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Advertisements for charities often display photographs of the people they help to evoke the kind of sympathy that engenders giving. This article examines how the expression of emotion on a victim's face affects both sympathy and giving. Building on theories of emotional contagion and sympathy, the authors propose that (1) people "catch" the emotions displayed on a victim's face and (2) they are particularly sympathetic and likely to donate when they see sad expressions versus happy or neutral expressions. Consistent with emotional contagion, participants felt sadder when viewing a sad-faced victim, and their own sadness mediated the effect of emotion expression on sympathy. Contagion effects are automatic and noninferential, but they are diminished by deliberative thought. The authors discuss the implications of using subtle emotional expressions on charitable and other marketing appeals.

Keywords: emotional contagion, charitable marketing, prosocial behavior, emotion expression

The Face of Need: Facial Emotion Expression on Charity Advertisements

Americans gave more than $306 billion to charity in 2007, or approximately 2.2% of gross domestic product (AAFRC Trust for Philanthropy 2008). With more than 800,000 charitable organizations in the United States alone, charities must compete for limited donation dollars. As a result of this intercharity competition, charities are spending significant amounts on marketing. Research based on Internal Revenue Service exemption data estimates that large U.S. nonprofits spend at least $7.6 billion per year on marketing (Watson 2006). Therefore, it is valuable to understand the persuasive impact of marketing in this context.

What persuades people to give to charity? Far less research focuses on consumer spending for others' welfare than on spending for a person's own welfare. In a review of the literature, Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi (1996) find fewer than 30 articles on charitable giving in the marketing literature over a 20-year period. Since the publication of that review, other researchers have studied persuasion tactics in a fundraising context (e.g., Ferraro, Shiv, and Bettman 2005; Gourville 1998). Many of the factors and processes

that have been examined are relevant for a wide range of consumer behaviors, including charitable giving. For example, Fishbein's (1967) model of behavioral intentions has been frequently examined in the context of donation behavior (see LaTour and Manrai 1989). Yet charitable giving warrants more specific attention and theory building because it uniquely involves generating consumer sympathy for other people and worthy causes.

Charity advertisements attempt to evoke sympathy for their cause. To this end, victims are pictured on charity appeals to elicit the responses that are believed to engender prosocial behavior. Research on the identifiable victim effect (e.g., Small and Loewenstein 2003) and the relative advantage of vivid over pallid information (e.g., Nisbett and Ross 1980) supports this notion. Pictures evoke emotion; however, the emotional response may depend on the nature of the picture. Certain picture attributes might more effectively appeal to sympathy than others.

In this article, we report how facial expression of emotion displayed in pictures on charity advertisements is a critical determinant of sympathy and giving. Although there is much research on experienced emotion and prosocial behavior (for a review, see Carlson and Miller 1987), we know of no study that isolates the impact of emotion expression on prosocial behavior. This gap is noteworthy because of the need to understand responsiveness to charity appeals, which often feature photographs of victims expressing emotion. Thus, this article's primary contribution is to provide

insight into how emotion expressions on advertisements influence consumers and their behavior.

Although many factors influence prosocial behaviors, in the realm of charitable appeals with its frequent, vivid pictures of victims, emotion expression could differentiate among appeals and ultimately determine whether consumers open their wallets and donate. Therefore, this research draws attention to a sympathy-generating attribute of charity appeals that has been neglected in both theory and practice.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Because the marketing of charitable causes involves evoking sympathy and prosocial motivation, certain theoretical insights are particularly germane to this topic. In what follows, we discuss our theory about how emotional contagion resulting from victims' facial expressions translates into sympathy and donations.

Emotion Expression and Contagion

The face, with its endlessly intriguing capability for communication, is believed to be the primary nonverbal channel for the communication of emotion (Ekman, Friesen, and Ellsworth 1972; Keltner et al. 2003). In addition to transmitting information, facial expression of emotion elicits vicarious emotion in observers, a phenomenon called "emotional contagion" (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1992, 1994; Neumann and Strack 2000).

A small number of studies demonstrate the real-world importance of emotion expression and emotional contagion in human interaction. A field study that videotaped passengers who reported lost luggage at an airport baggage claim found that nonverbal cues of emotion (facial expressions and body language) from the passengers were more predictive of objective behavior (airline agent ratings) than verbal cues (Scherer and Ceschi 2000). Howard and Gengler (2001) examine the relevance of emotional contagion for product attitudes. Finally, Ramanathan and McGill (2007) find that joint consumption experiences (e.g., watching a television show) dynamically led to more congruent evaluations when participants could see each other's facial emotion expressions, as a result of emotional contagion.

While the previously mentioned studies examine dynamic interactions, our studies extend the limits of contagion by examining situations in which the expresser of emotion is an unfamiliar person in a photograph in an advertisement. We propose that a happy-faced image will elicit or enhance happy feelings and a sad-faced image will elicit or enhance sad feelings.

Sympathy and Prosocial Behavior

The terms "empathy" and "sympathy" are often used interchangeably, but their meanings are distinct. Empathy involves experiencing the feelings experienced by another person. In contrast, sympathy is an emotional concern for the welfare of another person. Nevertheless, to empathize with someone else's negative feeling state is, in most cases, also to feel sympathetic toward them (Loewenstein and Small 2007). This suggests that empathy resulting from contagion also often generates sympathy.

The link between sympathy and prosocial behavior is well established (Bagozzi and Moore 1994; Batson et al. 1997; Coke, Batson, and McDavis 1978). Research has documented several factors that enhance charitable giving by facilitating sympathy. For example, people who have personal experience with a particular misfortune are more sympathetic toward other victims of the same misfortune, which in turn influences their donation and volunteering choices (Small and Simonsohn 2008). Similarly, specific identifiable victims stimulate greater sympathy and, thus, greater generosity than abstract statistical victims (Kogut and Ritov 2005; Small and Loewenstein 2003). In summary, there is a great deal of evidence that fostering sympathy increases people's tendency to give to charity. We build on these findings by suggesting that when a victim expresses sadness, an observer shares that pain. In turn, this emotional convergence of sadness facilitates sympathy and giving.

