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RUNNING HEAD: ESPECIALLY IN THIS ECONOMY

Especially in *this* Economy: The Effect of Personal and Situational Factors on Charitable Intentions and Attitudes toward the Homeless

by

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Honors Thesis

in

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Abstract

In response to tough economic times and difficulty meeting the need of homeless populations, many charities could use an improved understanding of what predicts and contributes to charitable intentions. The current studies sought to empirically address this issue. Study 1 results revealed that positive attitudes toward the homeless and charitable intentions predicted actual donation behavior. Study 2 results suggested that morality dimensions focused on fairness and harm predicted positive attitudes and charitable intentions. Additionally, a combination of moral commitment and interdependent self-construal predicted higher donation intentions. Study 3 examined how political affiliations and media coverage regarding the current state of the economy influenced donation intentions. Media coverage interacted with income to predict attitudes and intentions. Furthermore, Democrats reported more generous intentions toward the homeless than Republicans. Theoretical and practical applications are considered.

Especially in *this* Economy: The Effect of Personal and Situational Factors on Charitable Intentions and Attitudes toward the Homeless

Economic troubles both in the United States and abroad have constrained the financial situations of businesses and individuals. With the government providing bailouts and stimulus packages to lend needed money to many for-profit organizations, the funds normally earmarked for nonprofit organizations and charities is less available than in years past (Das, Kerkhof, & Kuiper, 2008). As more people lose jobs, fall behind on credit card payments, or struggle to afford decent housing, the need for the services provided by nonprofit organizations increases. At the same time, individual donors—who generally account for over 75% of charitable donations (Ranganathan & Henley, 2008; Dalton, Madden, Chamberlain, Carr, & Lyons, 2008)—are caught in economic straits as well, attempting to protect their own financial future amidst a mortgage crisis and failing investments. As a result, charities and other nonprofit organizations are forced to find innovative ways to recruit new donors and maintain relationships with existing ones. Charities must learn to market themselves and request donations in the most efficient manner. Thus, an understanding of the factors that influence individual donor behavior is essential in forming such marketing techniques.

Recently, many charitable organizations have pursued marketing techniques that increase public recognition of the charity and thus increase revenue (Grace & Griffin, 2006). The successes of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital or Relay for Life indicates that high-profile and innovative methods can attract significant donations. Other research has focused on the specific phenomenon of selling empathy ribbons and similar conspicuous items for a charitable cause to demonstrate that some people donate to protect their ego rather than out of true altruism. West (2004) named this trend 'conspicuous compassion', arguing that people in today's society

feel obligated to show emotion and care in public. As a result, social norms reinforce the inherent good in giving to charity not only to benefit the organization but also to reinforce one's positive personal image. To fit in socially, one must care for others. People who engage in moral behaviors such as volunteering or giving money to charity can rationalize from their actions that they both hold altruistic values and are morally righteous themselves (Kunda & Schwartz, 1983). If people already feel motivated to help because of internal beliefs, they might actually be less likely to give if they feel externally pressured to contribute. Similarly, focusing on a reward structure around donations—such as tax-deductions—might lead to overjustification, causing people to lose interest in actually helping others (Reiss & Sushinsky, 1975). Thus, charities might not have to *convince* people to help, but might instead merely need to *remind* them of their existing beliefs that should lead them to donate for intrinsic reasons.

General Overview

What factors and belief systems contribute to intrinsic motivation to engage in pro-social behavior? In the current paper, I focus on guilt, morality beliefs, self-construals, and contextual factors as predictors of giving behavior, specifically to charities working with the homeless. In Study 1, the primary focus is on the effectiveness of inducing guilt and on the contextual factor of monetary anchoring. Additionally, in this study, I examine the relations among attitudes, intentions, and actual giving behavior with regard to the homeless. In Study 2, drawing on Graham, Haidt, and Nosek's (2009) framework of morality and on several lines of self-construal research, I examine how politically liberal ideologies and interdependent self-construals influence attitudes and intentions toward the homeless. In Study 3, I explore moral precommitment and explicit political affiliations as well as the situational context of economic

news as predictors of giving behavior. I first review research on giving behavior more generally and then elaborate on specific predictors with each study.

Giving Behavior

A wide array of research has examined predictors of donation and giving behavior. For example, priming individuals to consider the morality of a potential action has been found to be an effective method in soliciting donations for a charitable organization. Whereas giving away money might seem foolish or impractical according to the perceived norm of self-interest (Briers, Pandelaare, & Warlop, 2007), reminding individuals of the importance of morality can supersede the notion that all actions should primarily benefit economic interests. However, when presented with an option between protecting self-interest or helping others, self-interest—at least self-interest that does not stray into selfishness—generally remains the top priority for much of society (Watson & Sheikh, 2008). Even so, people regularly make the decision to cooperate with others, seemingly despite the fact that their own interest might be served through more selfish behavior. This phenomenon can be partially explained by the expectation that cooperation and altruistic actions will serve one's interests in the long run (Baron, 1997). For instance, research regarding forgiveness reveals that making the pro-relational decision to forgive someone yields important personal benefits, such as psychological well-being (Karremans & Van Lange, 2004) and improved physical health (Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007).

People choose to donate or help others even when they recognize that there is no way they can be directly paid back for their altruism. Despite a large number of studies and articles written about charitable intentions and donations, relatively few have focused on giving toward charities working with the homeless. In a book focusing on charity in America today, author Arthur C. Brooks mentions homeless people twice, and only in the context of a hypothetical

example (Brooks, 2006). Equating homelessness with poverty in psychological studies bypasses much of the stigma associated with homelessness. Whereas poverty is a socio-economic status that can seemingly be remedied through higher income, homelessness is a practical reality that requires financial assistance and adequate shelter. The following studies aim to focus specifically on charity toward the homeless, acknowledging that individuals' attitudes and intentions in this context could differ from giving patterns to other charities. Specifically the goal is to explore when and why positive attitudes, intentions to help, and actual helping behavior toward the homeless emerge. Study 1 begins to answer these questions by exploring the role of guilt and monetary anchors.

Study 1

Guilt

Guilt can act as a motivation for helping behavior. For instance, rather than donating to improve one's social standing, one might donate to avoid feelings of guilt over declining to help. Research has supported the idea that donating to charities relieves feelings of guilt after a transgression (Harris, Benson, & Hall, 1975). Recent studies also suggest that attempting to prevent anticipated feelings of guilt can be a strong motivation to donate (Basil et al., 2006). However, discussing the guilt or confessing the transgression—other ways to relieve feelings of guilt—can reduce the likelihood of a donation (Harris et al., 1975). Numerous charities use guilt appeals, showing pictures or film footage of children begging for food or injured persons in the aftermath of a natural disaster. One goal of Study 1 is to examine if such appeals are valuable in the context of homelessness.

Monetary Anchors

Another goal is to examine contextual factors with a focus on monetary anchors. If a specific organization's situation inspires compassion to the point of donation, an individual must still decide how much to give. Charities often offer trinkets or cards for a small price (Briers et al., 2007), creating exchanges which largely serve to provide individuals with price anchors for their contributions. Similar price anchors can be created through suggested donations. By asking not merely for donations, but for specific amounts, charities can ensure that no individual defers the choice to contribute simply because he or she does not know what the proper amount would be. Dhar (1998) demonstrated that individuals are more likely to defer choices if the decision is deemed difficult or unclear, and helping behaviors are least likely to occur when the situation is ambiguous (Clark & Word, 1972). Price anchors could provide the necessary clarity to promote greater donation frequency and/or larger donations.

