

BOSTON COLLEGE
SOCIAL WELFARE
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

**By Their Fruits, Shall We Know Them?:
Comparing Philosophy of Giving to Actual Behavior**

Laura M. Leming and Department of Sociology, Boston College

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Laura M. Leming
Social Welfare Research Institute
and
Department of Sociology
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Introduction

Social psychologists have often concerned themselves with questions of how actors' behaviors do or do not correspond to their explanations of those behaviors (See Krahe's summary of the consistency controversy, 1992). With society's growing interest in the realm of charitable giving and voluntary activity, these questions are particularly pertinent. Do those who voice concern for charitable giving or the need for voluntary action increase their contributions in these areas and what motivations spur them to increased levels of giving? Can we see in their actions the concerns that they raise and the philosophy they espouse? Shall we, indeed, "know them" by their fruits? This paper presents a unique opportunity to explore just such questions, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

Both spiritual and social science literature present the thesis that people are motivated to give when they have a sense of "identification" (Aquinas, Schervish & Havens, 1997) with a cause or the people served by it. This may come by way of personal connection through individual experience or that of family members or friends. This identification for some seems to extend to an ethic of care, here termed "fellow feeling" suggested by Durkheim when he spoke of an individual's consciousness of the group and the bond one feels to society (*Elementary Forms*, p. 258).

Economists often focus on the resource constraints that people experience in their giving. While examining the philosophy of giving, an awareness of the limits on giving is appropriate. While a person may have a number of motives for giving, they act within the resources of time and money that they have available (Tresch, 1994). This extension to the year-long Boston Area Diary Study (BADs) of giving and volunteering examines these and other motifs discerned in the philosophy of giving expressed by the 44 respondents who completed the study by participating in weekly interviews during 1995.

BADs participants, while a small sample, are fairly representative of the population of the Boston Metropolitan area in terms of income distribution. While the sample included more women than men, that resulted from our having asked for the most knowledgeable person in the household with regard to giving and voluntary activity to participate in the study. Weekly appointments for telephone interviews solicited information in four main areas: 1) changes in household income and demographics, 2) monetary contributions given to and received from organizations, family (other than spouse and dependent children) and friends, and persons on the street, 3) time contributed to and received from family, friends and acquaintances (termed "unpaid assistance" in BADs) and to and from organizations (termed "volunteering"), and 4) emotional support given and received.

While the BADs study was primarily quantitative in its analytical approach, much information was gathered from the respondents during the course of the weekly interviews. In addition, at the end of the final interview, four open-ended questions were addressed to the BADs respondents to provide an opportunity for them to express their philosophy of

giving and volunteering. The questions asked for the following information: 1) philosophy of giving and volunteering, 2) whether respondents think the community or individuals should take more responsibility for helping those in need, 3) why respondents choose specific organizations for their giving, and 4) why respondents choose specific organizations or groups with which to volunteer. The answers to these questions provided a qualitative analysis component to the study and an opportunity to look at whether what respondents said about their giving was in fact an indication of variations in their behaviors of giving and volunteering. We would argue that although these respondents had been involved in a study of giving and volunteering for a year, and might possibly have been "cultivating" their reflections around these issues, these questions were posed without advance warning and were out of the normal course of the interview pattern that had been established. This provided a spontaneous character to the answers, which can be readily seen in the range of answers we received.

Answers to all four of the questions were coded for the major themes or motifs which emerged for each question. This paper will explore the explanations that BADS respondents gave for their "philosophy" of giving and volunteering with regard to their actual behavior. What sort of rationale did respondents give for their behaviors (which had been previously recorded)? Do these "explanations" show any discernible relationship to actual behavior? Why do they choose certain organizations or individuals to help? What are the most fruitful areas for exploration suggested by givers' responses coupled with their behavior? Some interesting patterns are suggested, even among the relatively small number of respondents who participated in the Boston Area Diary Study.