Automatic and Deliberative Thinking

Recent research has examined how automatic and deliberative thinking moderate sympathy and prosocial behavior (Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic 2007). Emotional contagion is a primitive, automatic form of empathy, which theorists distinguish from more deliberative empathy that involves taking another person's perspective (Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1993). Consistent with this distinction, research has shown that "catching" another person's feelings by responding to his or her facial expressions happens automatically and outside of awareness (i.e., without inference or deliberation) (Dimberg, Thumberg, and Elmehed 2000; Neumann and Strack 2000).

Other research finds that deliberative thinking can disrupt emotional processes (Wilson and Brekke 1994; Wilson, Lindsey, and Schooler 2000). Although a picture on a charitable appeal may prompt emotion, if consumers are sufficiently motivated and have the opportunity to read the fine print, such information about the charity or victim might then engage a more deliberative mind-set, overriding the emotional response. Therefore, we predict that facial expression will have a lesser effect when consumers are processing other, more cognitively demanding forms of information in addition to the picture.

Summary

Emotion expression on charitable appeals may be an important variable affecting donations. Expression is likely to cause contagion in observers, thus influencing observers' emotional states automatically and outside of awareness. When a person catches sadness, his or her emotional state converges with the victim's negative emotional state, resulting in greater sympathy and prosocial behavior.

However, the emotional bond may be disrupted when examining detailed information about the victim's plight. This is not to say that information cannot induce sympathy but rather that it dilutes or even overrides the impact of emotional contagion.

The five studies presented in this article empirically test the components of our proposed theory. Study 1 demonstrates that the emotional expression of a victim pictured on a charitable appeal systematically changes observers' propensity to give. After we establish this phenomenon with actual donations, Studies 2–5 employ psychological measures of sympathy to elucidate the possible mechanism. Study 2 replicates Study 1's results with measured sympathy and demonstrates that participants' emotional states con-

verge with that of the pictured victim. Study 3 examines the moderating role of information by controlling an informational component in the appeals as well as a cognitive load manipulation. It finds evidence that the sad expression enhances sympathy when people are processing at a relatively shallow level but not when they are analyzing other information. Study 4 finds that the effects of sympathy are robust when people select their own exposure to advertisements. Finally, Study 5 reveals that only when the source of sadness is a victim's expression does it increase sympathy, not when sadness is caused by an unrelated source. This provides further support for the notion that emotional convergence between victim and observer is critical for the process to unfold. Together, these studies illuminate the process by which emotion expressions embedded in advertisements systematically influence sympathy and prosocial behavior.

STUDY 1

Study 1 tests whether people will donate more to a charity when the picture on the appeal features a sad-faced child than when it features a neutral-faced or happy-faced child. A total of 151 students and university staff members participated in a series of studies in exchange for a $10 show-up fee. Approximately 50% were women, and the age range was 18–43 years (M = 21). Each participant sat in a private cubicle.

Procedure

The materials consisted of advertisements for an organization supporting children's cancer research. Each advertisement contained a picture of a child (either a boy or a girl), photographed with permission in a kindergarten classroom. Thus, the photos did not exhibit any features designating the children as victims, such as hair loss or physical deformity. This was intentional to emphasize the face and to ensure that any changes in donations would not be due to the child's sickly appearance. We took pictures of each child showing a happy, sad, or neutral emotion expression. A pretest of 37 participants confirmed that the happy pictures appeared more happy (M_{boy} = 4.81, SD_{boy} = .40; M_{girl} = 4.46, SD_{girl} = .61) than both the neutral pictures (M_{boy} = 3.32, SD_{boy} = .82; M_{girl} = 2.89, SD_{girl} = .88) and the sad pictures (M_{boy} = 2.00, SD_{boy} = .78; M_{girl} = 2.65, SD_{girl} = .79; ps < .001). Similarly, the sad pictures appeared more sad (M_{boy} = 3.78, SD_{boy} = 1.06; M_{girl} = 3.00, SD_{girl} = .97) than the neutral pictures (M_{boy} = 2.57, SD_{boy} = .73; M_{girl} = 2.59, SD_{girl} = .96) and the happy pictures (M_{boy} = 1.19, SD_{boy} = .46; M_{girl} = 1.59, SD_{girl} = .80; ps < .001).

Participants were randomly assigned to see a photo of one of the two children, expressing one of the three emotions. Thus, the study was a 3 (emotion expression: happy/neutral/sad) × 2 (child) between-subjects design. The paper flier advertisements were given to participants at the end of a session that included several unrelated studies, while they remained seated in their private cubicles (for stimuli, see "Layout of Charity Advertisements Used in Studies 1–3" in the Web Appendix at http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrdec09). At the time they received the fliers, participants also received the $10 show-up fee, an envelope, and instructions that told them they could donate any portion of their $10 to the research foundation. Participants were instructed to seal the envelope and return it to the experimenter when exiting the lab, even if the envelope was empty, to reduce any social pressure. After each participant returned the envelope and all other study materials, the experimenter unobtrusively recorded the advertisement's condition number. All donated money was given to the designated charity after the study.

Results

We examined whether the facial emotion expression affected both the propensity to donate and the magnitude of the donation. The proportion of people in the sad expression condition who donated was 77.4%, compared with 52.1% in the happy condition and 52.0% in the neutral condition. A chi-square test comparing the sad condition with the other two conditions was significant ($\chi^2(1)$ = 9.26, p < .005). In terms of magnitude ($0–$10 range), a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed a main effect of expression on donation amount ($F(2, 145)$ = 3.53, p < .05, η_p^2 = .05). Giving was greater for the sad expression than for each of the other two expressions (both ps < .03). There was no difference between the happy and neutral expression conditions (p = not significant [n.s.]). There was no main effect of child or interaction between child and emotional expression. Figure 1 displays the means and standard deviations of the donations, collapsing across the two children.

If we exclude the $0 donations from the analysis, there is no main effect of expression on donation amount ($F(2, 87)$ = .31, p = n.s.). Thus, it appears that people on the margin are more likely to opt to donate when the expression is sad than when it is happy or neutral, but those who would donate when viewing any emotion expression do not donate more money when that expression is sadness.

In summary, advertisements featuring a child expressing sadness increased donations compared with happy or neutral facial expressions. To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to demonstrate the impact of facial emotion expression on prosocial behavior.