Attitudes and Intentions

Beyond the single measure of actual donations, this study also includes measures of positive attitudes toward the homeless and charitable intentions toward a charity that works with the homeless. The decision to use attitudes and intentions as central dependent measures stems from considerable work regarding the importance of those two factors in guiding individuals to donation behavior. The theory of planned behavior, first proposed by Ajzen in 1985 and refined in the years since, dictates that the intentions to perform behaviors can be predicted by attitudes toward the behavior, normative influence, and the perceived efficacy of the behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Smith & McSweeney, 2007). This research does not directly address the social norms surrounding donations or the perceived efficacy of donations; rather, this study explores the direct link between attitudes and intentions, as well as the link between intentions and behavior. Research indicates that intentions predict donation behavior in generalized contexts (Smith &

McSweeney, 2007), and this study narrows the focus to the specific domain of donations to the homeless.

Goals and Hypotheses

The primary goal of Study 1 was to examine the effectiveness of guilt appeals and of monetary anchors in encouraging donation intentions and behavior. The secondary goal was to demonstrate that attitudes and intentions predict actual donation behavior. To examine these predictions, participants completed measures assessing their intentions toward a charity that works with the homeless and their attitudes toward the homeless. At the end of the study, participants were given the opportunity to actually donate money.

- **Hypothesis 1**: It was hypothesized that greater charitable intentions would predict more f donations, assessed by money donated.
- **Hypothesis 2**: It was hypothesized that positive attitudes toward the homeless would predict more donations.
- **Hypothesis 3**: It was hypothesized that those participants who received guilt appeals as part of the donation request would have higher charitable intentions than those who did not receive guilt appeals.
- **Hypothesis 4**: It was hypothesized that those participants who were exposed to monetary anchors of suggested donations would donate more money than those who were not exposed to such anchors.

Study 1 Procedures

Participants attended sessions in groups ranging from one to six people. Participants completed measures of demographic information as well as constructs that assessed their general tendency toward empathy and generosity. Other relevant personality constructs (e.g.,

conscientiousness, trust, selfishness) were also included. Because this study addressed participants' likelihood to donate to charity, an outcome which can depend upon a person's disposable income (Lee & Chang, 2007), one of the demographic questions asked for participants to estimate their families' annual incomes. After completing these initial questionnaires, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions ("simple donation," "guilt-inducing only," "monetary anchors only," and "guilt plus monetary anchors"). Participants did not know which condition they were assigned.

Participants were told to read advertisements for a charity that works with homeless people. Participants received three flyers for Mosaic Community Development. The three advertisements provided to each condition differed only in the layout of the elements of logo, name, and text—superficial changes that did not change the message. Three flyers were used to ensure that the messages were sufficiently reinforced in each condition, and that decisions made by participants were not merely from the superficial elements present. Members of the control condition received advertisements with the charity's name, logo, a brief description of the organization's mission, and the text, "Please donate to help those in need." Participants in the remaining conditions also read the text, "Please donate to help those in need." However, participants in the "guilt-inducing only" and the "guilt plus monetary anchors" condition received flyers that also included a paragraph comparing the living situation of a homeless person with someone in the middle class.

After reading the flyers, participants were asked to rate each flyer's attractiveness, clarity, and professionalism. They also answered questions regarding how guilty the advertisement made them feel, how much empathy they currently felt toward the homeless, whether they felt their donation was actually needed, and their willingness to donate to this cause. Those

participants in the "monetary anchors only" and the "guilt plus monetary anchors" conditions were asked if they would like to donate, and then were also asked how much they would like to donate in increments of $1, $5, $10, or other. Those in the control condition or the "guilt-only" condition were asked if they would like to donate, followed by a blank field provided for them to indicate an amount. Willingness to donate was assessed with hypothetical questions as well as by actual money donated. All money donated was returned to the participants upon debriefing, along with information about how participants could go on to donate to Mosaic Community Development if they chose to do so.

Study 1 Results

Hypothesis 1

A regression revealed that charitable intentions predicted actual donation behavior, $\beta = .42$, $t(78) = 4.07$, $p < .001$. That is, more positive intentions predicted more money donated.

Hypothesis 2

Another regression analysis indicated that positive attitudes toward the homeless did not significantly predict actual donation behavior, $\beta = .17$, $t(78) = 1.52$, $p > .05$. However, positive attitudes toward the homeless predicted charitable intentions, $\beta = .32$, $t(78) = 2.95$, $p < .01$.

Hypothesis 3

Guilt appeals had no significant effect on generous intentions, $F(1, 78) = .45$, $p > .05$. Specifically, those who received guilt appeals ($M = 3.71$ units, $SD = .51$) had only slightly less generous intentions toward the homeless than those who did not receive guilt appeals ($M = 3.80$ units, $SD = .58$).

Hypothesis 4

Additionally, there was no significant main effect of monetary anchors on actual donations, $F(1, 78) = .19$, $p > .05$. Those exposed to monetary anchors ($M = 1.33$ dollars, $SD = 2.27$) donated slightly more money than those who were not exposed to monetary anchors ($M = 1.13$ dollars, $SD = 1.81$), but this difference was not significant.

Additional Findings

The main effect of guilt condition on monetary donation was significant, $F(1,76) = 4.55$, $p < .05$. However, this main effect was in the opposite direction of what would have been hypothesized, as those who did not receive guilt appeals ($M = 1.70$ dollars, $SD = 2.46$) donated more than those who received guilt appeals ($M = 0.75$ dollars, $SD = 1.39$). See figure 1 for an illustration.

I also explored the potential interaction of guilt appeals and monetary anchors on donation amount. Although the overall interaction was not significant, $F(1,76) = 2.47$, $p = .12$, simple effect testing revealed a significant difference between those who did not receive guilt appeals ($M = 2.15$ dollars) and those who received guilt appeals ($M = .50$ dollars) when monetary anchors were present, $p = .05$. Essentially, monetary anchors had the expected effect of increasing donation size when guilt appeals were absent. See figure 2 for an illustration.

Study 1 Discussion

Study one supported the first hypothesis that donation intentions predicted actual donations. Rather than merely expressing a desire to donate or appear generous, individuals actually followed through when given the opportunity to donate money to a charity they had never heard of before. One would expect that such an intention would also predict actual behavior in future studies. Thus, subsequent studies investigated individuals' attitudes and intentions, but did not include a behavioral component.

This study also supported the hypothesis that positive attitudes toward the homeless would predict donation intentions. Though no direct effect of attitudes on donation behavior was found, the relationship between attitudes and intentions indicated that how individuals feel about homelessness connects to how individuals think about a charity that works with the homeless. The lack of a direct relationship between attitudes and behavior could be driven by efficacy regarding helping the homeless, or could simply be that despite positive emotional assessments of the homeless, any help that could be provided would best be offered through some other means, such as volunteering or donating at another time. Thus, additional studies included volunteering intentions as a dependent measure, and assessed previous donations as well as future-based intentions to consider other temporal situations in which donations might be given.