Question 1: Philosophy of Giving and Volunteering

Method

The coding scheme was devised from the actual responses given by participants. The code was applied in a non-exclusive way, in that one respondent's answer might contain one or several of the motifs. Checks for inter-rater reliability, employing raters who were blind to the BADS study, concluded with a maximum disagreement rate of 4.5%. The percentage rates for the ten most salient motifs for philosophy of giving and volunteering are listed in Table 1. By grouping the respondents who employed each of the motifs, we were able to compare the means of the those expressing that motif with the mean for the whole sample using certain of the variables from the BADS study

The variables included in this analysis were the following variables from the data collected in BADS: total money and goods contributed both to organizations and to family and friends, money and goods given to religious organizations (not including weekly contributions given to churches and synagogues), total formal volunteer hours (that is, volunteering for organizations), total unpaid assistance rendered (recorded as informal volunteering in other studies), and three derived percentage variables, all based on decision-makers' income. The latter are percentages of total income of the decision maker(s) of the household for total giving, giving to organizations, including religious and non-religious organizations, and giving to friends and family members (other than the members of one's own household).

Tests for significant differences were also run. In view of the small sample size, only a few differences showed statistical significance. With this small a sample however, this implies that significant results are strong findings and insignificant results are merely inconclusive. With this understood, some patterns of giving are suggested by the different motifs which will be fruitful for further inquiry.

**Table 1: Philosophy of Giving and Volunteering:
Predominant Motifs Expressed by BADS Respondents**

Limits (on time or money/ or wished they could do more) 27%

BADS Respondents mentioned that they had limits on either time or money or both. Others, while not expressly saying they were limited said they wished they could do more. In one family, it was noted that the financial status of the family had changed, so they were experiencing greater limits.

Religious Philosophy 27%

Eleven respondents specifically stated that their giving was in accord with their religious beliefs, with two of these mentioning "tithing" or ten percent. One additional respondent mention religious giving as a "habit" rather than as part of their philosophy of giving and one other said she no longer attends church but misses the people connections she had there.

"Fellow-Feeling" 27%

This category includes statements by respondents who mentioned a sense of compassion, care, love, or feelings of being brother or sister to others who are in need. A primary motivation for these respondents is response to human need.

Responsibility 25%

Eight respondents also mentioned feeling "responsible" or "owing" the community contributions of time or money. These responses tended to emphasize a kind of general human responsibility "to care" or "to give." E.G. "we all have responsibility to give money and time" or "You have a responsibility to take care of the world too."

Get Back 25%

"Getting Back" was a theme that emerged in responses focusing on how "what goes around comes around (R: 479)," and in several cases was connected to the philosophy the respondent had learned from their family of origin. (Two R's actually quoted saying of their parents.) It expresses the sense of benefiting personally or family members benefiting in some tangible way from giving. (These are more "external" or objective rewards as distinguished from internal or more emotional rewards which would be more appropriate in the self-enhancement category.

Giving Back 20%

Eight respondents mentioned "giving back" as a key motivation for their giving and volunteering. In three cases, it was specifically connected to the local community. In other instances, it was expressed more generically in terms of having "received a lot" or "feeling blessed." In one instance it was tied to having received help from an organization at an earlier time, highlighting a sense of personal connection that will be seen as key issue in question two.

Enjoyment 18%

Eight respondents mentioned that they liked or enjoyed giving or helping others, two in the context of being able to use their gifts for others.

Helping Children 18%

Several respondents specifically said they were concerned with programs or activities focused on the needs of children.

Family Influence 16%

Five BADS respondents spoke of the influence of their family of origin when asked about their philosophy of giving. Two of these five actually quoted their parents while the others spoke of how they were raised in a context which encouraged giving.

Self Enhancement 14%

Several respondents spoke of how their giving and volunteering was connected to a belief or experience that they themselves benefited in terms of self-esteem or self-image.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the motifs listed in Table 1 revealed some suggestive ideas about “what’s really going on” when people give and volunteer. Two of the more frequently occurring motifs in the answers to the question about philosophy were the notions of having a “responsibility” to give and that it is important to “give-back” to the larger community. Somewhat counter-intuitively, respondents who expressed these motifs seem to give less in almost all the giving variables examined, when compared to the total sample.

Expressions of responsibility were typically phrased by respondents in “shoulds.” Bernadette Collins¹ told us “we all should do more,” and Angela Wallace said “you should share with the less fortunate.” Note that there is a certain ring to these responses which suggests that they are universal statements but perhaps may not reflect a felt need for these respondents. When we examine the quantitative data, this bears out. While the mean percentage of total giving (based on total decision makers’ income) for the BADS sample is 9.53%, the percentage of total giving for those who expressed “responsibility” to give, was almost two full percentage points less, 7.65%. Bernadette, who also expressed being limited in her ability to give, gave 1.3% of her income. The percentage of income contributed by Angela Wallace was 5.1.