To maintain trust that the donation was real and not prompt suspicion that participants' donations were being tracked, we did not quiz them about their thoughts and feelings in conjunction with the charity appeal. Although this limited our ability to explore psychological mechanisms, it was important to minimize demand and impression management concerns that could influence real donations.

Figure 1
MEAN DONATIONS BY EMOTION EXPRESSION IN STUDY 1

In the remaining studies, we examine the mechanisms driving this effect. Instead of soliciting donations, we use a scale measuring sympathy as the primary dependent variable. Many studies have found that this scale is highly correlated with prosocial behavior, making it a suitable proxy for true giving (for a review, see Batson 1990). Although behavioral measures are preferable to self-report measure in general, an advantage of measuring sympathy rather than actual giving in the remaining studies is that it enables us to measure and manipulate other psychological variables. As we mentioned, when such measures are taken before or during a charity solicitation, participants often become suspicious about the veracity of the request and the organization. When such measures are taken after a charity solicitation, they can be distorted by the earlier decision to give. For example, helping alters mood through a process known as mood repair (Manucia, Baumann, and Cialdini 1984), so emotion measures would not accurately reflect the emotions present during the decision. Using the sympathy scale precludes these concerns.

STUDY 2

Study 2 examines the psychological mechanisms underlying the effect demonstrated in Study 1. Specifically, it examines whether emotional contagion can explain the effect of victims' emotion expressions on sympathy. We predicted that participants would feel happier when viewing a happy-faced child and sadder when viewing a sad-faced child. We further predicted that feelings of sadness would mediate the impact of an emotional expression on sympathy.

A total of 130 students and university staff members participated in a series of studies, including this one, in exchange for $10. Of the 130 participants, 50% were women, and the average age was 22 years (age range = 18–55 years). Each participant sat in a private cubicle.

Procedure

We used the same experimental design and stimuli as in Study 1. The questionnaire had five sets of questions: (1) self-reported sympathy toward the child in the picture, (2) open-ended responses, (3) self-reported current emotion, (4) awareness measures, and (5) manipulation checks.

Self-reported sympathy. After viewing the advertisement, participants indicated the degree to which they felt certain feelings toward the child in the picture on a seven-point scale (1 = "not at all," and 7 = "extremely"). We borrowed items from Batson and colleagues (Batson 1983; Coke, Batson, and McDavis 1978), and they included upset, distressed, sympathetic, alarmed, grieved, troubled, compassionate, perturbed, worried, and disturbed. Factor analysis revealed that all items loaded onto a single factor (α = .93); thus, we created an average score for these items, and we refer to it simply as "sympathy."

Open-ended responses. Participants then described why they felt bad for and cared about the child.

Self-reported current emotion. Next, participants rated their own emotions. Specifically, they were asked to indicate the extent to which any of the following described "how you feel right now" on a five-point scale (1 = "very slightly or not at all," and 5 = "extremely"). We included all items from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988).

Awareness measures. Participants also rated the degree to which several potential causes for sympathy had affected them, including "I was affected by the expression on John's face," on a five-point scale (1 = "not at all a cause of my feelings," and 5 = "the most important cause of my feelings"). The other causes participants rated on the same scale included (1) "I am a sympathetic person," (2) "Someone close to me has experienced cancer," (3) "I was affected by John's cuteness," (4) "I was affected by John's age," (5) "I was affected by John's health," and (6) "I was affected by John's race."[1]

Manipulation checks. After participants reported their own feelings, the PANAS list of emotion characteristics was repeated with different instructions. This time, participants indicated the extent to which the characteristics described "the expression on John's face in the picture." Consistent with the pretest data reported in Study 1, all manipulation checks were significant and in the predicted direction.

Results

Effects on sympathy. A two-way ANOVA revealed a main effect of emotion expression on sympathy ($F(2, 124) = 9.28$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .13$). Our primary prediction was supported: People in the sad expression condition reported higher levels of sympathy (M = 4.22, SD = 1.19) than people in the happy expression condition (M = 3.27, SD = 1.23) and the neutral expression condition (M = 3.39, SD = 1.17; ps < .005) (see Figure 2). The main effect of the child's sex and the interaction effect were not significant.

Emotional contagion. Next, we evaluated the impact of emotion expression on participants' own feelings while they viewed the advertisement (see Figure 3). From the self-reported current emotion scale, we computed an average score of the three items describing sadness (upset, depressed, sad; α = .81) and an average score of the three items describing happiness (excited, enthusiastic, happy; α = .73). A two-way ANOVA with self-reported sadness as the dependent variable revealed a main effect of emotion expression ($F(2, 124) = 9.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .14$). Participants were sadder when viewing a sad face (M = 2.38, SD = .963) than when viewing a happy face (M = 1.66, SD = .79)

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[1]John was replaced by Jennie for the conditions with a picture of a girl.

Figure 2
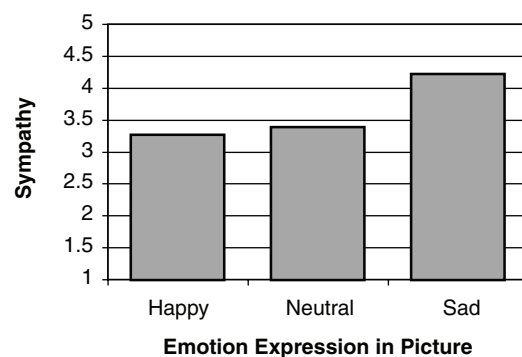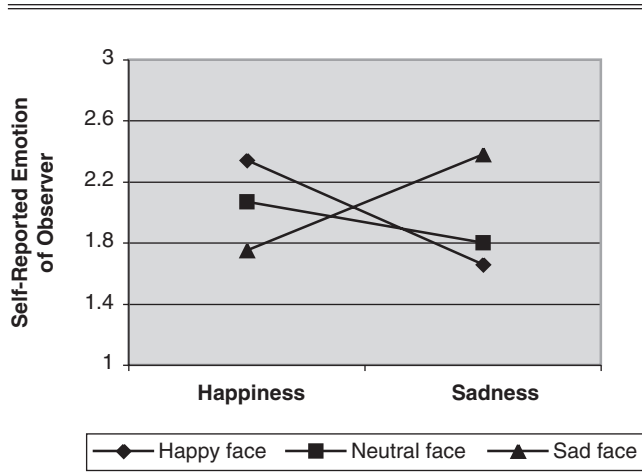#### SELF-REPORTED SYMPATHY BY EMOTION EXPRESSION CONDITION IN STUDY 2