The hypothesis that guilt appeals would increase charitable intentions was not statistically supported. Those who received guilt appeals were remarkably similar to those who did not receive guilt appeals on almost every dependent measure used in this study, with the exception of the behavioral outcome of actual donation amount, in which guilt appeals appeared to backfire and produce smaller donations than the control appeals. Three possible explanations are posited for such findings. It could be that the guilt appeal used in this study was not strong enough to induce actual feelings of guilt that could relate to intentions. Alternatively, perhaps people are so desensitized to guilt appeals used by nonprofit organizations that the appeal used here had no effect on intentions. It is also possible that guilt appeals induced guilt in some, but caused a backlash reaction of indignation or resentment in others. The counterintuitive finding regarding guilt appeals, combined with anecdotal experience of feeling bombarded with guilt appeals after becoming aware of the persuasion technique, convinced me to remove guilt appeals from subsequent studies.

Charitable organizations seeking an advertisement campaign might do well to avoid guilt appeals as well, especially considering the behavioral outcome in which donations were significantly smaller as a result of guilt appeals. In the current study, it appears that individuals may have showed signs of reactance to guilt appeals, significantly decreasing the size of donations in response to advertisements that tried to induce guilt. Reactance is defined as an individual's response to threats against one's behavioral freedoms, often to the degree that individuals actively pursue alternative or opposite behaviors to those being promoted (Wellman & Geers, 2009). In this study, guilt appeals might have seemed overly manipulative and patronizing, causing participants to seek behaviors that would subvert the intentions of the appeals; they exercised reactance by either not donating or by donating a very small amount. Such reactance was even more pronounced when monetary anchors were present, suggesting that the additional structural framework provided by the monetary anchors might serve to further frustrate individuals to the degree that they donate even less. Meanwhile, those who did not receive guilt appeals—and therefore felt less threatened by the donation requests—responded positively to the monetary anchors, increasing the size of their donations. Finally, psychological reactance as posited originally by Brehm (1966) and as built upon by other researchers (Wellman & Geers, 2009) suggests that individuals respond specifically to threats to *behavioral* freedoms, not cognitive ones. As such, the guilt appeals might not have produced reactant intentions, but only reactant behaviors. Though intentions and behaviors are broadly linked, as suggested by the relation between charitable intentions and amount donated in the current study, reactance provides a mechanism to interrupt that relationship and to promote behavior contrary to intentions.

The next two studies continued to explore situational and personal factors that can predict charitable intentions. With the removal of guilt appeals from the manipulation, the researchers expected to see little to no participant reactance, thus enabling charitable intentions to be an even more accurate predictor of real-world behavior.

Study 2

Study two expanded upon a few of the basic relationships explored in study one. Specifically, study two was conducted online, thus allowing for the recruitment of a larger, more diverse population. Because study one revealed a relationship between charitable intentions and actual donation behavior, behavioral outcomes in subsequent studies were omitted. Charitable intentions and attitudes toward the homeless served as the primary outcomes. The key predictors in this study were self-construals and moral ideologies.

Self-Construals

Individuals choose to engage in pro-social behavior for ostensibly altruistic reasons, but such behavior is also driven by personal morality, one's personality, and how one sees oneself—his or her *self-construal*. The strength of a commitment to morality can also affect the degree of dissonance which individuals feel when given the opportunity to make a donation. More subtle measures of how people try to present themselves can be observed through self-construal assessments. Those who tend to have an independent self-construal are more concerned with self-reliance and personal skills, whereas those who have an interdependent self-construal are more motivated to maintain healthy relationships with others and to publically uphold social standards (Lalwani & Shavitt, 2009). Thus, self-construal can act as an indicator of existing commitments toward self-promotion or toward other-promotion; within an interdependent self-construal, others are included within the definition of the self because of the perceived

importance of relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Rather than using relationships as means to an end, relationships are often the ultimate goal of interdependent individuals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Furthermore, by incorporating questions regarding morality and self-reliance into a self-construal measure, researchers can assess individuals' concern about morality or self-reliance within the context of other self-construal aspects. Such subtlety might create less cognitive dissonance, but might also serve as a closer approximation for how individuals would approach donation requests outside of an experiment.

Morality Dimensions

Dimensions of morality have been linked to political orientation (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009), a construct of particular interest when predicting the behavior of both individuals and political bodies. According to the framework developed by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek (2009), those who place the most importance on protecting other entities from harm ("harm/care") and on promoting fairness for all ("fairness/reciprocity") are most likely to be politically liberal. Political conservatives, meanwhile, place equal importance on harm/care and fairness/reciprocity as they do on the other three constructs—loyalty to one's social group or category ("ingroup/loyalty"), proper behavior with regard to sex, drugs, or other taboo material ("purity/sanctity"), and respect for figures of authority ("authority/respect"). The liberal political dimensions of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity in particular seemed likely to promote feelings of camaraderie with the homeless and generosity toward charities that worked with the homeless.

Goals and Hypotheses

The way one perceives oneself can encourage a wide range of intentions. For instance, if one perceives oneself as mathematically adept, that individual is far more likely to pursue activities that require skill in arithmetic than those who are less confident in their mathematic

ability. For study two, self-construals were measured to better assess how the desires for independence and for interdependence predict charitable intentions and positive attitudes toward the homeless. Additionally, questions were included to address individuals' commitments to morality as part of their self-construals.

- **Hypothesis 1**: It was hypothesized that those who rated the moral dimensions of *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* highest and those who rated morality and interdependent self-construals highest would have more positive attitudes toward the homeless than those who did not assign such high ratings to those variables.
- **Hypothesis 2**: It was hypothesized that those who rated the moral dimensions of *harm/care* and *fairness/reciprocity* highest and those who rated morality and interdependent self-construals highest would have more generous intentions (both donation intentions and volunteering intentions) than those who did not assign such high ratings to those variables.

Study Two Procedures

In study two, participants were recruited through advertisements on internet listservs such as Spiderbytes asking if they would like to complete a 20-30 minute survey for the chance to win $100 in a raffle. Participants completed several of the same measures as in study one, including demographic information, personality constructs, and disposable income. Additional questions regarding educational achievement and religious background were added to control for these factors. After completing these initial questionnaires, participants completed a measure of social desirability to determine how honest and representative answers in the study were. Because intentions to donate and measures of morality are susceptible to biased responding—such that participants give the answers they think they are supposed to give rather than the actual truth—

measuring the social desirability of participants' responses is an important consideration. Next, participants completed a measure of morality developed by Graham, Haidt, & Nosek (2009) that accounts for how much a person invests in the moral foundations of avoiding harm, fairness, authority, ingroup loyalty, and purity. Then, participants answered questions regarding their perceptions of the homeless according to an adapted warmth/competence measure (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Next, participants completed a self-construal questionnaire which included a measure of how important morality is to one's self-construal (Grace & Cramer, 2003).

After completing those scales, participants were asked to consider the nonprofit organization of their choice. Participants thought of a charitable organization that works with the homeless and rated it according to a scale measuring the organization's professionalism, success, and other traits. These ratings were merely intended to induce participants to engage actively with the organization they suggested, thus ensuring that assessed intentions toward that organization were arrived at after consideration of the charity's viability. Participants also answered questions regarding how guilty thinking about the homeless makes them feel, how much empathy they felt toward the homeless, whether they felt their donation was actually needed, and their willingness to donate to and volunteer for this cause. Participants were then asked if they would hypothetically be willing to donate or volunteer for this charity, and were given the opportunity to indicate their intention by entering a hypothetical donation amount and volunteering willingness in a blank field. Charitable intentions were assessed with these hypothetical questions. Once participants completed the scales, they were provided with a link to enter a raffle for the $100 prize.

