

Avoidance of Altruistic Triggers: Empathy vs. Social Pressure

Cristina Figueroa^{*} Jantsje M. Mol[†] Ivan Soraperra[‡]
Jöel van der Weele[§]

June 10, 2024

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Abstract

There is clear evidence that some individuals avoid being asked for donations, but the exact motives are unclear. Here we investigate two possibilities: individuals may avoid an unwanted rush of their own empathy or avoid social pressure imposed by others. An online experiment with 1400 participants where individuals can decide to avoid either empathetic or social pressure triggers reveals that: (1) both types of triggers increase donations, (2) both types of triggers increase avoidance, (3) empathetic triggers yield higher avoidance. Our evidence is consistent with sophisticated individuals who accurately anticipate the effect that empathy and social pressure has on their giving behavior. We discuss implications for charitable giving and economic theories of giving.

JEL classification: D91, D64, C91

Keywords: Giving, Experiment, Empathy, Social Pressure, Sophistication

^{*}University of Amsterdam. Email: c.figueroa@uva.nl.

[†]University of Amsterdam, Tinbergen Institute. Email: j.m.mol@uva.nl.

[‡]Max Planck Institute for Human Development. Email: soraperra@mpib-berlin.mpg.de.

[§]University of Amsterdam, Tinbergen Institute. Email: j.j.vanderweele@uva.nl.