Won't You Be My Neighbor?
Norms of Cooperation, Public Broadcasting and the Collective Action Problem

Appendix A: Explanation of Sampling Method

Before engaging in a survey public broadcasting viewers and listeners, it is important to understand the nature of the audience. First and most importantly, we know that public television donors are a rare population. In a CPB survey conducted right before the present research, they found that about 44 percent of the general population "frequently views" public television (several times a week or more), while 75 percent say they viewed public television sometime in the last month (CPB 1996). According to a Roper Study conducted in February 1996, upon which PBS placed a question, approximately 55 percent of the United States population reported having watched public television in the "last week", and 42 percent reported that they never watched. The question is, do these viewers donate? Only about five percent of general population and nine percent of those who watch public television actually give.[1]

Thus, we are working with a rare population—not many people actually give to public broadcasting. This means a national random sample survey with a screening question for whether the person watches public broadcasting would be tremendously expensive.[2] Not only that, but the final data set would have a very small number of givers, making it difficult to make meaningful conclusions about them. This means that I needed to explore options which would allow me to locate known givers—membership lists. Since the individual was the unit of analysis for the survey, the membership lists were used to find the households with a known giver. The "next birthday" (or most recent birthday) method (a quasi-probability procedure) was used to randomly locate an individual in the household for both the case and control samples. Thus,

even with the membership list, there was no guarantee that the person who answered the survey was the individual who had made a contribution to public broadcasting.

This method of sampling was a case control design, which is often used in epidemiological studies (for example, Lilienfeld, 1976; Bassuk and Rosenberg, 1988; Ostergren and Hanson, 1991). While there are several variations on the theme, the case control design, also called a retrospective design, begins with a population of those known to have the "desired" condition for which one is trying to find the cause, and then taking a random sample of the community from which the cases are drawn (Lilienfeld, 1976). In this study, each station provided me a simple random sample of members, from which the survey organization took a simple random sample.

Selection bias can occur when variables are chosen according to the values of the dependent variable. In citing the problems with retrospective research, King and his colleagues (1994) argue that the conclusions reached with this sampling method are nothing more than suggestive that further studies must be conducted. Obviously, no descriptive inferences can be made about a sample culled in this fashion (if half of your sample were public television viewers, it would make no sense to argue that 50 percent of the population gives to public broadcasting), but King and his colleagues argue one cannot make causal inferences based on the data either if you chose the population based on the dependent variable (King et al.,1994:141).

However, a large body of statistical literature suggests that, in many respects, case control data may be analyzed and conclusions made as if the data were collected prospectively (see for example, Carroll, et al.,1995; Prentice and Pyke, 1979. Carroll and his colleagues (1995) find that "[t]he resulting estimators which ignore the case-control study aspect and instead are based on a random-sampling formulation, are typically consistent for nonintercept parameters and are

asymptotically normally distributed" (157). However, it is important to re-emphasize that

intercepts will be biased. Thus, no intercepts are reported in this paper.

All in all, perfect research designs are simply not possible. Funding limits the questions

scholars can ask, and the conclusions they can draw. However, the case control design maintains

the best balance of a money-saving technique and a design, which for the most part, makes

causal inferences possible. A prospective sample would not have worked, given statistical and

funding constraints. In the end, if the survey had asked a general population if they had watched

public television, about 70 percent would say yes, and a very small subset of those people would

say they gave to public broadcasting. Thus, the case control design presents the best sampling

method possible to study this population.

The three cities were chosen for several reasons. First, the cities were chosen because

they had widely differing geographical locations. Second, each station was located in a large

designated market area, with more potential for variance on the county-level variables. Third,

the stations were chosen because I had the ability to meet with each membership manager to

discuss the survey. However, the only membership manager I did not personally meet with was

the WETA representative! Finally, these are the stations who allowed me access to a simple

random sample of their membership lists. Two other stations rejected my requests.

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[1] Interview with John Fuller, Director of PBS Research, Spring 1997, Washington, DC.

[2] In various personal conversations with survey research professionals, the costs may have been

$10-15,000 for a survey with a sample size of 500.