Study 2 Results

Hypothesis 1

There was an overall significant effect of the model combining the liberal morality dimensions of harm/care and fairness/reciprocity, moral self-construal, and interdependent self-construal in predicting positive attitudes toward the homeless, $F(4, 188) = 2.81$, $p < .05$, $R^2 = .056$. See Table 1.

Hypothesis 2

There was an overall significant effect of the model combining harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, moral self-construal, and interdependent self-construal in predicting generous intentions (both volunteering and donating) toward the charity of their choice, $F(4,176) = 3.92$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .082$. See Table 2.

Additional Analyses

For exploratory purposes, I also examined relations between additional components of morality and intentions and attitudes. These relations are reported in a correlation matrix. (See Table 3). This analysis included all relevant self-construals and morality dimensions measured and their relationships with the central dependent measures of attitudes and donation intentions.

Study 2 Discussion

Results indicted that liberal morality dimensions predict both positive attitudes and generous intentions toward charities working with the homeless. These findings support the theoretical supposition that political liberals have moral frameworks more in line with helping the homeless than do political conservatives. This orientation toward helping the homeless could manifest itself in voting for welfare legislation or other political means to offer assistance. However, future work is needed to examine applications of the current findings which suggest

that donation and volunteering intentions seem to indicate a more personal altruism at work for those who identify more strongly with fairness and care. A similar relationship was explored in the context of self-identified political affiliation in the third study.

The results of Study 2 also revealed a connection between one's commitment to morality in making decisions, one's view of oneself as interdependent on others in the community, and one's willingness to donate. Especially in cases where individuals perceive the homeless as members of their community, such an interdependent perspective dictates that by helping others, individuals help themselves. Again, this mentality can be theoretically linked with the moral dimension of fairness and reciprocity, and thus consistent with the results indicating political liberals are more likely to give to the homeless.

The methods used in this study, specifically the use of an online survey, mean that the attitudes and intentions studied cannot be confirmed with a behavioral outcome. However, asking the participants to consider a charity of their own choice should ensure that individuals feel free to be open in their assessments and honest in their expressed intentions. Furthermore, the reactance that occurred in study one should be relatively nonexistent in this study, because no advertisements were provided to threaten participants' behavioral freedom. Additionally, without experimental methods, causal conclusions cannot be drawn about predictors examined in Study 2.

Thus, in Study 3, I included experimental manipulations to examine the causal influence of additional situational factors on donation intentions; namely, I focused on the state of the economy. Additionally, I examined more directly the impact of political affiliation and moral precommitment on intentions to donate or volunteer. I review each of these theoretical perspectives before detailing the procedures of Study 3.

Study 3

Media Exposure and the Economy

The condition of the national and local economy would seem to affect an individual's decision-making process regardless of the level or type of media exposure one receives. After all, prices rise and fall, interest rates fluctuate, and jobs appear and disappear as a result of larger economic forces. What, then, are the effects of media exposure about the current economy on decisions regarding disposable income? Can the media induce individuals to shop, to invest, or to donate? Or do the media simply report the facts and provide an accurate representation of what is already going on, without any impact on subsequent choices made by media consumers? Research done over ten years ago (Haller & Norpoth, 1997) suggested that those who follow the news closely share the same opinions of the economy as those who do not follow the news, indicating that media coverage has a limited effect on opinion formation. However, in the past decade, the United States has seen remarkable changes in the nature of news dissemination and media engagement, with the continual rise of 24-hour news networks and instant internet feeds changing the way individuals perceive the economy. Has the media's influence grown at the same rate as its scope?

Many people hedge statements or qualify decisions they make by blaming the economy. "Especially in this economy…" the argument begins, as one explains away social and moral norms regarding generosity. News about the state of the economy could potentially create a number of different thoughts for those considering charities. If told that the economy is performing poorly, individuals might be more inclined to keep their money and time to themselves, afraid that they cannot afford to give to others and still provide for themselves. Alternatively, individuals might recognize that in a down economy, charities are in even greater

need than usual and might feel additional moral motivation to help those charities. Thus, a variety of independent variables and personal traits were accounted for in predicting the three main dependent variables of this study—positive attitudes toward the homeless, volunteering intentions with the charity of one's choice, and donation intentions toward the charity of one's choice. This study directly manipulated the type of news about the economy that participants received, but a direct effect of news type on any of the dependent variables seems unlikely. Instead, news type affects people's attitudes and intentions differently depending on personal traits, such as household income and political affiliation. The overall effects of media coverage on the study's dependent variables were still assessed for exploratory purposes, but no hypotheses were made about the direction of such main effects.

As might be expected, rich people account for most charitable donations in the United States—the top 7% of the American population give almost half of all donations in a given year (Brooks, 2006). Additionally, those in the highest income brackets are more likely to give charitably than poor and middle class families, perhaps because the wealthy are more likely to receive social benefits among peers for their generosity (Brooks, 2006). However, these lines of research have not shown a compelling connection between household income and volunteering. Thus, Study 3 examines such relations. Despite tax benefits for charitable giving that are particularly profitable for individuals in the highest tax brackets, increases in household income do not predict corresponding increases in total amount donated (Mayo & Tinsley, 2009). Furthermore, the median propensity to give declines as income increases, suggesting that there are a few very generous outliers accounting for much of the total money donated by the rich (Mayo & Tinsley, 2009).

Thus, it appears that the wealthy are particularly susceptible to rewards—both social and financial—and that the wealthy pay special attention to signals about how to use their money. Research shows that the self-serving bias causes the wealthy to underestimate their own good luck and the fundamental attribution error causes wealthy people to discount the bad luck of poorer household (Mayo & Tinsley, 2009). However, were some outside factor to influence the luck of everyone, then the wealthy might respond more sympathetically to poorer individuals caught in the same strain of bad luck as them. Therefore, negative news about the economy seems especially likely to inspire donation intentions among those with high income, whereas positive news would lead to reduced charitable intentions.

Political Affiliations

Individuals choose their media sources. If all media sources were completely unbiased, this difference in sources would mean little, but perceived and real biases do exist among different news networks and outlets. Political ideologies and economic sensibilities differ from source to source, making it difficult to ensure that all people receive the same stories with the same slants. Instead, the television news audience divides itself along political lines, creating a polarization between audiences that only exacerbates existing differences (Morris, 2007). Thus, depending on the network, people might choose not to trust information reported by a media source. Media influence can be strengthened if the network seems to match political ideology, but could also be significantly weakened if the network seems to be biased in a direction opposite to one's own political sensibility (Morris, 2007). Thus, political ideology must also be accounted for when determining the influence media exposure has on views about the economy and subsequent monetary decisions, including possible charitable donations. In Study 3, I used a neutral news source and had participants self-report their political affiliation. Thus study seeks

to build on Study 2 in which participants' dimensions of morality were assessed through a measure developed by Graham, Haidt, & Nosek (2009) that accounts for how much a person invests in the moral foundations of avoiding harm, fairness, authority, ingroup loyalty, and purity. Research has shown that placing emphasis on the foundations of harm and fairness relate to more liberal political inclination, meaning that this measure of morality provides another insight into political ideology, especially for those who do not identify as Republican or Democrat (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009).