Figure 3
EMOTIONAL CONTAGION OF HAPPINESS AND SADNESS BY EMOTION EXPRESSION CONDITION IN STUDY 2

Notes: Self-reported sadness is an average score of upset, depressed, and sad. Self-reported happiness is one item: happy.

or a neutral face (M = 1.80, SD = .82; *p*s < .01). In this ANOVA, there was also a main effect of the child's sex (more sadness in the boy than in the girl conditions) (F(1, 124) = 4.30, *p* < .05, η_p^2 = .03), but sex of the child did not interact with emotion expression (*p* = n.s.).[2]

In contrast to sadness, the effect of expression on self-reported happiness was in the predicted direction, though it was not significant (F(2, 123) = 1.21, *p* = n.s., η_p^2 = .02). In follow-up analyses, we found that the ANOVA was indeed significant when the dependent measure was the single-item "happy" than when it was the composite score (F(2, 123) = 3.41, *p* < .05, η_p^2 = .05). Bonferroni comparison tests found that people reported greater happiness (using the single-item measure) in the happy expression condition than in the sad expression condition (*p* < .04), but the happiness difference between the happy expression and the neutral expression conditions was not significant (*p* = n.s.). There was no main effect of sex of the child, nor did sex of the child interact with emotion expression. In summary, emotional contagion occurred for both sadness and happiness, though contagion of sadness was more robust.

Mediation analyses. Next, we tested whether participants' own sadness mediates the effects on sympathy. We followed the steps Baron and Kenny (1986) advocate. Figure 4 indicates that self-reported sadness fully mediates the impact of facial expressions on sympathy judgments. The beta value for emotion expression drops from .49 to .23 when self-reported sadness is included in the regression, and the *p*-value rises to nonsignificance (*p* = .062). The Sobel (1988) test is significant (z = 3.42, *p* < .0001), in further support of full mediation.[3]

Unlike sadness, happiness does not mediate the impact of facial expressions on sympathy judgments. The beta value for

[2]The main effect for the child's sex could be because the boy's expression of sadness was rated as sadder (M = 3.78, SD = 1.06) than that of the girl (M = 3.00, SD = .97; t(36) = 4.035, *p* < .0001).

[3]A test of whether sympathy mediates the impact of emotion expression on self-reported sadness revealed that emotion expression remains significant (*p* < .05) when sympathy is added to the regression.

emotion expression remains significant (*p* < .001) even when self-reported happiness is included in the model, and self-reported happiness is not significant in this model (*p* = .84).[4]

In summary, emotional contagion of sadness mediated the impact of emotion expression on sympathy. Participants who saw the sad-faced child felt sadder and thus were more sympathetic. Although there is some evidence for happiness contagion, our theory does not predict that the convergence of happiness will increase sympathy, and it does not. Sadness contagion facilitates sympathy because the observer shares the victim's pain, but happiness contagion fails to connect the observer to the victim's negative state.

Examining inferential thinking. Because emotional contagion is an automatic process that does not need to entail deliberation or awareness, we examined whether these processes account for the effects. First, two independent raters coded the open-ended responses for evidence of perspective taking (high, medium, or low); they agreed on 83.6% of cases (Cohen's κ = .70). Disagreements were resolved through discussion. Across all responses, 32.1% had a high level of perspective taking, 29.8% had a medium level, and 38.1% had a low level. A two-way ANOVA with perspective taking as the dependent variable revealed no effect of emotion expression or of the child (*p* = n.s.).[5]

Second, we examined participants' beliefs about the causes for their sympathy to determine whether they were aware of the impact of expressions. The causes participants endorsed as the most important determinants of sympathy were their own personality ("I am a sympathetic person"; M = 3.68, SD = .87), the child's age ("I was affected by John's age"; M = 3.66, SD = 1.07), and the child's health ("I was affected by John's health"; M = 3.28, SD = 1.22). The cause that was actually manipulated in the study ("I was affected by the expression on John's face") was judged to

[4]To analyze whether self-reported happiness mediates the effect, we use the single-item measure of happiness because it was the only happiness measure affected by emotion expression.

[5]Perspective taking is both an enduring trait and a state that can be induced by deliberative thought. Consistent with the "trait" perspective, it is correlated with sympathy (ρ = .47, *p* < .01) and sadness (ρ = .35, *p* < .01). However, regressions including perspective taking find no significant interactions with emotion expression. This further supports the notion that emotion expressions operate independent of deliberative thought.

Figure 4
MEDIATION ANALYSIS IN STUDY 2 WITH SADNESS AS THE MEDIATOR
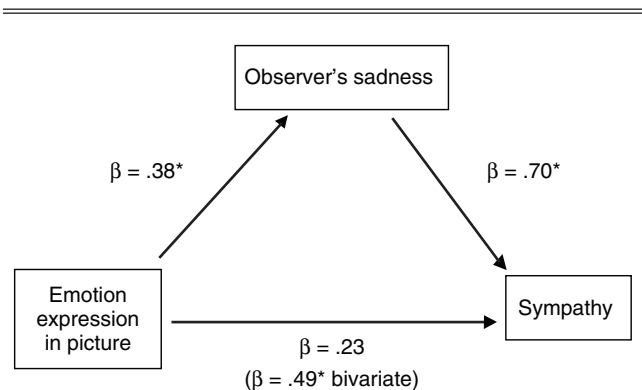
p < .001.

be only somewhat important (M = 3.15, SD = 1.24), significantly lower than each of the other endorsed causes ($ps <$ .001). The cause deemed to be the least important was the child's race (M = 1.58, SD = .97).

Third, we tested whether participants' beliefs about the impact of emotion expression depended on which expression they saw. We conducted a one-way ANOVA with the item "I was affected by the expression on John's face" as the dependent variable. The results were not significant (F(2, 127) = .73, p = n.s.). Thus, participants' judgments about the influence of emotion expression did not differ by emotion expression, even though that emotion expression indeed influenced sympathy.

