow individuals more freedom in their choices, increase competence in controlling the environment and willingness to be involved with social environment. Moreover, hierarchical regression analyses show that the SoU individuals experience accounted for the unique variance in these criteria as well as self-esteem, beyond that accounted for by the personality dimensions.

The basic limitation of the present research is that the data were retrieved from university students. Future research could use samples from different ages having different educational backgrounds. SoU could have important implications for the literature on self, such as multiple selves, self-complexity, as well as independent and interdependent self-construals. Future research should take these topics into consideration. Given that cultures have a remarkable influence on the SoU (Snyder & Fromkin, 1980), cross-cultural variations on the SoU should especially be investigated by future research.

The current research on uniqueness is limited because of the ignorance of the SoU experienced by individuals. In other words, having higher or lower degrees of motivation towards being unique would result in different consequences when exploring differences in individuals' behaviors, in terms of both mental health and social behaviors, if the levels of a SoU are taken into consideration. Thus, it is possible to search for individual differences in both perceptions, and the resultant picture gives a four-dimensional categorization: higher or lower levels of a SoU in combination with higher or lower levels of motivation to be unique.

This 2 × 2 model of uniqueness could contribute to the theory of uniqueness in finding solutions for a number of problematic issues and the future research should take this view into consideration. It is argued, for example, that the NfU is a motive for counter-normative behaviors (Lynn & Harris, 1997). It could be stated that the SoU should be taken into consideration when the effect of the NfU on counter-normative behaviors is investigated. It seems plausible, in this respect, to argue that individuals who have a strong need to be unique are less likely to behave counter-normatively if they have a strong SoU than those who have a strong NfU with a weak SoU.

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