

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

## Charitable Giving: How Ego-Threats Impact Donations of Time and Money

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On any given day, consumers face a multitude of situations with the potential to damage their sense of self and identity (Sherman & Cohen 2006; Steele 1988). Examples of such situations include disappointing a significant other, underperforming on the job, failing to deliver on a promise, gaining weight, etc. The purpose of this research was to examine how ego-threats, i.e., instances where one's self-view is momentarily called into question by external agents or events, can influence charitable behavior. Two propositions guided our enquiry. First, we hypothesized that a state of self-threat may have the potential to foster charitableness in consumers. Grounding this prediction in self-affirmation theory, (Steele & Liu 1983, Steele 1988), we proposed that by affirming a generous and/or compassionate dimension of the self, volunteerism, and to some extent financial philanthropy, may serve a repair function for the injured self. Furthermore, we hypothesized that if given the choice, ego-threatened individuals would favor to donate time rather than money. Grounding this prediction in the social psychological literature (Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles 1999; Schwarz & Clore 1996; Van Boven & Gilovich 2003), we proposed that this state of preference for time contributions would derive from perceiving volunteerism as more repairing than financial philanthropy.

In line with our theorizing, we found in studies 1 and 2 that reducing one's confidence in his or her intelligence via a seemingly innocuous handwriting manipulation (Brinol & Petty 2003) led participants to exhibit greater charitableness (i.e., donate more money) in favor of their preferred charity. Yet, when participants were given the choice to donate time or money, volunteerism became the preferred option. To examine why consumers may opt to donate time more readily than money when under threat, we provided participants in study 3 poor performance feedback upon completion of a problem-solving task. Next, we gave some participants an opportunity to restore their sense of self-worth by affirming values important to them in a writing task (Steele 1988; White & Lehman 2005). We found again that participants expressed stronger preferences for donating time over money when under threat. Yet, this effect weakened when subjects had had an opportunity to reaffirm their self. A mediation analysis revealed that participants' beliefs about the repair efficacy of volunteerism mediated the effect of threat on donation behavior. In study 4, we sought to extend our findings by investigating the effect of threats unrelated to intellectual achievement. Furthermore, we sought to examine whether the centrality of the threat to one's self-concept may moderate the general impact of ego-threats on charitableness. To this end, we created a task requiring that participants compare themselves to pictures of attractive individuals of their sex before responding to a seemingly unrelated charity appeal. As expected, we found that participants in the threat condition during the picture study became more likely than control participants to volunteer time over money. Yet, this effect was restricted to participants whose self-esteem significantly depends on physical appearance (i.e., individuals heavily invested in their looks). In sum, across four experiments, we showed that ego-threatening events can indeed lead consumers to greater charitableness. Furthermore, we found that when given the opportunity to choose, ego-bruised consumers tend

to favor volunteerism over financial philanthropy as the former is perceived to be more repairing than the latter.