

The Truth is Never Black and White

An Examination of Race-Related Interviewer Effects in the Contemporary South

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- One of a host of measurement issues in surveys.
- The result of the interview process involving *two* people engaged in a social interaction:
 - The respondent, whose attitudes we are interested in.
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Group Consciousness and Interviewer Effects

- Most research has been based on responses of whites and blacks to interviewers of same and dissimilar race; e.g. Schuman and Converse, Cotter et al., Davis.
- Respondents' opinions typically only affected on questions that are strongly connected with race.
- Other researchers have identified similar effects based on gender and other ethnic identification.
- Attempts to replicate in computer-based interviews (Krysan and Couper) have seen limited success.

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Theories of the Survey Response

- Traditional belief: Respondents have pre-formed opinions; may be unwilling to reveal true opinions to potentially critical interviewers.
 - Are respondents “donning the black mask” with different-race interviewers? (Davis)
 - Are respondents conforming to in-group expectations with same-race interviewers? (e.g. Noelle-Neumann)
- Zaller-Feldman theory: Respondents are sampling from considerations; presence of interviewer influences the sampling process.
 - The survey interview as an *intrusive* measure.
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Data Collection

- Telephone survey conducted in February 2009.
- 659 complete or partial interviews with African American southerners.
- Stratified, representative sample using random-digit dialing with screen for black respondents.
- Of the 621 complete interviews, 303 were conducted by white interviewers; 318 interviews by other racial/ethnic groups (mostly black).

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Survey Content

- Reactions to the outcome of the 2008 presidential election.
- Attitudes on the state of the economy and political issues.
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Methodology

- Theory: respondents' reported opinions will differ based on the race of the interviewer in response to racially-sensitive questions.
- Independent variable: interviewer race (white or non-white).
- Dependent variables: responses to six survey questions (of 69) that appeared to have a racial dimension.
- Hypothesis tests using:
 - Pearson's chi-square test of association.
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Control Variables

- Respondent's gender.
- Respondent's age.
- Respondent's formal education.
- Whether the respondent identified as mixed-race.
- Whether the respondent identified as a native southerner.
- Racial composition of the respondent's county/county-equivalent (percentage African American).
- We also include additional controls in models on interracial marriage and the state of the economy for African Americans.

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Republican efforts to attract black support

Respondents were *less* likely to report that the Republican Party was working to attract black voters to white interviewers.

- Just over ten percentage point difference (25.2% vs. 35.7%).
- In the multivariate model with controls, 40% less likely to acknowledge Republican efforts to white interviewers.

We believe that some black respondents may be concerned that indicating *awareness* of G.O.P. outreach efforts might be interpreted by white interviewers as an *endorsement* of those efforts.

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Attitudes toward interracial marriage

Respondents were *more strongly favorable* towards interracial marriage when interviewed by whites.

- Just over ten percentage point difference (79.1% vs. 69.0%).
- In the multivariate model with controls, 73% more likely to find interracial marriage “strongly acceptable” when speaking to white interviewers.

The presence of a white interviewer may be *priming* black respondents to access beliefs about equality in society, while non-white (particularly black) interviewers may prime respondents to consider the practical implications of interracial marriage.

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Perceptions of racial progress

Respondents were *substantially more likely* to report racial progress to white interviewers than non-white interviewers—but the effect is *only present* when asking about progress for African Americans.

- Progress in the **South**:

- Approximately eight percentage point difference in reporting “a lot of real progress” in the region.
- 36% more likely to report “real progress” to white interviewers, according to multivariate model with controls.

- Progress in **America**:

- Approximately 15 percentage point difference in reporting “a lot of real progress” nationally.
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No substantial differences appear in responses to a similar question about progress for *other groups in society*, suggesting that the observed effects in the questions about African Americans are due to the immediacy of race in those interactions.

We believe, based on existing research, that some black respondents may have internalized white hostility towards continued allegations of discrimination and therefore are more reluctant to suggest to whites that racial progress in the South and America remains an elusive goal.

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On the national economy

Respondents were *less likely* to report that economic conditions for blacks were different than for other groups when speaking to white interviewers.

- Nearly eight percentage point gap in responses that the economy was “worse” for blacks.
- In the multivariate model with controls, 35% less likely to say the economy was “worse” when speaking to white interviewers.