The difference in mean total giving for those who expressed their philosophy in terms of “giving back” was less dramatic at 9.02%, but is still lower than the mean for the whole BADS sample. The giving back motif, as noted in Table 1, was expressed in less universal terms and as more personal than the responsibility motif. Here, respondents related their sense of “owing” the community to what they felt they had received. A clear example is found in the succinct statement of Mona Dupont: “I have been given a lot in life and want to give back to people.” Mona’s total giving percentage is 2.9. For her, giving back seems to be operationalized more in time than in money contributions. In almost every week of the year-long study, Mona spent several hours with her “Little Sister” in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization.

These monetary figures associated with the responsibility and giving back motifs could easily be interpreted to suggest simply that respondents’ behavior doesn’t match what they say. Looking at voluntary action, we realize it’s more complicated than that. And a more subtle interpretation, suggested in the light of examination of more emotionally potent reasons for giving and volunteering, is that notions of responsibility or giving back might be minimalist positions and therefore less compelling. People who feel “responsible” give,

¹ All respondent names are pseudonyms.

but those with more emotionally compelling reasons to give, give more - far more, our results would suggest.

As suggested by the case of Mona Dupont, the arena of formal volunteering is an area that warrants careful attention, especially when it is coupled with monetary contributions. Volunteering stood out in our examination of nurturing characteristics of respondents (reported elsewhere) and also demands attention here. The "Responsibility" group volunteered slightly fewer hours (100.) than the whole group (119). The "Give-Back" group contributed far less unpaid assistance but did more formal volunteer (169 hours) than the whole group. This raises a question as to whether our respondents were thinking of time more than money when they spoke about their philosophy of giving. Two of our respondents told us that time is a focus for them. Michelle O'Donnell, a mother of one who does part-time real estate work said, "Money is important but time and effort is also important." Ashley O'Connell echoed the emphasis on time: "Time is as valuable as money...giving time means so much more."

Two of the motifs we considered as more "emotionally potent" than the responsibility motif were expressed as religious motivation and a type of caring that we're calling "fellow-feeling." Twenty-nine percent of the BADS respondents expressed some religious basis for their giving, three who mentioned tithing or a "ten-percent" rule of thumb. The "fellow-feeling" group included those who spoke of other people as their "brothers and sisters" or expressed their motivation for giving in terms of care, love, or compassion for other people and a desire to respond to human need. Fellow-feeling in the BADS study is characterized by Nick Micelli who said his giving was motivated by "a basic sense of humanity and community - everyone does share and all benefit." Nick is an engineer who was employed during only part of the study. He is the father of two with joint custody but whose daughters spend more time with him. While his total giving percentage is about .6 of a percentage point below the whole group of BADS respondents, his contributions to organizations are a full percentage point higher. Nick donates blood platelets every other week as his major volunteer activity.

For the fellow-feeling group, total giving as a percentage of total decision makers' income is clearly higher, a difference of over *three* percentage points, above the mean for the whole group. Those who expressed this sense of fellow-feeling make up the group who gave the most in monetary contributions, but the increase is most apparent in contributions to family and friends. While they do seem to volunteer somewhat more than the whole group, their "fellow feeling" shows up more in monetary behavior than in the amount of time they gave. The mean total for formal volunteer hours given by the fellow feeling group was *126* hours, compared with the mean for the whole group of 118.98. Curiously, unpaid assistance given by the fellow-feeling group was lower than that of the whole group.

Twenty-seven percent of the BADS respondents told us they were religiously motivated. Two of our respondents mentioned specific Biblical passages that inspire their giving but Sarah Canavan said simply that you "Do it because you love people and for love of Jehovah." Timothy O'Brien says he believes in Biblical tithing, so he starts with donating 10% of his income "and then make offering of another ten percent." During the year of the BADS study, he actually gave just over 16 % of his income with 15% going just about exclusively to religious organizations. For the religiously motivated group, we saw a 1.3% increase in total giving over the whole BADS group and much higher amounts of time contributed both in formal volunteer hours (202 hours, compared with 119 for the whole sample) and in unpaid assistance given to others (389 hours versus 342 hours for the whole group). As suggested by Tim O'Brien's case, and as might be expected for the

group that expressed religious motivation, the percentage given to specifically religious organizations was more than double that of the whole group.

