

Social giving makes us happier

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Pro-social spending boosts happiness, especially when spending allows for social connection

People usually feel good when they make a charitable donation, but they feel even better if they make the donation directly to someone they know or in a way that builds social connection. Research to be published in the *International Journal of Happiness and Development* investigates for the first time how social connection helps turn generous behavior into positive feelings on the part of the donor.

Lara Aknin of Simon Fraser University, in Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada, and colleagues at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver and Harvard Business School, Massachusetts, USA, wanted to examine when the emotional benefits of giving to charity become manifest. They carried out three studies of charitable donations, or more precisely pro-social spending, and found that spending money on others or giving money to charity leads to the greatest happiness boost when giving fosters social connection. The overarching conclusion is that donors feel happiest if they give to a charity via a friend, relative or social connection rather than simply making an anonymous donation to a worthy cause.

The research has implications for not-for-profit organizations hoping to maximize donations, suggesting that recruiting advocates and helping them build on their social connections could have benefits for the donors too. Extending these findings, it is possible that if donors have a greater sense of happiness when giving involves making a social connection one might imagine that the positive emotions might even lead to more frequent and perhaps bigger donations. Extrapolating further from the research happy donors might themselves be more likely to become advocates for a given cause or benefit it through their spontaneous word-of-mouth marketing." The findings also complement earlier research that has demonstrated a positive effect on happiness of social interaction and taking part in voluntary work.

"While additional factors other than social connection likely influence the happiness gained from pro-social spending our findings suggest that putting the social in pro-social is one way to transform good deeds into good feelings," the team concludes.

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"Does social connection turn good deeds into good feelings?: On the value of putting the 'social' in pro-social spending" in *Int. J. Happiness and Development*, 2013, 1, 155-171

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