

A Note on Motivations for Charitable Donations
Evidence from Survey Data

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Abstract

This paper utilizes survey data to investigate motivations for charitable giving using a categorization of motivation based on Kohlberg's stages of moral development augmented with Gilligan's caring motive. We compare male and female responses to ascertain whether there are gender differences in motivation for other-directed actions such as charitable giving, doing a favor for a friend, and giving to the homeless. Caring and compassion is the most important motivation cited by both men and women for giving to charity or to the homeless, followed by concern for justice and equality, and feelings of social responsibility. There is some evidence that women are more likely than men to be motivated by caring and compassion, while men are more motivated by justice and equity. Men also more often say they give in the expectation that they may need the support of the charity in the future and do favors for friends expecting they will reciprocate. In questions linking motivations to charity choice, giving to ACCION USA was motivated by justice and equity, while giving to America's Second Harvest and the Cancer Research Institute was based on caring and compassion.

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Rationality has long been identified by economists as behavior that maximizes one's self interest. The fact that people often act in ways that are other-directed rather than selfish would then appear to violate rationality. Economists have recently turned their attention to modeling social preferences, including difference aversion, social welfare maximization, and/or Rawlsian maximin concern for those less well-off.¹ This paper builds on our previous work on charitable giving where we characterized motivations for donating using a schema developed from Kohlberg's (1981) stages of moral development augmented by Gilligan's caring motivation.² Here, survey data are utilized to identify the motivations for charitable giving and to categorize the reasons cited according to our motivation schema. We also examine whether there are gender differences in stated motivations for charitable giving and other altruistic actions. Finally, we investigate whether there is a link between the motivations for giving and the choice of charity to which to donate.

II. Motivations for Giving

Kohlberg (1981) identifies six stages of moral development. We utilized these to categorize motivations for other-directed behavior presented in Table 1. The first motivation, Self-interest, includes behaviors that appear other-directed but, in fact, promise some sort of return to the individual. In Kohlberg's schema, these are labeled Punishment

¹ See, for example, Bolton and Ockenfels (2000), Charness and Rabin (2002), Engelmann and Strobel (2004), and Fehr and Schmidt (1999, 2004).

² Kamas, Preston, and Baum (2004).

and Obedience Orientation, wherein moral decisions are made to avoid punishment, and Instrumental Relativist Orientation, in which good behavior earns some sort of reward so that the individual gives in the expectation of getting. Our second motivation, Social or Self-approval corresponds to Kohlberg's third stage, Interpersonal Concordance, whereby seeking approval of others or feeling good about oneself motivates moral actions.

The third category of our schema, Social Responsibility, refers to one's duty to act in ways to support the social system. We combine Kohlberg's fifth and sixth stages, the Social Contract Orientation and the Universal Ethical Principle Orientation, into our fourth motivation, Justice, Equality, and Rights, whereby actions reflect concerns for fairness and equity. Our fifth motivation, Caring and Compassion, incorporates Gillian's criticism of Kohlberg's stages by including concern or empathy for others that leads people to promote the well-being of others or to prevent their suffering.

TABLE 1
MOTIVATIONS FOR ALTRUISTIC ACTIONS

Motivation	Description
1. Self-Interest	Give in order to increase own well-being; consistent with narrowly defined utility maximization.
2. Social or Self-Approval	Give in order to improve one's social image or to feel good about oneself ("warm glow").
3. Social Responsibility	Give out of social obligation to maintain society.
4. Justice, Equality, and Rights	Give based on principles of justice, equality, and respect for the rights of all people.
5. Caring and Compassion	Give based on relationships with people, love, or compassion for those less fortunate.

III. Description of the Survey

The survey was distributed to Santa Clara University students, the same population utilized in the experiments in our previous work on giving to charities. The surveys were filled out in classes and in the psychology lab in order to obtain a sample including students majoring in a diversity of disciplines. The participants were assured of anonymity; after the questionnaires were filled out, the participants put them into unmarked envelopes and dropped them in a box where they were mixed up by the experimenter (who was not their professor.)

