

Title

"Holier than Thou? A Natural Field Experiment on Social Information in Charitable Giving"
(with J. Andreoni and M. Goldman)

Abstract

We study a six-year fundraising campaign by a Catholic parish to build a new church. Every Sunday, the priest announced donations, names, and addresses of donors, with surprise changes in the presentation of this social information. This unique data allows tests of hypotheses on how social information affects giving. We examine "fitting in" (neighbourhood effects, norm conformance) and "standing out" (social-image, information signalling, conspicuous giving). Early in the campaign, we observe significant fitting-in. Over six years, however, the dominant effect of social information is to encourage standing-out. Moreover, information affects how social comparisons are formed, sometimes with unintended consequences.