In summary, the findings are consistent with key elements of our theory. We found that a victim's emotion expression matters, this time measuring sympathy rather than donations. We also found evidence for emotional contagion as a mediator. People felt especially sad when they viewed the sad face, which in turn enhanced their sympathy for the victim. Finally, we found no evidence of differential perspective taking across emotion conditions or differential awareness about the impact of the various facial expressions. The lack of evidence for such inferential processes is consistent with the contention that emotional contagion is an automatic process that occurs without awareness or deliberative thought. We explore this issue further in the subsequent studies.

STUDY 3

Dual-process models of emotion and deliberation emphasize that the output of the deliberative system occurs later than and often tempers the output of an automatic, emotional response (Wilson and Brekke 1994). Drawing on the notion that emotional contagion is an automatic process, we reasoned that scrutinizing other information in an advertisement and thus invoking the deliberative system might attenuate the impact of the face. Therefore, we predicted that other information would moderate the effects of emotion expression on sympathy but only when people have the opportunity to process that information deeply. To test this, we use a standard cognitive load manipulation and predict that information should diminish emotion expression effects on sympathy when cognitive load is low but not when cognitive load is high.

A total of 483 students and university staff members participated in a series of studies, including this one, in exchange for $10. Of the 483 participants, 55% were women, and the average age was 22 years (age range = 18–62 years). Each participant sat in a private cubicle.

Procedure

At the onset of the study, half the participants were asked to hold a seven-digit number in their heads throughout the study, and the other half were asked to hold a two-digit number in their heads until the end of the study (Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999).

Because the previous studies consistently found no differences between happy and neutral expressions or between the two previously used pictures, we limited Study 3 to the happy and sad emotion expressions and to just one child. Therefore, participants were randomly assigned to see a photo of the boy expressing either happiness or sadness. As the information manipulation, half the participants also read

a description of the child's diagnosis of advanced cancer (see the section "Story Depicting Child's Cancer Diagnosis Used in Study 3" in the Web Appendix at www.marketing power.com/jmrdec09). Thus, the study was a 2 (emotion expression: happy/sad) × 2 (information: yes/no) × 2 (cognitive load: high/low) between-subjects design.

The questionnaire measured self-reported sympathy toward the pictured child using the same scale as in Study 2 and also asked participants to report the emotion of the pictured child as a manipulation check of emotion expression. Again, these manipulation checks replicated the significant effects reported for the pretest data. The two-item manipulation check of cognitive load was significant and in the predicted direction (p < .001), and the emotion and information manipulations did not affect this variable or interact with cognitive load (ps = n.s.).

Results

We subjected the sympathy score to a 2 (emotion expression) × 2 (information) × 2 (cognitive load) ANOVA. Not surprisingly, participants who read a description of the child's illness were more sympathetic than participants who did not read a description (M_{info} = 3.63, SD = 1.12 versus $M_{no\ info}$ = 2.94, SD = 1.28; F(1, 475) = 41.88, p < .001, η_p^2 = .08). There was also a main effect of emotion condition (F(1, 475) = 9.84, p < .01, η_p^2 = .02). Participants who saw a child with a sad expression (M = 3.44, SD = 1.29) were more sympathetic than those who saw a child with a happy expression (M = 3.10, SD = 1.19). However, these main effects were qualified by a significant interaction between emotion expression and information (F(1, 475) = 4.24, p < .05, η_p^2 = .01). Pairwise comparisons demonstrate that the sad face elicited more sympathy than the happy face when information was absent (p < .05) but not when information was present. Importantly, these findings were further qualified by a three-way interaction among emotion expression, information, and cognitive load (F(1, 475) = 4.27, p < .05, η_p^2 = .01). The three-way interaction occurs because cognitive load prohibits the activation of the deliberative mind-set engaged by reading the information. Considering only participants in the low-cognitive-load conditions, pairwise comparisons reveal no difference in sympathy between those who saw the sad expression (M = 3.56, SD = 1.18) and those who saw the happy expression (M = 3.64, SD = 1.12) when information is present (p = n.s.), but as in the previous studies, sadness increases sympathy (M = 3.34, SD = 1.45) compared with happiness (M = 2.52, SD = .96) when information is absent. However, when cognitive load is high, the significant effect of emotion expression remains intact both when information is present (M_{sad} = 3.80, SD = 1.18 versus M_{happy} = 3.48, SD = .95, p < .05) and when information is absent (M_{sad} = 3.06, SD = 1.22 versus M_{happy} = 2.75, SD = 1.28; p < .05) (see Figure 5). In summary, a sad face enhanced sympathy for a child victim compared with a happy face in the absence of supporting information about the child's plight. When participants read detailed information about the child's plight and could process it at a deep level, emotion expression became a less important determinant of sympathy. However, when cognitive resources were limited, information failed to diminish the impact of emotion expression.

The finding that information, in the form of a description of the child's plight, moderated the impact of facial expression is consistent with the dual-process view, which postulates that emotional contagion matters most when people are not thinking deeply. Sympathy judgments varied as a function of emotion expression only when people were reacting solely to the image of the face. However, when the task involved greater deliberative processing (i.e., judging sympathy on the basis of reading and evaluating the victim's condition), the emotion expression lost its impact.

This moderation by no means undercuts the importance of emotion expression and contagion effects. Rather, it sheds light on the conditions in which such effects are most likely to occur. Given limited cognitive capacity, time, and motivation, quick and intuitive judgments are assumed to be the default (Kahneman and Frederick 2002), so expression likely matters more often than not. However, when consumers read the fine print, expression effects are diminished.[6]

STUDY 4

The goal of Study 4 is to examine the effects of emotion expression when exposure is not forced. In the real world,

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[6]Though not directly tested, it is plausible that expression effects are greater for advertisements that provide an immediate opportunity to donate, such as when a Web advertisement includes a button to donate, than for those that typically entail a delay, such as a highway billboard.