The survey questions asked the participants to choose statements that explained their motivation in giving to charity by picking from a list of possible reasons to donate. The statements identifying motivations were designed to correspond to the five motivations outlined in Table 1:

- 1. Self-interest:** 1A. “I would donate to charity because in the future I may need the sort of support the charity offers.” or 1B. “I don’t think I would donate to charity.”
- 2. Social or Self Approval:** 2A. “I would donate to charity because people will think highly of me if I donate to charity.” or 2B. “I would donate to charity because I will feel good about myself if I donate to charity.”
- 3. Social Responsibility:** “I would donate to charity because as a member of this society, it is my obligation to support the objectives of the community.
- 4. Justice, Equality, and Rights:** “I would donate to charity in order to provide for all people more equal access to the opportunities and benefits our society offers.”
- 5. Caring, Compassion:** “I would donate to charity because I care about the well-being of other human beings.”

We also asked a set of questions linking the seven motivation statements to decisions to give to three charities. The charities and the descriptions provided to the students follow:

ACCION USA: ACCION USA is a private nonprofit organization that provides credit and business training to “microentrepreneurs” – low- and moderate-income self-employed women and men in more than 30 U.S. cities and towns. ACCION sees credit as a resource that can help to narrow the income gap and provide financial opportunities, fostering economic growth in distressed areas.

AMERICA'S SECOND HARVEST: America's Second Harvest is a national hunger-relief organization that solicits and distributes food and grocery products to approximately 50,000 local charitable hunger-relief agencies including food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters. It also educates the public about the nature of and solutions to the problem of hunger in America.

CANCER RESEARCH INSTITUTE: The Cancer Research Institute supports cancer and immunology research for the ultimate prevention and treatment of human cancer. The Institute has supported more than 2,500 scientists and clinicians at leading universities and research centers worldwide. Funding decisions are made by 63 of the world's leading immunologists.

IV. Survey Results

Table 2 provides the distribution of answers to the question of why the participant would donate money to charity. The question stated: “Choose the three statements below that best describe why you believe you would donate money to charity. Rank them in order of importance and write the letters in the spaces below.” The statements corresponded to the 7 statements listed above. Table 2 provides the numbers and percentages of those who ranked each statement first.

A large majority of the participants (62.7%) identify their primary motivation in giving to be that they care about the well-being of others, category 5, caring and compassion. The second highest motivation is category 4, justice, equality, and rights, with 16.2% citing this rationale. Third was category 3, social responsibility, with 10.8% listing this reason. Fewer than 5% of the participants cite each of the other reasons for giving. Only 1.1% (2.4% of the men and none of the women) say they would not donate to charity.

Men cite motivations linked to self-interest more often than do women (10.8% compared to 2.0%); in particular, they are more likely than women to give in case they may need the benefit in the future (8.4% for men and 2.0 for women.) Women more often say they are motivated by caring, compassion than do men (54.2% of men and 69.6% of women.) Men are slightly more often motivated by social responsibility and equity (30.1% compared to 24.5% for women.) On the other hand, with the exception of self-interest, the ranking of motivations is nearly the same; both sexes are motivated most of all by compassion, second by equity, third by social responsibility. Social approval is fourth for women and self-interest last, while these two are reversed for men.

Table 2
Why Participants Would Donate to Charity

Motivation	Number			Percentage		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
1. Self-interest (1A+1B)	11	9	2	5.7	10.8	2.0
1A. Self could receive benefit	9	7	2	4.6	8.4	2.0
1B. Would not donate	2	2	0	1.1	2.4	0.0
2. Social approval (2A+2B)		4	3	3.7	4.8	2.9
2A. Others think highly of me	1	1	0	0.5	1.2	0.0
2B. Feel good about myself	6	3	3	3.2	3.6	2.9
3. Social Responsibility	20	10	10	10.8	12.0	9.8
4. Justice, Equality, and Rights	30	15	15	16.2	18.1	14.7
5. Caring and Compassion	116	45	71	62.7	54.2	69.6
No answer	1	0	1	0.5	0.0	1.0
Total	185	83	102	100.0	100.0	100.0

In order to obtain a measure of how strongly the participants feel about each motivation, they were asked to identify the extent to which they agreed with the seven motivations for giving to charity listed above, with 1 strongly disagree, 3 neutral, and 5 strongly agree. Table 3 provides the means for the total sample and for men and women separately.