It should be noted that the total giving percentage includes gifts to family and friends. For that reason, looking at organizational giving by itself is also important. The comparisons for this variable seem to hold the same pattern in terms of increases over the whole group. For the total group, percent of income given to organizations is 2.12%. When we look at the religion and fellow-feeling groups with regard to organizational giving, we see percentage increases, a 1.8% increase for the religious group, and a .5% increase for the fellow-feeling group. The only other group which showed a similar increase in percentage of income given to organizations was the group of respondents who claimed family influence as important to their motivation for giving (.4% increase over the whole group).

Table 2 shows the values of five of the analysis variables for five of the motifs compared to the whole group of BADS respondents. The analysis variables are annual totals of percentage of income or hours derived from the BADS data. One of the things that becomes evident from this summary table is that while the fellow-feeling group's percentage of income dedicated to total giving is considerably higher than the sample, only a relatively small amount (.5%) of that increase shows up in organizational giving. This means that the largest part of their increase in giving is dedicated to family members and friends. This is contrasted to the increase in monetary giving exhibited by the religiously motivated group. While their total giving is 1.3% higher than the whole group, their organizational giving is 1.8% higher than that of the whole group ($p < .1$). Furthermore, they give half a percentage point less to their family and friends than the whole group does. So, our results indicate that fellow-feeling seems to increase giving, but primarily among one's own family and acquaintances, while religion as a motivation increases giving to organizations as well as volunteer hours. Perhaps because religiously motivated persons tend to "belong" to organizations, they may trust organizations with their money to a greater extent than others. Another piece of the picture could be that, at least among BADS respondents, religion encourages outreach beyond family and friends. The pattern of increase holds for this group when you look at unpaid assistance, that is, hours of help given to friends, acquaintances and extended family members. While unpaid assistance rendered by the whole group was 342 hours, the religiously motivated group averaged 389 hours. Again, while most of these differences don't show statistical significance in this small a sample, the pattern would suggest that something real is happening here.

Table 2
Summary Table
Comparison of Means for All BADS Respondents
&
Those Expressing Five Motifs of Philosophy of Giving

Analysis Variable	Mean for all BADS Responses	Religious Motivation	Fellow-Feeling	Limits	Responsibility	Family Influence
Organiz. Giving-% Income	2.12%	3.91% (p<.1)	2.64%	1.8%	1.86%	2.46%
Total Volunteer Hours 1995	119	202	126	32 (p<.01)	100	131
Total Unpaid Assistance Hours 1995	342	389	249	532	191 (p<.1)	354
Family & Friends-% Income	7.42%	6.92%	10.42%	4.78%	5.79%	3.68% (p<.1)
Total Giving-% Income	9.53%	10.82%	13.06%	6.57%	7.65%	6.15%

Table 2 also points out that one of the most frequently mentioned motifs, experiencing limits on time and money is, for the most part, real in its consequences for those who mention it. The behavioral patterns for these analysis variables among the members of this group, with the exception of unpaid assistance, clearly support their statements of feeling limited. Total giving is almost three percentage points less than that for the whole group; organizational giving is low, and volunteer hours are significantly lower than the norm for the whole group - and for any other motif as well. No other group volunteered less in formal settings. One needs to consider that quite possible, the expression of limits might also be an excuse used by those who choose not to give. However, one analysis variable in this study strongly undermines that conclusion. No other group registered as high in unpaid assistance, which might suggest one reason why these respondents felt their limits so keenly. Perhaps they are experiencing time constraints because they are already assisting family and friends. Marybeth Fontella told us that "my hands are tied because of caring for my mother," while Kevin Norton said there's "not much time to volunteer except for friends or members of the family."

The group that claimed family background as important to their philosophy of giving shows an increase in giving only to organizations, with about half of that increase being

devoted to religious organizations. Their giving to family and friends is significantly lower than the mean for the whole group and their mean for total giving is almost three and a half percentage points lower. While the figures seem to indicate that they do volunteer and give unpaid assistance at a slightly higher rate than average, these increases are too small to say much about. So what can we say about family influence? While a certain number of respondents attribute their patterns of giving and volunteering to the influence of their parents and upbringing, the primary influence seems to be in the direction of monetary contributions to organizations. These individuals in our study gave substantially less to friends and acquaintances.

