

Are women more generous? New study sheds light on donation behavior

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Why would women give more to the victims of Hurricane Katrina than to the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* sheds light onto the way gender and moral identity affect donations.

Authors Karen Page Winterich (Texas A&M University), Vikas Mittal (Rice University), and William T. Ross, Jr. (Pennsylvania State University) focused their research on how people choose among charities. With so many worthy charities soliciting donations, the researchers wanted to understand how people make these critical decisions.

"We gave people in the United States \$5 that they could allocate to Hurricane Katrina victims, Indian Ocean tsunami victims, or themselves," explain the authors. "On average, people kept \$1.10 for themselves and donated the rest. However, the actual amount donated to each charity depended on people's gender and moral identity."

The authors described moral identity as the extent to which being moral, fair, and just is part of someone's self-identity. Gender identity (which generally correlates with biological sex) is defined by how much a person focuses on communal goals, like considering the welfare of others (considered "feminine") versus "agentic" goals, like assertiveness, control, and focus on the self (considered "masculine").

During the experiments, the researchers found that participants with a

feminine gender identity who placed a high importance on being moral gave equally to hurricane and tsunami victims. Participants with a masculine gender identity who valued morality gave more to Katrina victims than tsunami victims.

"These findings suggest that donations are not simply driven by cause-worthiness. Rather they may be driven by the extent of overlap people see between themselves and the donation recipient," the authors explain. "For example, we also examined donations to victims of terrorist attacks. We found that women saw overlap between themselves and victims of terrorism in both London and Iraq. Men only saw overlap between themselves and London terrorist victims."

Organizations and donors would benefit by understanding these donation patterns, the authors conclude.

More information: Karen Page Winterich, Vikas Mittal, and William T. Ross, Jr. "Donation Behavior toward Ingroups and Outgroups: The Role of Gender and Moral Identity." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2009.

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