The motivation with which the participants most strongly agree is caring and compassion with a mean of 4.68. Justice, equality, and rights follows with a mean 4.10. Social responsibility and feeling good about oneself are virtually tied at 3.68 and 3.67 respectively. This is an interesting result since few cite feeling good about themselves as their first motivation for giving (3.2%). This suggests that while giving does lead to feelings of self-satisfaction, few believe it to be their primary motive for giving. There is also some evidence that the possibility of needing the support of the charity in the future is considered by the participants; this statement receives an average 3.55 agreement level.

Women report higher agreement than men with all the statements with the exception of “would not give,” where women exhibit a lower degree of agreement. The differences in the male-female means are relatively small, however, with the largest difference being agreeing that one would give in case one needed the benefits of the charity in the future, where women’s mean exceeded men’s by 6.7%. The male-female difference in means for compassion and caring is slightly smaller than those for justice, equity and social responsibility, but the size of the difference is very small.

Table 3

Means for Degree to Which Participants Agree with Motivation

	Total	Men	Women	Percentage Difference Between Men and Women
1. Self-interest				
1A. Self could receive benefit	3.55	3.42	3.65	6.7%
1B. Would not donate	1.88	1.94	1.83	-5.7%
2. Social approval				
2A. Others think highly of me	2.15	2.10	2.20	4.8%
2B. Feel good about myself	3.67	3.64	3.70	1.6%
3. Social Responsibility	3.68	3.57	3.77	5.6%
4. Justice, Equality, and Rights	4.10	3.98	4.21	5.8%
5. Caring and Compassion	4.61	4.52	4.68	3.5%

In order to ascertain how giving to each of the three charities was linked to the motivations, we asked the participants to identify the charity to which they would give if they were motivated by each of the six motivation statements (failure to give was not included.). For example, one question asked: “Suppose you were to donate to a charity based on the following statement: ‘I would donate to this charity because as a member of this society, it is my obligation to support the objectives of the community.’ Which of the following charities would you choose?” The question was repeated for each of the 7 statements. Table 4 provides the number and percentages of participants who chose the charity for each given motivation statement.

In response to the statement 1A (motivated by the possibility that the participant could need the support of the charity in the future), the Cancer Research Institute is the charity most often chosen (74.6%), which is not surprising since the participants were college students who might have a low probability of needing food aid or microenterprise loans. They and their families, however, may (or may already) suffer from cancer. The choice of charity for the social image motivation, statement 2A (others will think highly of me,) is split between America’s Second Harvest and the Cancer Research Institute, with 40.5% and 40.6% respectively. In the light of the previous result, it is interesting that for statement 2B, the self-image motivation (I will feel good about myself) 58.9% choose America’s Second Harvest while a smaller 34.1% pick the Cancer Research Institute. It appears that the participants feel it a more worthy action to give to America’s Second Harvest than to the Cancer Research Institute, while they judge that others would value giving to the latter more than the former.

Table 4

Charity Chosen for Each Specified Motivation

Motivation Specified	Charity Chosen									
	Number					Percentage				
	ACC	ASH	CRI	NA	Total	ACC	ASH	CRI	NA	Total
1. Self-interest										
1A. Self could receive benefit	34	9	138	4	185	18.4	4.9	74.6	2.2	100
2. Social approval (2A+2B)										
2A. Others think highly of me	22	75	74	14	185	11.9	40.5	40.0	7.6	100
2B. Feel good about myself	9	109	63	4	185	4.9	58.9	34.1	2.2	100
3. Social Responsibility	58	98	26	3	185	31.4	53.0	14.1	1.62	100
4. Justice, Equality, and Rights	123	45	13	4	185	66.5	24.3	7.0	2.2	100
5. Caring and Compassion	3	102	75	5	185	1.6	55.1	40.5	2.7	100

When motivated by social responsibility, America's Second Harvest is chosen by 53.0% and ACCION by 31.4%. The justice, equality, and rights motivation most often leads people to donate to ACCION, 66.5%; evidently this is due to the perception that the loans provide people a more equal opportunity for economic advancement. A smaller 24.3% choose America's Second Harvest; equity may be perceived as ensuring people have access to the basic need for food. As anticipated, caring and compassion most often leads people to donate to America's Second Harvest (55.1%), since providing food to the disadvantaged would be a likely response to feelings of compassion. However, the Cancer Research Institute also is chosen in response to compassion and caring with 40.5% of the participants picking this charity. Clearly, those stricken by cancer also elicit feelings of compassion.

