

Giving to charity: Why do we donate more money to individuals when they are members of a group?

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When charity recipients seem to belong to a cohesive group, donors will make stronger judgments about the victims, which leads to greater concern and increased donations if these judgments are positive, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"One of the most puzzling aspects of charitable giving is the relative meagerness of donations to large numbers of 'statistical' victims in contrast to the generosity shown to a single identified victim," write authors Robert W. Smith (University of Michigan), David Faro (London Business School), and Katherine A. Burson (University of Michigan). "A solution to this problem is to make multiple victims seem like a single, unified group."

The authors tracked funding activity on Kiva.org, a micro-financing website where lenders support groups of [borrowers](#) whose pictures are prominently displayed on the site. Independent ratings showed that some of the pictures on the website seemed to portray very tight groups while others rather loose groups. The authors found that groups that looked unified were more quickly funded. In other studies, the authors discovered that donations to help poor children were higher when the children were described as members of the same family.

However, the opposite is true when consumers are asked to donate to groups they may not view positively. Another study asked consumers to

make donations to benefit child prisoners with poor living conditions. Those who read about the child prisoners that seemed unified had more negative [judgments](#) and gave them less money than those who read about the non-unified but otherwise identical child prisoners.

"Perceived [group membership](#) results in stronger judgments of victims. Victims are viewed more favorably when they belong to a group with positive traits, triggering greater feelings of concern and higher donations, whereas the opposite is true for victims sharing [negative traits](#) ," the authors conclude.

Provided by University of Chicago

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