Liberals are more likely to blame poverty and homelessness to social injustice and factors beyond individuals' control, whereas conservatives tend to attribute poverty to personal qualities (Pellegrini, Queirolo, Monarrez, & Valenzuela, 1997). Additionally, self-identified Republicans are significantly less likely to endorse government-funded programs supporting homeless populations than self-identified Democrats (Pellegrini et al., 1997). Such findings support the theoretical proposition that social conservatives promote a "just world" view, according to which people receive what they deserve (Pellegrini et al., 1997). According to this just world perspective, the homeless have brought about their own suffering through their moral or personal shortcomings. Thus, attitudes toward the homeless are negative, enabling conservatives to feel both morally and socially justified in their cognitive perceptions of the homeless and in their lack of charitable contributions toward charities working with the homeless.

Survey data regarding private giving and volunteering suggest liberals and conservatives are relatively similar in their donation and volunteering behavior (Brooks, 2006). When actual donation amounts are considered, though, conservatives appear much more generous. Specifically, in 2000, conservatives gave thirty percent more money to charity than liberals, even though liberal families earned more per year (Brooks, 2006). Considering actual party

affiliations, 90% of registered Republicans donated in 2002, compared to just 83% of registered Democrats (Brooks, 2006). Such quantitative data seems to fly in the face of theoretical assertions about charitable intentions, at least regarding general trends. However, such survey research accounts for general giving patterns, not the specific focus on homeless charities studied in the current research. Brooks (2006) predicts charitable behavior based on four forces: religion, skepticism about the government in economic life, strong families, and personal entrepreneurism; all four of these forces seem to be most closely associated with political conservatism. Meanwhile, the homeless are often dependent upon government assistance in the form of welfare or shelters, potentially making them a less sympathetic target group in the eyes of a conservative. Thus, it remains possible that in the domain of charity toward the homeless, liberals and self-identified Democrats might be more likely to donate and volunteer, even despite trends that indicate conservatives and Republicans are generally more charitable.

Moral Precommitment

The current research also proposes that many individuals make the decision to cooperate with and to help others as a result of the intrinsic motivation to appear moral. However, this desire would not override the norm of self-interest without some additional motivational factor. Thus, through a process of *moral precommitment*, individuals establish their identities as moral prior to a decision and enact that identity through actions that support that character trait. In this way, individuals are not only motivated by a sense of the righteousness of their action, but also through the cognitive need to keep beliefs and actions consistent. Once this commitment is made publicly, one must consistently act morally. Being consistent helps them to avoid cognitive dissonance (McKimmie, Terry, Hogg, Manstead, Spears, & Doosje, 2003).

Additionally, one's commitment to this internal morality might play a role in determining their altruistic tendencies. A stronger moral precommitment, made explicitly by thinking about morality and rating one's desire to see oneself as moral, might change how one perceives a charity that works with the homeless, whereas a weaker moral precommitment, made implicitly in a self-construal measure, would likely have a smaller impact on attitudes and intentions. Specifically, a strong precommitment to a morality that involves caring for those less fortunate than oneself and promoting fairness for all people—such as the moral dimensions endorsed by political liberals according to Graham, Haidt, and Nosek's (2009) framework—would likely produce greater charitable intentions than would a similar precommitment to a more conservative morality.

The connection between morality and political affiliation made by Graham, Haidt, and Nosek's (2009) work suggests that charitable intentions might be motivated by an interaction of one's political ideology and the explicit consideration of the morality on which that ideology is based. As such, political conservatives who are reminded of their morality through a moral precommitment might decide to donate or volunteer less often than political liberals.

Goals and Hypotheses

The way that the media frames news about the economy changes audiences' perceptions of the economy. In this study, I studied how such perceptions might influence subsequent evaluations of the homeless and intentions toward charities. Furthermore, those perceptions were colored by either implicit or explicit commitments to morality. Other personal factors were studied in combination with these contextual factors to explore the possibility of interaction effects. Specifically, the current study included political affiliation, household income, and moral precommitment as possible factors that influence attitudes and intentions.

- **Hypothesis 1:** It was hypothesized that those who made a strong precommitment to morality would have more charitable (both donation and volunteering) intentions and have more positive attitudes toward the homeless than those who made a weak precommitment to morality.
- **Hypothesis 2**: It was hypothesized that Democrats would be more generous toward the homeless than Republicans, as measured by positive attitudes, donation intentions, and volunteering intentions.
- **Hypothesis 3**: It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction effect of political affiliation and moral precommitment on charitable intentions and attitudes, such that self-identified Democrats would be more influenced by a precommitment to morality than those who identified as Republicans. Specifically, Democrats in the strong precommitment condition would report the most charitable intentions.
- **Hypothesis 4**: It was hypothesized that there would be an interaction effect of media coverage presented and household income on charitable intentions. Specifically, negative news about the economy would influence participants with high incomes most in their intentions to donate to organizations that work with the homeless.

Study Three Procedures

Participants attended sessions in groups of three or fewer in a laboratory setting. Each group was assigned to a media exposure condition. This assignment was done randomly.

Participants completed measures of demographic information as in Studies 1 and 2. Other relevant personality constructs (e.g., agreeableness) were also included. Additionally, participants indicated their political affiliation in the demographic section, which acted as a possible predictor for volunteering and donation intention across conditions.

After completing these measures, participants were told that results needed to be tabulated before they could complete the next portion of the study. The researcher took the participants next door to a waiting room and turned on the television. The television was already set to show a pre-recorded portion of a CNBC broadcast. One condition saw an eight minute segment of the news broadcast on a day that featured negative news about the economy—the stock market went down, and stories focused on the slumping economy and reasons for the problems. Another condition saw an eight minute segment of news broadcast on a day that featured positive news about the economy.

After the eight minutes elapsed, the researcher brought the participants back into the lab and asked them to complete another set of questionnaires. The first section focused on the participants' affect, demonstrating whether the news stories changed the participants' moods. Previous research has shown that individuals experiencing negative affect are less likely to donate than controls or those experiencing positive affect (Moore, Underwood, & Rosenhan, 1973). In one condition (the weak precommitment condition), the next section asked participants to complete an eighteen item self-construal measure, which included two questions regarding how important it is for an individual to be seen as moral. In the other condition (the strong precommitment condition), the next section directly asked participants to rate their desire to see themselves as moral, and then induced them to write a few sentences about what they think it means to be a moral person. Participants in the strong precommitment condition also completed an abbreviated version of the self-construal measure, consisting of only eight items.

After completing those scales, participants were asked to consider the nonprofit organization of their choice. Participants thought of a charitable organization that works with the homeless and rated it according to a scale measuring the organization's professionalism, success,

and other traits. Participants also answered questions adapted from the social-cognitive model proposed by Cheung and Chan (2000). Participants indicated their intentions to donate, self-efficacy in donations, trust in the organization, their perceived moral obligation for donating, the need for donation, explanations for homelessness, and past donations to this charity. Additional questions measured how guilty thinking about the homeless made participants feel, how much empathy they felt toward the homeless, and their willingness to volunteer for this cause. Participants were then asked if they would hypothetically be willing to donate or volunteer for this charity, and were given the opportunity to indicate their intention by entering a hypothetical donation amount and volunteering willingness in a blank field. Charitable intentions were assessed with these hypothetical questions. Finally, participants indicated whether they actually have donated or volunteered at that charity before and in what quantities, and also provided qualitative data about their feelings toward the homeless, as well as their willingness to begin a social entrepreneurial venture that works with the homeless.