In order to ascertain the participants' motivation for donating to each of the charities, we asked the students to identify the motivation that would lead them to donate to a specified charity. The question said: "Choose the three statements above that best describe why you believe you would donate money to *charity name*." The statements correspond to the seven statements used in the other questions. Table 5 provides the numbers and percentages of participants who ranked each statement first for the specified charity.

Table 5

Motivation Identified with Donating to Specified Charity

Statement Chosen	Charity Specified					
	Number			Percentage		
Motivation to Give to Charity:	ACC	ASH	CRI	ACC	ASH	CRI
1. Self-interest (1A+1B)						
1A. Self could receive benefit	6	3	23	3.2	1.6	12.4
1B. Would not donate	37	12	7	20.0	6.5	3.8
2. Social approval (2A+2B)						
2A. Others think highly of me	0	4	1	0.0	2.2	0.5
2B. Feel good about myself	5	6	9	2.7	3.2	4.9
3. Social Responsibility	17	24	23	9.2	13.0	12.4
4. Justice, Equality, Rights	79	31	16	42.7	16.8	8.7
5. Caring, Compassion	37	101	102	20.0	54.6	55.1
No Answer	4	4	4	2.2	2.2	2.2
Total	185	185		100	100	100

When asked which motivation would lead them to donate to ACCION USA, 42.7% cite justice and equity, with a much smaller 20.0% picking caring and compassion. A large number would not donate to this charity (20.0%). Caring and compassion is the main motivation for giving to America's Second Harvest (54.6%), with justice and equality receiving 16.8% and social responsibility 13.0%. Similarly, donations to the Cancer Research Institute are primarily motivated by caring and compassion 55.1%, with potential future self-benefit and social responsibility each receiving 12.4%.

We also explored motivations for other-directed behavior by asking questions regarding reasons for doing a favor for a friend and giving to the homeless. Table 6 presents the top ranked answers for the total sample, men, and women, to the following question: "The following statements provide reasons why you might do a favor for another person. Please rank the statements according to the degree to which you agree with them. When you do a favor for another person, you most often do it because:"

Table 6

Reasons to Do a Favor for Another Person

	Number			Percentage		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
A. In the future the person will most likely return the favor	29	19	10	15.7	22.9	9.8
B. You believe you should think of others' well-being even if you have to make sacrifices.	106	45	61	57.3	54.2	59.8
C. Others will like you more if you do them favors.	5	2	3	2.7	2.4	2.9
D. It makes you feel good about yourself when you do favors for others.	44	17	27	23.8	20.5	26.5
No Answer	1	0	1	0.5	0	0.1
Total	185	83	102	100	100	100

The altruistic answer, thinking of others' well-being even though it requires sacrifices, is the most chosen motivation by all participants (57.3%). There is a small difference between men and women, with men slightly less often picking this rationale than women (54.2% of men and 59.8% of women.) The second ranked reason, feeling good about oneself, is chosen by 23.8%, with women identifying this as a motivating force slightly more often than men (26.5% of women and 20.5% of men). The most striking difference between men and women is that 22.9% of the men do favors expecting friends to reciprocate, while only 9.8% of the women are so motivated. Less than 3% say they do favors in order to ensure that others will like them.

Table 7 provides the top ranked responses for the total sample, men, and women, to the following question: "Please rank the following statements according to what you most often would do. If a homeless person politely asks you for a donation at a time when you have cash/coins in your wallet, you would most likely:" A large fraction (40.0%) would not give anything to the homeless person, with men stating they would say no slightly less often than women (38.6% compared to 41.2%). This might reflect differences in generosity but it also may be that women are more likely to feel threatened by a homeless person and therefore unwilling to stop to take out money. Compassion is the primary motivator for both men and women to give to the homeless, motivating 43.8%, with women somewhat more likely to cite compassion (46.1%) than men (41.0%). However, restricting the analysis to the 109 participants who say they would give something, compassion motivates 74.3% of those who give (81 of 109); for men, the percentage is 68.0% (34 of 50) while for women it is 79.7% (47 of 59). Men are more likely to say they would give because it's unfair (9.6%)

than women (2.9%). Again, focusing on only those who say they would give, the percentages are 16.0% of men and 5.1% of women cite unfairness. About 6% of men and women say their rationale is social obligation, while 3-4% pick feeling good about themselves.

