

Men, women give to charity differently, says new research

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To whom would you rather give money: a needy person in your neighborhood or a needy person in a foreign country? According to new research by Texas A&M University marketing professor Karen Winterich and colleagues, if you're a man, you're more likely to give to the person closest to you -- that is, the one in your neighborhood -- if you give at all.

If you're a woman, you're more likely to give - and to give equal amounts to both groups.

Winterich, who teaches marketing at Texas A&M's Mays Business School, says she can predict charitable behavior to different groups by an individual based on just two factors: gender and moral identity. (Moral identity does not measure how moral a person actually is, but rather how important it is to that person to be caring, kind, fair, honest, etc.)

The research is forthcoming in the Journal of Consumer Research. Co-authors on the paper are Vikas Mittal at Rice University and William T. Ross at Penn State University.

The results of Winterich's studies involving American participants have implications for those in the fund-raising arena.

The study examined how people responded to a need within an "ingroup" and an "outgroup." An ingroup has an obvious connection to the

potential donor, such as physical proximity or ethnicity, while the outgroup might have nothing more than humanity to relate it to the donor.

In the study, participants completed a survey to gauge their moral identity. Later, each was given five \$1 bills and three options: keep the cash, give it to a Hurricane Katrina relief fund, or give it to a relief fund for victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami.

The results were very consistent. Women with higher moral identity were more likely to split their dollars evenly between the two charities. Women with lower moral identities gave more to the ingroup (Katrina victims).

Men with high moral identities gave to the ingroup, but seldom to the outgroup (tsunami victims). Men with low moral identities pocketed the cash.

Winterich's work reinforces other studies of moral identity that show its correlation to how an individual expands his or her bubble of concern to include others. Low moral identity indicates a person will be more focused on self; high moral identity means a person will be more focused on others.

The bottom line for fundraisers, says Winterich, is that they need to examine how they position themselves relative to their potential donor. Charities must focus on the relationship between the donor and the cause to ensure that the charity is viewed as an ingroup, particularly if men are the target. Also, since women tend to be more generous, charities should target them specifically whenever possible.

Additionally, priming a potential donor to think about their moral identity can make them more charitable than they might otherwise be.

There was one other surprise from this study. "It was shocking to me how much they gave," Winterich says. "I think it says good things for society."

Provided by Texas A&M University

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