Study Three Results

Hypothesis 1

Moral precommitment had no significant direct effect on positive attitudes toward the homeless, $F(1, 55) = .03$, $p > .05$. Moral precommitment had no significant direct effect on volunteering intentions, $F(1, 55) = .77$, $p > .05$. Moral precommitment had no significant direct effect on donation intentions, $F(1, 55) = .04$, $p > .05$.

Hypothesis 2

This study revealed a significant main effect of political affiliation on positive attitudes toward the homeless, $F(1, 41) = 5.70$, $p < .05$. Democrats ($M = 4.13$ units, $SD = 0.60$) expressed more positive attitudes toward homeless populations than did Republicans ($M = 3.67$ units, $SD =$

0.62). Additionally, Democrats (M = 4.89 units, SD = 0.79) reported greater volunteering intentions with organizations that work with the homeless than did Republicans (M = 4.22 units, SD = 1.13). The difference between the two groups was significant, $F(1, 41) = 5.24$, $p < .05$. However, there was no direct effect of political affiliation on donation intentions, $F(1, 41) = 0.67$, $p > .05$.

Hypothesis 3

Political affiliation had a significant effect on donation intentions when moral precommitment was primed, $F(1, 39) = 4.57$, $p < .05$. Specifically, Republicans who made a strong commitment to their morality (M = 3.67 units, SD = 1.45) were less likely to express intentions to donate than were Republicans in the weak commitment condition (M = 4.63 units, SD = 0.85). Democrats in either strong or weak commitment conditions did not differ significantly. See figure 3 for an illustration.

Hypothesis 4

The effect of news type on volunteering intentions was marginally significant when combined with household income, $F(1, 51) = 3.31$, $p = .075$. Specifically, those in the lower income brackets who received negative news about the economy (M = 3.98 units, SD = 0.73) expressed lower volunteering intentions than did those in the higher income brackets (M = 4.60 units, SD = 0.86) and than did those in the lower income brackets who received positive news about the economy (M = 4.81 units, SD = 1.33). Thus, the results were contrary to what was hypothesized. See figure 4 for an illustration.

Study 3 Discussion

Simply being reminded of morality and one's desire to see oneself as moral did not cause individuals to express more positive attitudes toward the homeless or more generous intentions

toward charities that work with the homeless. Such a finding suggests that generosity toward charity is not a direct result of a general morality; rather, individuals have different conceptions of what morality entails, and those conceptions dictate whether a charity or a demographic deserves generosity. Furthermore, morality alone does not cause people to see all others in a more positive light; instead, theories about ingroups and outgroups would suggest that some others are actually viewed more negatively as a result of morality.

Consistent with the findings of Study 2, Democrats were found to have more positive attitudes toward the homeless and greater volunteering intentions with charities that work with the homeless than were Republicans. This matches with the general link between political ideology (conservative or liberal) and political affiliation (Republican or Democrat). Participants in this study were allowed to list any other political affiliation, but because Independent does not easily map onto a political ideology, those responses were excluded from analyses. Further research could ask additional questions of political independents to determine their ideology, morality, and intentions regarding charities.

The results of this study also extended the theory from Study 2 that political liberals/Democrats are more likely to express generous intentions *because* of their morality. This result was most noticeably expressed in figure 3. When Republicans made a strong, explicit commitment to their morality, they were less likely to intend to donate than when they made only a weak, implicit commitment. Democrats, on the other hand, showed an increase in their donation intentions when a strong commitment to their morality was made, indicating that a reminder of what constitutes morality and the desire to act according to that morality influences intentions toward charities working with the homeless.

Finally, results indicated that individuals with low household incomes are most affected by negative news about the economy when considering volunteering intentions. This result was the opposite of what was hypothesized. If household income is jeopardized, time becomes a more valuable commodity and might need to be spent bringing in more money or being more productive at home. To better understand whether the reduction in volunteering intentions was due to a particular problem with the homeless population, however, would require additional survey items. Questions regarding overall volunteering intentions and weekly time habits would help to explain how individuals prioritize their volunteering efforts, and whether the negative news about the economy signals a need for personal restructuring of time, or a specific shift away from working with the homeless.

Because this was a lab study that involved manipulation—specifically through the use of pre-recorded CNBC coverage of the economy—there was a potential for reactance that could have been addressed through a behavioral measure. Even if reactance would not occur, it remains to be seen how intentions relate to behaviors in times of economic turmoil. One would guess that many individuals have the same charitable intentions in good and bad economic times, but their actual giving behavior might fluctuate with the economy. Additional studies concerning the impact of media coverage on donations should include behavioral assessments to determine the degree to which intentions continue to predict behaviors in such situations. Also, the explicit priming of morality included in this study might have offended or threatened some individuals, leading to a potential for reactance at the behavioral level. Future work could examine more implicit manipulations.

The media coverage on CNBC could not be controlled to create completely consistent and equal manipulations. The amount that the stock market changed in either condition was

unequal, and the ways in which reporters and anchors talked about the economy had potential confounding factors. Additionally, individuals who were especially inclined to follow economic news, such as the Dow Jones ticker or the performance of individual companies, might have realized that the news was pre-recorded and might not have treated the manipulation with the same seriousness that they would normally give to media coverage. Additional studies could have more controlled internally consistent manipulations such as fake newspaper articles. Also, a neutral condition in which the economy either shows no change or in which the economy is not discussed could provide a useful baseline in considering the impact media has on attitudes and intentions.

General Discussion

These studies reveal a few general trends regarding charity and generosity toward the homeless. First, intentions have some predictive power of behavior, and are a reasonable measure of the degree to which individuals will eventually donate. However, intentions do not correspond perfectly with behavior, and recognizing the boundaries of that relationship is important for understanding how best to recruit new donors and volunteers. Specifically, as seen in Study 1, attempting to induce guilt can backfire as a recruitment strategy, causing individuals to react in an avoidant fashion and reducing the size of donations. This could be a result of a saturation of the American population with guilt appeals to the degree that they lose their effect on actual behavior. It could also be that nonprofit organizations who attempt to induce guilt and gain financially from that guilt are regarded as less deserving of money, and participants react against such organizations by withholding donations. As charities continue to consider how best to attract donations and volunteering efforts, they need to consider how to make audiences aware

of the problem and of their ability to effect change while not imposing moral judgments or threatening behavioral freedom in such a way that individuals choose to react against the charity.

Second, political liberals seem to have moralities that are relatively consistent with positive appraisals of the homeless and generous intentions toward charities working with that population. These appraisals are primarily determined by liberals' emphasis on fairness/reciprocity and harm/care as central foundations for their morality. Conversely, political conservatives have more negative appraisals and fewer generous intentions toward such charities, and these considerations may be driven by moralities that account for the additional dimensions of ingroup loyalty, respect for authority, and purity. As a result, homeless-oriented charities can continue to attract liberal donors and volunteers by emphasizing morality as a general construct and the idea that all members of the community deserve basic care and equal rights.

