

Summary of Discussion for

From Two-Step Flow to the Internet: The Changing Array of Sources for Genetics Information Seeking

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A couple of the discussions stemmed from the numerical results reported in the paper. There were concerns with some of the numbers represented. Some of this was due to the explanation for numbers that were reported. One example of this was in the methods section where the authors described how the persons were selected for the survey and how many agreed to answer to the survey. In the paper it states that the sample size is a "...sample of 882 adult residents of Kentucky". The paper then goes on to explain how the sample size was obtained. It says that "...procedures were used to contact a total of 2,454 potential respondents, of which 125 were determined to be ineligible (typically because they were not at least 18 years of age.) Among the remaining households, 41% agreed to be polled". If the number of respondents is calculated by the explanation $((2454 - 125) * .41)$ it results in approximately 955 respondents, which is significantly off from 882. After the class discussion I experimented with the calculation and found that if the order is rearranged to be $((2454 * .41) - 125)$ the result is approximately 881 respondents, which is much closer to the 882 reported. To me this implies that of the 2,454 persons contacted 41% agreed to be polled and then 125 were determined to be ineligible, which is not how it was explained in the paper. Another concern with the numbers was the lack of explanation for missing percentages. For example, the paper states "Twelve percent had less than a high school education, 32% percent had completed high school (or GED), and the rest (51%) had at least some college;...". If you add those percentages up you get 95%, not the expected 100%.

Another topic of discussion was the demographic results of the study. The paper states that "To obtain the sample, Waksberg random-digit dialing procedures were used to contact a total of 2,454 potential respondents..." and that "The calls were made by trained interviewers working for the University of Kentucky Survey Research Center during July and August 2002...". This seems to indicate that a great deal of care was taken to not bias the results, but some detail was left out. For instance, one person questioned why 60% of the respondents were female. The information given about the actual population of Kentucky said males were underrepresented by the survey's results. The person that questioned this percentage speculated that maybe the calls were made

during the day when people staying at home with their children, who are typically female, were more likely to answer the phone.

Another line of discussion about the methodology of the paper was started up about the way the questions were constructed. In the paper it states that the questions were “what if” questions so it was not reporting “...actual, past behavior”. A couple of people questioned why the authors did not ask about past behavior. It seemed to be the next logical step of the line of questions.

A final topic of discussion, the most discussed of the paper, was the statement the paper made that “...the Internet is not a good source for individuals seeking help with making decisions about genetic testing and treatments; the information to be found there regarding genetics is not typically geared toward laypersons...”. Most, if not everyone, disagreed with this statement to some extent, if not totally. One person mentioned maybe the paper predated the widespread use of the Internet, but then it was realized that was not true due to when the data was gathered and the paper published. Most were perplexed with this idea and did not agree with the reasons given in the paper. Personally, I would think this should be a wakeup call to the medical profession to start utilizing the Internet as an information conduit between them and patients (or potential patients).