Figure 5
SELF-REPORTED SYMPATHY IN STUDY 3

A: Low Cognitive Load

B: High Cognitive Load
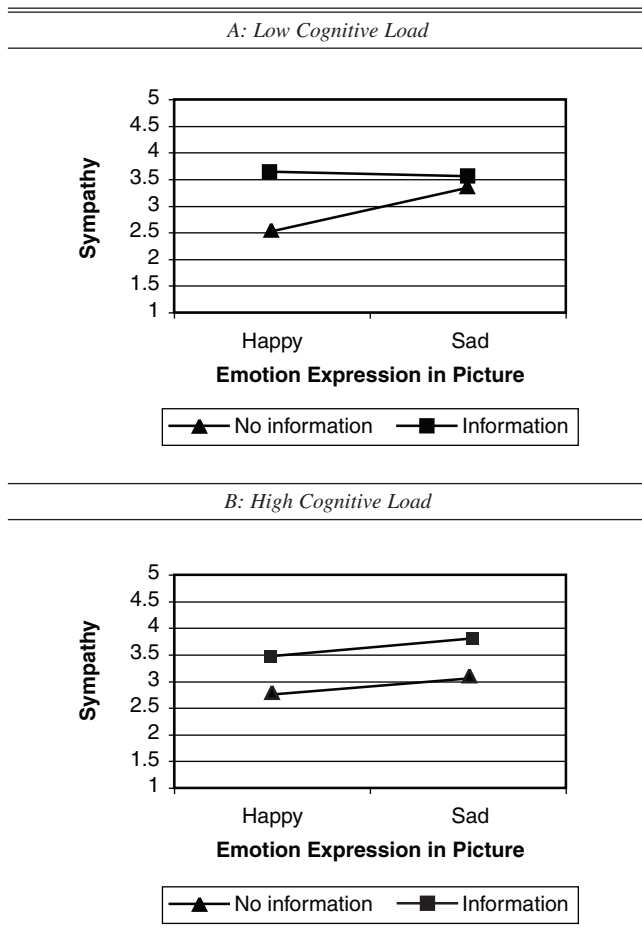
viewers can "change the channel" and choose to view something else. Thus, it is possible that consumers in the real world are less affected by a sad expression because they avoid looking at it. Therefore, we designed a paradigm that allows participants to choose their own exposure to advertisements. Specifically, after seeing an advertisement with an image of a child expressing one of the three emotions, participants repeatedly could choose between seeing another similar advertisement from the same charity or an advertisement from a different charity, which was from a set of emotionally neutral nature images. In addition, this study uses a variety of photographs of children taken from the Web sites of actual charities rather than the images used in prior studies (see the section "Charity Advertisements Used in Study 4" in the Web Appendix at http://www.marketing power.com/jmrdec09).

We selected ten charity images for each emotion condition. Because this study used a new paradigm and different pictures, we again included a neutral condition for a more thorough test of emotion expression effects. Every set of pictures within each emotion condition contained an equivalent composition of white/nonwhite and male/female images. In a pretest, participants reported that the happy set of pictures appeared more happy (M = 4.61, SD = .31) than both the neutral set (M = 2.93, SD = .44) and the sad set (M = 1.84, SD = .44; $ps < .001$). Participants also reported that the sad set of pictures appeared more sad (M = 3.89, SD = .36) than both the neutral set (M = 2.71, SD = .43) and the happy set (M = 1.39, SD = .37; $ps < .001$). In other words, the pretest confirmed that the pictures indeed represented the target emotion expressions.

A total of 187 students, university staff, and community members participated in a series of studies, including this one, in exchange for $10. Of the 187 participants, 59% were women, and the average age was 24 years (age range = 18–66 years). The study was administered through computers set in private cubicles.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three emotion conditions and to two orders of presentation of pictures. We instructed participants to complete a Web-based survey about their reactions to a series of advertisements. Instructions indicated that they would be choosing to view advertisements from two charities: (1) Children of the World and (2) the Wilderness Society. Each advertisement would be presented for five seconds, and participants would be viewing a total of ten advertisements. On the start page of the study, participants saw two sample advertisements: one from Children of the World (a child expressing a neutral emotion expression), and one from the Wilderness Society (no face or emotional content).

The first advertisement, which every participant saw, was from Children of the World. However, the picture participants saw depended on their emotion expression and picture order condition. After viewing the first advertisement for five seconds, participants were asked "Do you want to see another ad from this charity or an ad from the other charity?" and they could click on either charity name. If they clicked on Children of the World, they saw a picture of a different child, but the child was expressing the same emotion as in the previous picture. If they clicked on the Wilder-

ness Society, they saw a picture of a nature scene. They then viewed the selected picture for five seconds. Participants saw a new ad image following each choice. This pattern repeated until participants made all nine choices (viewing ten advertisements in total, one at a time). In other words, participants repeatedly made choices between viewing another advertisement containing the same emotion expression or another neutral advertisement.

Afterward, participants completed the same measures used in prior studies to report their sympathy (in this study, they reported sympathy toward the group of children in the advertisements rather than to one child) and their own emotional state. As a manipulation check of emotion expression, participants reported the perceived average emotions of the children they viewed. Consistent with the pretest data, manipulation checks of emotion expression were significant and in the predicted direction.

Results

In all analyses, there was no main effect of picture order or interactions with this variable. Thus, we collapsed across order conditions.

Sympathy effects. We subjected the sympathy score to a one-way ANOVA and found a significant main effect of emotion expression ($F(2, 184) = 10.676$ $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$). Replicating our previous results, participants in the sad expression condition reported higher levels of sympathy ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.38$) than participants in the happy expression condition ($M = 2.72$, $SD = 1.40$) and the neutral expression condition ($M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.41$; $ps < .05$).

The same pattern holds if the dependent variable is self-reported sadness rather than sympathy: There is a main effect of emotion expression ($F(2, 184) = 7.067$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$), with participants in the sad expression condition feeling sadder ($M = 2.31$, $SD = .99$) than participants in the happy expression condition ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .95$) and the neutral expression condition ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .93$; $ps < .01$). We also performed a mediation analysis similar to that in Study 2. The beta value for emotion expression drops from –.17 to –.05 when self-reported sadness is included in the regression, and the t-value rises to nonsignificance ($p = .418$). The Sobel (1988) test is significant ($z = –2.55$, $p < .01$), in further support of full mediation.

Selective exposure. Using a variety of simple statistics, we examined participants' propensity to continue viewing the children's charity advertisement as a function of the emotion expression condition. No matter which statistic we employed, we found no differences in viewing choices across the conditions. For example, the propensity (proportion of choices) to choose the children's charity did not differ by emotion expression ($F(2, 184) = 1.05$, $p = $ n.s.). Similarly, the first choice, the last choice, the maximum number of consecutive children advertisements viewed, the number of consecutive children or nature advertisements, and the number of switches between the two ad sets did not differ by expression ($ps = $ n.s.). Moreover, when we include the proportion of choices to view the children's charity advertisement as a covariate in the model predicting sympathy, the main effect of emotion expression still holds ($F(2, 183) = 10.74$, $p < .0001$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$). Taken together, these data suggest that when participants are in control of their viewing mate-

rial, they nonetheless feel most sympathetic when viewing sad expressions, regardless of their viewing choices.

