<center>Methods to study generosity</center>

1. Behavioral observation

It takes long time to (1) observe in different situations and types of interaction and (2) understand what behaviors are considered expression of generosity in that particular group of participants.

During observation, I believe that not only the number of behaviors matters, but also the attitude attached to the behaviors (Why am I helping? What's the purpose? What do I expect to get back? Etc.). The latter is subjective to the interpretation of the observer, and even when participants are asked to explain the motive of their behavior, they may not know it themselves (or they somehow rationalize it).

It seems easier to me to measure the intention or readiness of helping. If, for example, all participants are put into the same context (a camp), face the same situation (a task), how fast they react to a situation that requires generous behavior, and the process that they go through in order to decide to carry out the behavior, can provide information on the motive of the helping behavior. In layman terms, how fast I decide to help this person A, and what I do before I help (ask other people about A, talk to A, choose between helping A and B, and so on) shows my relationship with A and others in that group and my motivation of helping (which information is enough to convince me that I should help A?). This process of seeking information, in a camp setting when everyone doesn't know each other, or when they all have access to a similar amount of information about others and about the task, can rule out complicated confounds. Participants may also be asked to speak out loud their thoughts during action to reduce subjective interpretation from the observer.

2. Survey, Likert scale, and similar stuffs

Personally I don't think this is a good way to measure behavior, or even intention, given the bias of social desirability. During interview, storytelling is more useful than Likert scale (or that type of close-ended questions) because it provides more information on the context of behavior, how participants interpret the situation and make meaning out of it. Even when participants are asked to recall the behavior and write down their story, I believe that the manner of writing gives as much information as a set of questions with items to check validity of response. Of course then come memory bias, but isn't questionnaire subjected to the similar cognitive problem of accessibility (rating according to the ability to remember similar events) and so on?

Survey is also more likely to cause fatigue than storytelling, since in the later participants are actively engaging and they may feel better because they have control over the content of the interview.

A more serious problem with recall is rationalization: participants explain the behavior in light of its result and certain situational factors that they selectively attend to after knowing the result. This is where behavioral measurements take an advantage.

3. Repetitive or one-time measurement

Repetitive measurement certainly gives more information, but some behaviors can't be measured repetitively, for it reveals the hypothesis or causes discomfort in participants. For example, if I ask one youth repetitively the question of "How do you help him/her in this situation?", even when the context changes and thus the relevant helping behaviors asked are different, I believe that youth will know or sense my interest in generosity and reply accordingly.

It's also boring to keep hearing the same question again and again. Thus different methods can be used interchangeably over contexts.

4. Multiple or one interviewer/observer/researcher?

For youths at-risk I think one observer is better since it takes time for them to get used to the presence of an outsider. They are also more likely to talk to people their friends know than a complete stranger.

In some field experiment when the helping behavior is measured, multiple researchers are involved to see how behaviors are transferred from one object to another. There's this study in which participants meet a random person in the hallway, they are asked to do that person a great favor (which of course they refuse to), then they are proposed a smaller favor for (situation 1) the same person, (situation 2) friend of that person. This gives insight in the factors involving in helping behavior.