Conservatives, however, would not be attracted by those messages. If politically conservative groups, including members of the Republican Party, are to be reached by these charities, advertisements that cast the homeless as members of the same ingroup as the potential donors may be especially effective. Advertisements that extend boundaries to include homeless individuals—perhaps by telling anecdotal stories about how outside forces combined to force otherwise normal, middle-class Americans into homelessness, or by emphasizing a shared humanity or "American" identity—might help to entice conservatives to give. Purity seems to be a more difficult moral dimension to convincingly activate, but normative information could help combat stereotypes that cast the homeless as unclean or morally impure. Finally, charities can continue to portray a more professional public image, helping conservatives to see these organizations as respectable authorities in their community. Knowledgeable campaigns,

financial responsibility, and association with other respected groups and individuals will help charities to receive donations and other assistance from conservatives who place a high value on respect for authority.

As more is learned about the factors that contribute to generous intentions and positive attitudes toward the homeless, charities can use such information to better target individuals and social groups. Obviously, such information has a risk of saturating the marketplace to the degree that targeted appeals lose their impact. Thus, the work of recognizing appropriate advertising techniques is ongoing. This research suggests that charities take their purpose into serious consideration, with the understanding that some people simply will not feel motivated to help certain causes. If charities need to reach a broader audience, new messages or frames of morality can be used to attract those who might otherwise avoid helping. On the other hand, if charities simply want to increase the size of donations or the depth of commitment of existing patrons, current messages might be adequate, and reminders of the good work being done will suffice as additional motivation.

This research is not meant to suggest that liberals are more generous or more caring than conservatives. Rather, this thesis simply recognizes that a particular domain—homelessness—is more salient to liberals. Further research could determine what domains are most salient to political conservatives. Additionally, research concerning populations beyond college students could reveal whether the intentions measured here would stand the test of time and experience or if they are merely the result of idealized notions regarding justice and equality. A new generation of generous donors and volunteers is needed to replace the Baby Boomer generation and to care for the lower classes in an increasingly stratified society. Charities will need their money and their support, especially in *this* economy. However, before practical implementations

are put into practice, more systematic empirical research is needed. I hope this initial extension of donation behavior and pro-social attitudes and intentions to the domain of homelessness fosters such explorations.

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Tables

Table 1. Study 2: Predicting Positive Attitudes

	B	SE	*b*	*p*
Harm/Care	0.15	0.10	0.12	0.14
Fairness/Reciprocity	0.19	0.10	0.14	0.07
Moral Self-Construal	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.26
Interdependent Self-Construal	0.01	0.10	0.01	0.90

Table 2. Study 2: Predicting Generous Intentions

	B	SE	*b*	*p*
Harm/Care	0.04	0.10	0.03	0.67
Fairness/Reciprocity	0.22	0.10	0.17	0.03
Moral Self-Construal	0.17	0.08	0.16	0.05
Interdependent Self-Construal	0.10	0.10	0.08	0.34

Table 3. Study 2: Correlations among Variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. PosAtt	--											
2. GenInt	.30**	--										
3. VolInt	.31**	.85**	--									
4. DonInt	.24**	.85**	.56**	--								
5. Harm	.17*	.12	.16*	.03	--							
6. Fair	.18*	.18*	.17*	.10	.35**	--						
7. Ingr	-.04	-.08	-.07	-.06	.08	-.19**	--					
8. Aut	-.06	.01	.01	-.03	.03	-.14*	.24**	--				
9. Pur	-.03	.03	.01	.02	.30**	-.03	.19**	.47**	--			
10. Inter	.08	.16*	.13	.17*	.17*	-.01	.23**	.30**	.29**	--		
11. Ind	.01	.09	.04	.09	.12	.15*	.05	.00	-.00	.08	--	
12. Mor	.12	.21**	.16*	.20**	.08	..06	.02	.24**	.34**	.48**	.31**	--

(PosAtt = positive attitudes toward homeless; GenInt = volunteering + donation intentions; VolInt = volunteering intentions; DonInt = donation intentions; Harm = harm/care; Fair = fairness/reciprocity; Ingr = ingroup loyalty; Aut = respect for authority; Pur = purity; Inter = interdependent self-construal; Ind = independent self construal; Mor = moral commitment in self-construal).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Figures