In summary, this study is a conceptual replication that strengthens the external validity of our findings in a novel paradigm that allows for selective exposure to advertisements. We found that consumers are just as likely to choose to view more children's charity advertisements when the child in the advertisement expresses sadness as they are when the child expresses happiness or neutral emotion and that, even with this freedom, the sad expression causes the most sympathy. Thus, we expect that consumers outside the lab will be similarly affected when they are at liberty to control their own viewing.

STUDY 5

We have argued that the effect of facial emotion expression on sympathy is due to the transfer of sadness from the child in the picture to the observer. If the shared emotional experience is the critical process, the effect should hold only when the source of the observer's sadness is the facial emotion expression in the picture but not when the observer's sadness is incidental or when it stems from an unrelated source. This distinction is important because previous research on incidental sadness, happiness, and prosocial behavior has found that both incidental happiness and sadness sometimes increase helping, but in general, it has not theorized that incidental sadness is a better helping motivator than incidental happiness (for reviews, see Batson 1990; Schaller and Cialdini 1996). However, when an emotion is induced incidentally, we would not expect the emotional bond brought about by contagion to emerge.

To further isolate the unique effect of emotional contagion on sympathy, Study 5 directly manipulates whether the source of the observer's emotion is the child's facial expression or an unrelated source. Thus, our final study tests whether the target emotion (happiness or sadness) interacts with the source of the emotion (facial expression or incidental) on sympathy.

We used the same basic paradigm as in Study 4, with an additional factor that we refer to as "source of emotion." Having found no differences between the happiness and the neutral expression conditions in Study 4, we restricted the emotion factor to two levels—happiness and sadness—as in Study 3. Again, we showed the sets of pictures (ten for each emotion expression condition) in one of two distinct orders. Finally, the source-of-emotion factor involved manipulating whether the emotion was caused by the facial expressions in the picture, as in the previous studies, or whether it was induced by an unrelated source.

One hundred forty-six participants completed the two-part study, along with other experiments, during a one-hour lab session in exchange for $10. Of the 146 participants, 57% were women, and the average age was 26 years (age range = 18–67 years). Each participant sat in a private cubicle.

Procedure

Participants were randomly assigned to the incidental happy and the incidental sad conditions and followed a writing procedure used in many previous studies (e.g., Strack, Schwarz, and Gschneidinger 1985). They were first instructed to write about "the 3–5 things that make you most sad (happy)." After listing these items, participants turned to

the next page to describe one item in more detail, writing their description "so that someone reading this might even get sad (happy) just from learning about the situation." Consistent with previous research that has used this incidental writing task, a pretest with 35 respondents confirmed that writing about unrelated sad things caused people to feel sadder (M_{sad} = 2.19, SD = .86) than writing about unrelated happy things (M_{sad} = 1.40, SD = .80; F(1, 33) = 7.731 $p <$ .01, η_p^2 = .19). Participants in the conditions for which the source of emotion was a facial expression rather than an incidental source followed a similar writing task also used in previous research. These participants received instructions to write about "the 3–5 things that you did today" and to go into detail about how they spend their days on the second page of the task. This version reliably does not raise the level of any emotion.

Immediately after completing the writing task, participants were instructed to click on a link to the Charity Advertisements Web-based survey. As in Study 4, participants were told that we were interested in their reactions to a series of advertisements, that they would get to choose to view advertisements from two charities during the study, and that they would view a total of ten sequential advertisements for five seconds each. On the start page of the study, participants also saw two sample advertisements: one from Children of the World and one from the Wilderness Society.
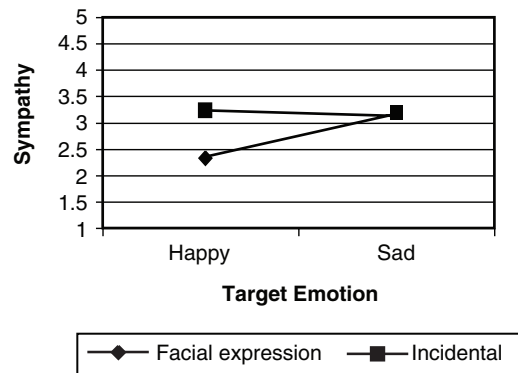
The participants in the incidental-source-of-emotion conditions saw a set of children's advertisements containing neutral facial expressions. The participants in the facial-expression-source-of-emotion conditions saw children's advertisements from either the happy or the sad facial expression sets. All other procedural details were identical to those in Study 4. To summarize, all participants completed two tasks: the writing task and the choosing-ads task. Those in the incidental-source-of-emotion conditions completed the target emotion writing task and a choosing-ads task that contained neutral facial expressions. Those in the facial-expression-source-of-emotion conditions completed the neutral writing task and a choosing-ads task that contained target emotion facial expressions.

Results

A two-way ANOVA on sympathy revealed a significant interaction between source of emotion and target emotion (F(1, 142) = 4.470, $p < .05$, η_p^2 = .031) (see Figure 6). As in previous studies, when the source of emotion was a facial expression, participants in the sad condition were more sympathetic (M = 3.17, SD = 1.28) than those in the happy expression condition (M = 2.34, SD = 1.32; $p < .05$). However, there was no difference in sympathy between sad (M = 3.13, SD = 1.26) and happy (M = 3.24, SD = 1.42) when emotion was caused by an incidental source (p = n.s.).[7]

In summary, this study further supports our theoretical argument that it is the emotional convergence specific to contagion that drives the effect of emotion expression on sympathy rather than a general feeling of sadness. Specifically, we find that when sadness is caused by an unrelated source, the emotion-specific effects disappear.

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[7]As in Study 4, emotion expression had no impact on the selection of advertisements to view, nor did source of emotion or their interaction.