Table 7

Response to Homeless Person's Request for Donation

	Number			Percentage		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
A. Give him/her some money because you feel it's your obligation as a member of this society to help others.	11	5	6	6.0	6.0	5.9
B Give him/her some money because you think it's unfair that you have a better standard of living than he/she does	11	8	3	6.0	9.6	2.9
C. Give him/her some money because you feel compassion for him/her for being in such a miserable situation	81	34	47	43.8	41.0	46.1
D. Give him/her some money because it will make you feel good about yourself.	6	3	3	3.2	3.6	2.9
E. Politely say no.	74	32	42	40.0	38.6	41.2
No Answer	2	1	1	1.1	1.2	1.0
Total	185	83	102	100	100	100

V. Conclusion

This paper investigates the motivations for charitable giving utilizing a categorization of motivation developed from Kohlberg's stages of moral development augmented with Gilligan's caring motive. We utilize a survey that asks participants to identify their motivations for giving and to link these to giving to three specified charities, ACCION USA, America's Second Harvest, and the Cancer Research Institute.

Caring and compassion is the most important motivation for giving to charity by both men and women ("I care about the well-being of other human beings") with 63% identifying this as their primary motivation. Concerns for justice and equality and feelings of social responsibility are ranked second and third, chosen by 16% and 11% of the participants, respectively. Women are more likely than men to be motivated by caring and compassion, 70% compared to 54%, while men are slightly more likely to cited equality (18% compared to 15% for women) and social responsibility (12% compared to 10 %). Men more often give in the expectation that they may need the support of the charity in the future, 8% compared to 2% of women.

When asked to rate how strongly they agree with each motivation for giving, caring and compassion receives the highest level of agreement, 4.68 out of maximum 5; second is justice and equality at 4.10. While few participants cited feeling good about themselves as their primary motive for giving (3%), there is evidence that giving does make people feel good about themselves, with a mean agreement of 3.7. This suggests that while people do not give in order to feel good about themselves, this is a by-product of acting altruistically.

We also asked students to identify the charity to which they would donate if motivated by each category in our schema. The charity most likely believed to potentially

benefit the participants in the future is the Cancer Research Institute. When seeking social approval, participants are equally split between America's Second Harvest and the Cancer Research Institute, while self-approval is most satisfied by giving to America's Second Harvest. Social responsibility leads most participants to choose America's Second Harvest. ACCION is chosen in order to provide justice and equality. Finally, the caring and compassion motivation results in donations to America's Second Harvest.

Asking the participants the reverse question, (if they were to give to the specified charity, what would motivate them?), giving to ACCION is most motivated by justice and equality, donations to America's Second Harvest rests on caring and compassion, and giving to the Cancer Research Institute is explained by the participants as resulting from caring and compassion.

In response to a question asking participants to identify their motivation for doing a favor for a friend, the majority (57%) choose the altruistic response (one should think of the others well-being even though it requires sacrifice.) Women are slightly more likely to identify feeling good about themselves (27% of women compared to 21% of men). There is a striking difference in the percentage motivated by expected reciprocity, with 22.9% of men citing this rationale and only 9.8% of women doing so.

A full 40% would not give money to a homeless person. Of those who do give, 74% choose the answer based on compassion. More women (80%) than men (68%) say they are motivated by compassion. On the other hand, men are more likely to say they would give because of unfairness (16%) than women (5%).

Overall, the results of our survey suggest that caring and compassion is the strongest of the five motivations for both men and women. This indicates that more attention needs to

be paid by economists to caring and compassion in modeling social preferences. We also find some evidence that women tend to be more motivated by caring and compassion relative to men, while men are more motivated by justice and equality and the possibility of a future payback than women.

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