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Reply to Hodgkinson and Weitzman

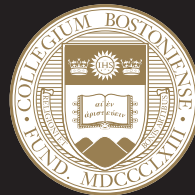
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Reply to Hodgkinson and Weitzman

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We are pleased that Virginia Hodgkinson and Murray Weitzman have responded to our article, "Embarking on a Republic of Benevolence? New Survey Findings on Charitable Giving." Temperate interchange among scholars on the pages of this journal is something we hope will occur more frequently.

In response to Hodgkinson and Weitzman, we review what we were trying to say and not say in our article and reply to their three major criticisms.

The purpose of our article was straightforward: to indicate that findings from several recent national surveys provide estimates of charitable giving higher than previously obtained from survey research. Referring back to the long-standing question of why survey numbers do not multiply up to a national estimate, we presented some new and independent survey findings that did approximate the national nonsurvey estimates presented in the Independent Sector (IS) almanacs and the American Association of Fundraising Counsel (AAFRC) *Giving USA* series. In particular, this array of new survey findings yield estimates for annual household, giving substantially higher than IS's published figure from its biennial *Giving and Volunteering* (G & V) survey, which we highlighted because it is the most nationally disseminated and quoted figure. That is what we were trying to say. One thing we did not say or mean to imply is that the AAFRC estimate be taken as normative. We cite the AAFRC number simply to indicate the convergence of survey and nonsurvey estimates somewhere at or moderately above \$1,000 per year average contribution for all households in the United States in 1995. We could have and actually should have also cited the similarly higher IS almanac figures in discussing the disparity between G & V estimates of average household contributions and national aggregate charitable giving by individuals.

Within this context, we can turn to the three criticisms made by Hodgkinson and Weitzman. The first two relate to our statement that "IS has ceased multiplying its average household contribution to obtain a national estimate.

Instead, IS now offers the AAFRC *Giving USA* national estimate of total individual giving" (Schervish & Havens, 1998, p. 238). First, Hodgkinson and Weitzman protest that the IS almanac presents some historical AAFRC estimates; but for years after 1984, the almanac offers estimates of national giving that are calculated by the almanac's authors, including Hodgkinson and Weitzman. Second, they point out that IS has never published a national aggregate number based on multiplying up its survey estimate by the number of U.S. households to obtain an aggregate national estimate of charitable giving by individuals. We stand corrected on both counts and offer our apology.

There are a couple of additional points to make in regard to Hodgkinson and Weitzman's second criticism. First, we think that they are wise to consider cautioning readers of any documents containing G & V averages of household giving not to multiply up those averages to obtain national aggregate estimates. Although IS never proffers such a number, it provides all the ingredients for mistakenly doing so. In several places, including the G & V series, IS does print the number of households in the nation in close proximity to its estimate of average annual household contribution. This, we fear, does invite intrepid readers to do their own calculations—coming up with the \$69.3 billion figure, a calculation that Hodgkinson and Weitzman correctly say should not be made. They ask "Why would anyone want to use \$69.3 billion as an estimate of 1995 total national individual contributions?" (p. 524). We add the corollary, "Why would anyone want to call \$696 an average household contribution for all households when it implies the \$69.3 billion aggregate figure, because we all seem to acknowledge that it is not in fact the average household contribution?" When a number is called an average, it is by definition some aggregate number divided by some number of cases. So the question remains why, without footnote, caution, or caveat in the immediate text, do IS publications present figures for average household giving if these figures are not really household averages? One explanation that Hodgkinson and Weitzman suggest is that such household averages are generated to secure trends. What we wonder about, however, is how trustworthy are trends that are based on survey numbers that do not capture 30% to 40% of charitable giving?

The third criticism is that we use the 1996 *Giving USA* (Kaplan, 1997) AAFRC estimates of \$116.23 billion in individual charitable giving instead of the lower revised estimates made public by AAFRC in its May 27, 1998, press packet. We are chided not just for failing to use the 1997 revised figure of \$112.22 (which averages out to \$1,163 or \$4 less per household) but for not using the 1998 *Giving USA* figures. The 1998 revision lowers the estimate of total individual contributions to \$96.5 billion in 1995 current dollars. But this revision was not settled on until a week before the May 27, 1998, press-packet release date—when our article was literally in the process of being printed.

One final issue warrants comment, because Hodgkinson and Weitzman bring it up and because it is an underlying concern we also share. Hodgkinson and Weitzman write, "Surveys in some ways are akin to a dice game—you

place your bets and take your chances" (p. 523). Surely, there is never any way to guarantee that a sample-based survey capture the realities of a population. But the whole point of research methodology is to reduce the dice-game attributes of surveys and to increase the chances of getting things fairly correct.

In the end, we are pleased to find agreement between Hodgkinson and Weitzman and us on the fact that average household giving is actually substantially higher than the \$696 reported in the 1996 edition of *Giving and Volunteering* (Hodgkinson, Weitzman, Crutchfield, Heffron, & Kirsch, 1996). It is an honor to associate with researchers of the caliber of Hodgkinson and Weitzman on the common cause of improving the quality of surveys (a) to the point where these surveys provide findings congruent with what we think is going on or (b) to the point where we trust these surveys enough to change what we think is going on.

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