Figure 6
SYMPATHY BY SOURCE OF EMOTION IN STUDY 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Advertisements for human-need charities aim to evoke sympathy and solicit donations. We argue that it is important for charities to bear in mind the emotions expressed in victim portrayals in their advertisements. Drawing on existing theories of emotional contagion and of emotion and prosocial motivation, we created a framework for predicting when and how such expressions influence sympathy and giving.

Specifically, we predicted that people feel sadder when exposed to a sad-faced image. We argue that this transfer of emotion is automatic and not driven by inferential thinking. How might this subtle and rather automatic induction of emotion influence sympathy and behavior? We propose that the shared experience of sadness emotionally equips observers to empathize with suffering. Finally, we theorize that when people read more information on charity advertisements, it engages their deliberative system, which lessens the impact of the emotion expression. This idea is bolstered by research showing that emotional contagion occurs automatically and that deliberation can disrupt these emotional processes.

Study 1 evaluated actual donation behavior and found that a sad expression increases giving compared with a neutral or happy expression. Studies 2–5 replicated the pattern with subjective measures of sympathy rather than donations and provided strong support for emotional contagion as the mechanism. In Study 2, participants who saw a sad face felt sadder, and their sadness mediated the effect of emotion expression on sympathy. Study 3 demonstrated that the effect on sympathy of emotion expression was moderated by other information in the advertisement. However, because the information moderator does not persist when participants are under cognitive load, it appears that the information moderator occurs because reading engages a more deliberative and less emotional mode of thought. Using new stimuli and a new paradigm, Study 4 replicated the prior pattern and demonstrated that the effects are not restricted to forced exposure situations. Rather, people are just as likely to choose to view advertisements with sad faces as they are to choose advertisements with happy or neutral faces, and expression effects on sympathy remained strong even when participants had the freedom to look as

much or as little as they chose. Finally, Study 5 used the same paradigm to strengthen the evidence for emotional contagion by ruling out the possibility that any sadness would increase sympathy. The data suggest that unlike sadness transferred from a facial emotion expression, sadness arising from an unrelated source fails to augment sympathy for the victims represented in the charity advertisement compared with happiness.

This research draws attention to a sympathy-generating attribute of charity appeals that has been neglected in theory and practice. To our knowledge, it is the first attempt in both the marketing and the psychology literature to isolate the impact of emotion expression on prosocial feelings and behavior, and it is the first to examine emotional contagion effects from photographs in any kind of print advertisements. In practice, we have found that charities usually do not portray victims expressing sadness.[8] Our findings challenge this judgment and call for a direct market test.

Notably, we found that emotion expression matters most when people are thinking with their hearts and not scrutinizing information. This result dovetails with prior research on the identifiable victim effect, which has shown that an identifiable victim triggers excessive sympathy when people process with their feelings but not when they scrutinize other information before making donation decisions (e.g., Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic 2007). However, in those studies, providing information reduced levels of sympathy. In contrast, Study 3 demonstrates that though providing other information moderated the effect of expression, it actually raised levels of sympathy. We expect that this disparity is due to the nature of information provided. Small, Loewenstein, and Slovic (2007) provide dry statistics, whereas we provide a description of the specific victim's plight, which was concrete and personalized. Note that in both cases, consistent with the dual-process framework, information that either suppresses or enhances sympathy can blunt the specific emotional response to an image.

More generally, we build on recent consumer behavior research in domains outside charitable giving that emphasizes the crucial distinction between "heart and mind" thought processes (Drolet and Luce 2004; Shiv and Fedorikhin 1999). Similar to many researchers, we use cognitive load to limit cognitive thought, but we also do the opposite by impelling deliberation in a situation for which responding with the heart is likely to be the natural response.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Further study will expand our understanding of the role of emotion expression. We examined just two specific emotion expressions, sadness and happiness, in the context of a charitable advertisement. Might other expressions, such as fear or disgust, also affect sympathy? Might the influence of expression be different for images of adult victims? How might expression effects interact with other picture attrib-

utes, such as visible illness? All these questions suggest directions for further research.

Similarly, it is important to investigate how far advertisements should go to induce sadness in viewers. Just because a sad expression helped generate sympathy does not imply that a sadder advertisement will work better. For example, sadness may work only to the extent that people feel that a donation can alleviate the sadness of the child. An intensely sad advertisement might evoke a feeling of helplessness. Furthermore, intense sadness is associated with a ruminative cognitive style, in which people become self-focused and have trouble relating to others (Lyubomirsky and Nolen-Hoeksema 1995). If an advertisement evokes such a state, it might actually reduce giving. Moreover, an intense sad expression might appear phony and posed to viewers, thus potentially causing reactance (Brehm 1966). Therefore, it is important to distinguish between the subtle sadness induced by a mild facial emotion expression and more intense sadness, which would likely result from a combination of facial expression and other bleak or graphic ad features.

Consistent with our theory, our studies show that a happy expression provides no sympathy advantage; yet it is possible that there are exceptions to this general rule. In general, images with facial expressions that are clearly incongruent with the message of the corresponding advertisement are likely to be ineffective. For example, if the charity entails a positive event (e.g., a team-based race) for which a positive expression is more congruent with the purpose of the advertisement (i.e., creating a spirited feeling), the need for congruence might overpower the benefits of emotional contagion.

Finally, further research should examine the role of expressions in marketing contexts other than charity print advertisements. Previous research has found that specific emotions influence buying decisions (Lerner, Small, and Loewenstein 2004). If facial expressions in an advertisement can connect viewers to characters in that advertisement, the implications for marketers are potentially far-reaching. For example, an expression of fear in an insurance or drug advertisement might influence consumption decisions regarding purchases that presumably alleviate risks.[9]

With these future directions in mind, this article introduces a new and critical feature of charitable marketing appeals: emotion expression on images of victims. We illustrate when and how a sad expression enhances sympathy and giving. Taken together, the findings imply the importance of subtle emotional cues that sway sympathy and giving.

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[8]We coded all Web site home pages of human-need charities rated "exceptional" (four stars) by a nonprofit charity evaluator (www.charity-navigator.org) (N = 363). From this set, 284 included a person picture, with happiness being the most common facial expression (37.5%). In contrast to expressions of happiness, 8.3% depicted a person expressing sadness, 9.6% expressed a neutral emotion, and the remaining images depicted at least two victims with unmatched expressions.

[9]We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this application.

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