Other motifs in addition to those summarized in Table 2 should be looked at in brief for their interesting aspects. The BADS respondents who stated that self-enhancement was part of their philosophical basis for giving and volunteering were lower than the whole group on every one of the analysis variables. They gave significantly less of their total income (4.36%, $p < .05$), less to family and friends (3.1%, $p < .1$), and although, not statistically significant, gave *almost a full percentage point* less to organizations. Their motivation for giving to others seems low.

A related motif, but showing different patterns was the group of those who said more generically that they “get back” something from giving. While their total giving was 1.4% less than total giving for BADS, their organizational giving was .5% higher. Like the family influence group, their motivation seems to be to give to those beyond the circle of family and friends. They also volunteered more than the whole group (an increase of 52 hours, or 43% more than the mean hours volunteered by all BADS respondents).

An alternative reason for giving that we examined was the group that explains their giving and volunteering as “giving-back” to the community. While this group gave slightly less than the whole group in terms of total giving, their organizational giving was high at 3.19%, second only to the religiously motivated group. Again, the “give-back” group gave less to family and friends (even in unpaid assistance), but more to organizations in general, both financially and in volunteer hours (60 hour increase over the whole group). A larger portion of their organizational giving increase went to religious organizations (.7% increase) but their non-religious organizational giving was higher as well.

Some of our respondents told us they give simply because they enjoy it. This shows up in the time they give more than in the money. This group averages 125 hours more in volunteer time and 90 hours more in unpaid assistance than the whole group. While their organizational contributions are slightly higher (.2% increase), total giving and giving to family and friends is lower the sample.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, what can be said about directions for fruitful exploration in the area of how respondents explain their giving and volunteering? Some motivations seem to be more potent than others. Given the history of religious groups in giving and volunteering, it is not really surprising that our religiously oriented respondents dedicated a higher percentage of their income to giving and a much higher percentage to organizational giving. Only a .2% of that increase went to non-religious organizations, however, so their giving seems to stay within the bounds of religion. The other highly potent motivation for monetary giving is the sense of compassion or care expressed by the fellow-feeling group. Here, the results give strength to the adage, “Charity begins at home,” for that is certainly where the largest portion of increased monetary giving for this group is concentrated. However, organizations benefit from the fellow-feeling motif as well since this group’s mean organizational contribution was .5% higher.

Staying with organizational giving, groups also benefit monetarily from those who attribute their giving to their family upbringing, and even more so from those whose goal in giving is to "give back." In terms of volunteer hours, the group who enjoy giving, the "give-back" group and the religiously oriented gave the most time.

Our results suggest that certain motivations may orient a person to give outside of their circle of family and friends more than some other motivations. We encourage further exploration of these patterns. Does it hold in other studies that where families hand down a tradition of giving, concern for the stranger in contrast to acquaintances and family members tends to be included? Do religiously oriented givers indeed give beyond their circle but within the auspices of religious groups? Do those who express compassion and fellow-feeling as motivational give more to groups as a spillover effect to their energies and resources being devoted first and foremost to family and friends? It is also clear from our results that those who say they experience limits in giving and volunteering mean what they say. But is one root of their time limitation the fact that they already dedicate so much time in assisting their families and friends?

A final reflection broadens the implications planted here in seed form. In a society becoming more self-conscious about its giving and volunteering, how do we capitalize on the motivational themes that already exist among givers? A strict orientation to benefit to the self is not indicated as a fruitful stance by our study. More fruitful might be the cultivation of "Fellow Feeling," where everybody wins, friends and family and strangers alike. "Responsibility" to give doesn't seem to be a potent motivator according to the BADS results, but "Giving Back" to the community, on the other hand, does. Giving our respondents the opportunity to "explain" their behaviors to us, has allowed new avenues of reflection and extended our study's implications and applications.

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SOCIAL WELFARE RESEARCH INSTITUTE
BOSTON COLLEGE
MCGUINN 515
140 COMMONWEALTH AVENUE
CHESTNUT HILL, MA 02467
TEL: 617-552-4070
FAX: 617-552-3903
EMAIL: swri508@bc.edu
WEBSITE: www.bc.edu/swri