Figure 1

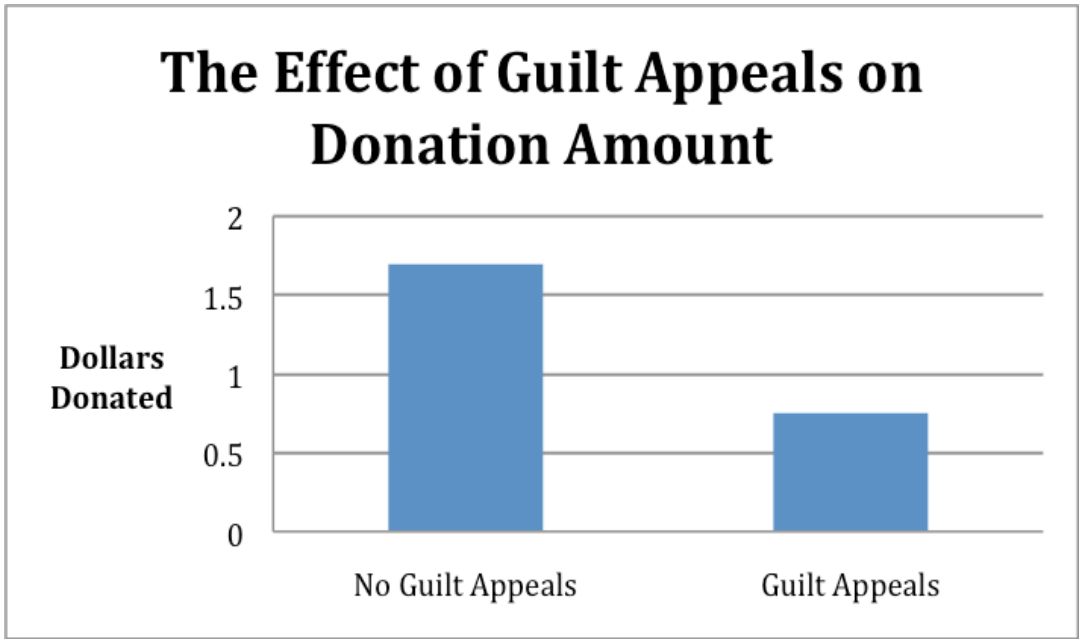

Figure 2

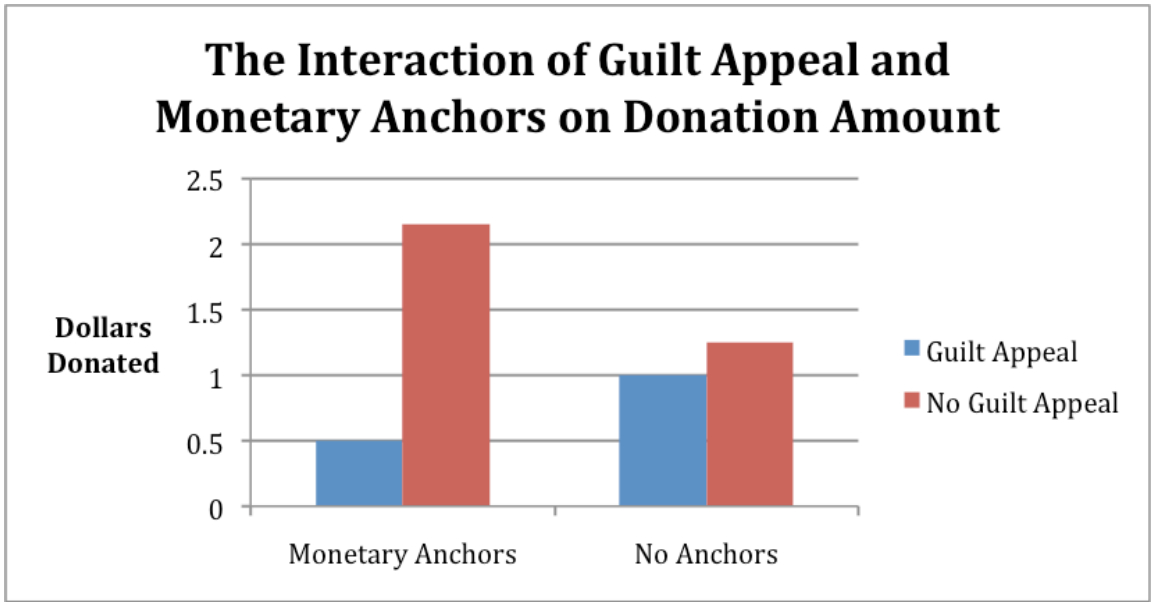

Figure 3

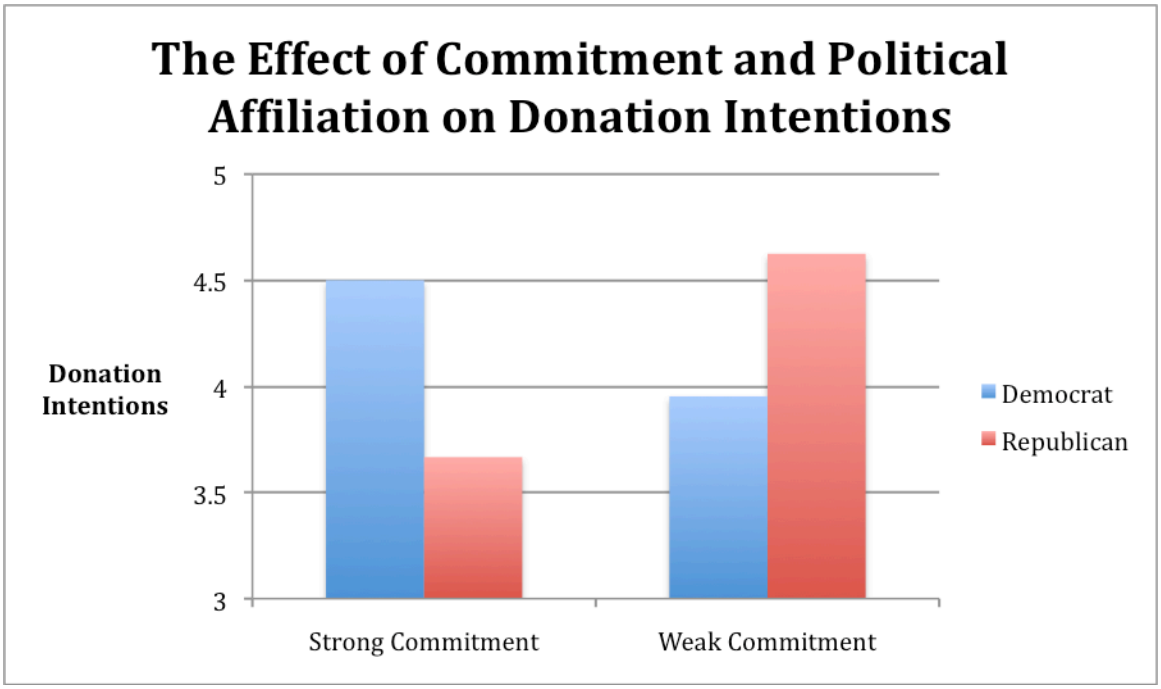

Figure 4

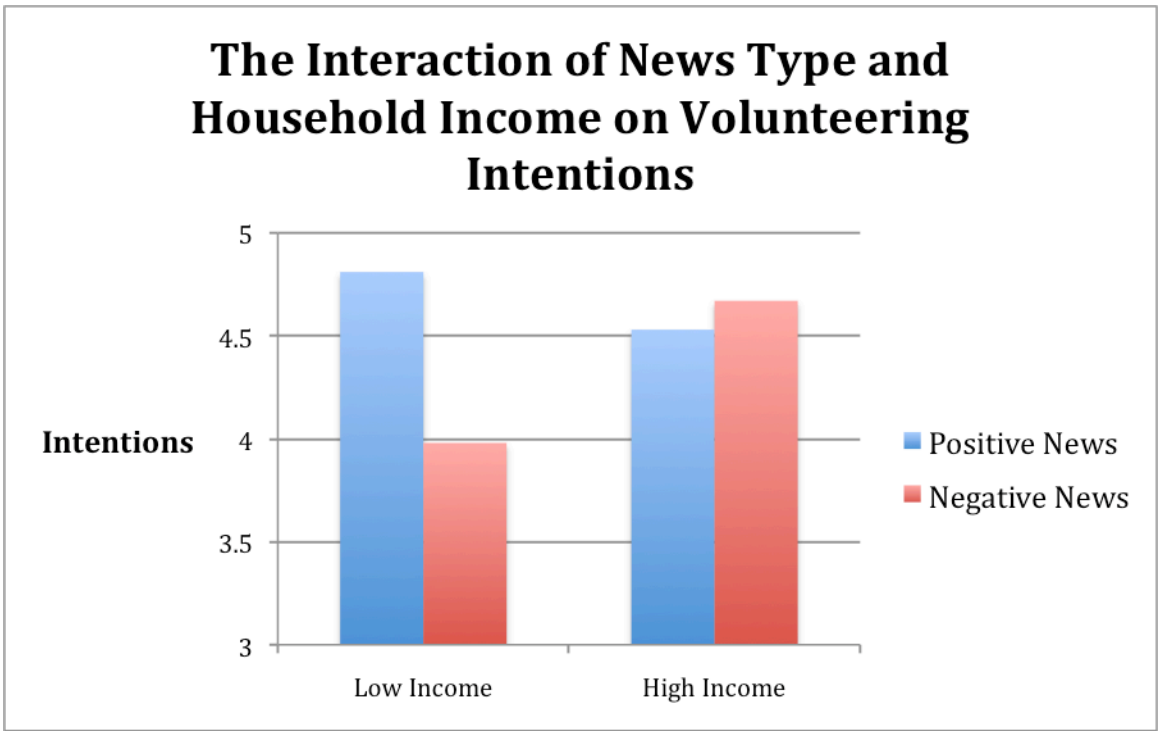

Figure Captions

Figure 1. The amount of money donated as a result of the guilt appeal manipulation (Study 1).

Figure 2. The amount of money donated as a result of the interaction between the guilt appeal manipulation and the presence or absence of monetary anchors (Study 1).

Figure 3. Donation intentions indicated as a result of the interaction between moral precommitment and political affiliation (Study 3).

Figure 4. Volunteering intentions indicated as a result of the interaction between household income and type of media exposure received (Study 3).