As in the questions about racial progress, we suspect that the racial gap emerges due to some black respondents’ reluctance to be perceived as conforming to white stereotypes about African Americans’ economic status and position in society.

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Conclusions

- Generally race-of-interviewer effects were consistent with expectations based on prior research, even when controlling for likely confounding factors.
- The magnitude of these effects seems to vary across issue domains.
- Distinct effects only appear to emerge in questions that *directly* touch on race; attitudes toward Barack Obama, for example, do not seem to be affected (results not presented here).
- Future Directions:
 - Further research on respondents from other racial groups.
 - Should consider a more complex research design to test whether the classical or Zaller-Feldman model explains interviewer effects.
 - Attempt to produce a research design that is capable of identifying which are the true attitudes.

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Q9: Do you feel that the Republican Party is currently working to attract African American voters?

	Non-white iwr	White iwr
yes	35.7	25.2
no	51.4	61.7
not sure	12.9	13.1

Entries are column percentages. $n = 617$; $\chi^2 \approx 8.54$; $p \approx 0.014$.

Q9: Do you feel that the Republican Party is currently working to attract African American voters?

Constant	-0.359 (0.424)
White interviewer (dummy)	-0.522** (0.197)
Female respondent (dummy)	-0.120 (0.199)
Respondent's age	-0.002 (0.006)
Black pct. pop. in county	0.013* (0.006)
Native southerner (dummy)	0.044 (0.234)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	-0.214 (0.241)
Educational attainment	-0.169** (0.064)
N	600
Likelihood-ratio	35.508
p	0.000

Q31: Acceptability of interracial marriage

	Non-white iwr	White iwr
strongly acceptable	69.0	79.1
somewhat acceptable	21.0	15.8
somewhat unacceptable	3.1	0.7
strongly unacceptable	4.1	1.3
don't' know/ not sure	2.8	3.0

Entries are column percentages. $n = 616$; $\chi^2 \approx 13.33$; $p \approx 0.01$.

Q31: Acceptability of interracial marriage

Constant	2.115*** (0.471)
Male interviewed by white female (dummy)	-0.004 (0.301)
White interviewer (dummy)	0.548* (0.238)
Female respondent (dummy)	-0.529* (0.238)
Respondent's age	-0.015* (0.006)
Black pct. pop. in county	-0.012† (0.006)
Native southerner (dummy)	-0.394 (0.249)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	0.395 (0.263)
Educational attainment	0.069 (0.062)
N	600
Likelihood-ratio	48.313
p	0.000

Q37: Progress for blacks in the South

	Non-white iwr	White iwr
a lot of real progress	48.3	56.2
hasn't been much real progress	46.1	34.7
not sure	5.6	9.1

Entries are column percentages. $n = 618$; $\chi^2 \approx 9.4$; $p \approx 0.009$.

Q38: Progress for blacks in America

	Non-white iwr	White iwr
a lot of real progress	53.3	68.0
hasn't been much real progress	39.9	26.9
not sure	6.9	5.1

Entries are column percentages. $n = 618$; $\chi^2 \approx 14.07$; $p \approx 0.001$.

Q39: Progress for other racial groups

	Non-white iwr	White iwr
a lot of real progress	41.4	45.3
hasn't been much real progress	47.0	40.5
not sure	11.6	14.2

Entries are column percentages. $n = 615$; $\chi^2 \approx 2.81$; $p \approx 0.246$.

Q37-39: Racial progress

	Progress in South	Progress in USA	Progress for others
Constant	0.135 (0.395)	0.255 (0.395)	0.139 (0.393)
White interviewer (dummy)	0.310† (0.179)	0.603*** (0.182)	0.136 (0.180)
Female respondent (dummy)	-0.500** (0.184)	-0.350† (0.188)	-0.285 (0.184)
Respondent's age	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)
Black pct. pop. in county	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.008 (0.005)
Native southerner (dummy)	0.353 (0.215)	0.256 (0.214)	0.165 (0.216)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	-0.219 (0.224)	-0.489* (0.222)	-0.235 (0.226)
Educational attainment	-0.021 (0.056)	0.043 (0.058)	0.003 (0.057)
N	603	602	600
Likelihood-ratio	30.059	37.366	19.674
p	0.000	0.000	0.006

Q47: State of the economy for blacks

	Non-white iwr	White iwr
better	10.3	6.8
same	45.5	56.8
worse	44.2	36.4

Entries are column percentages. $n = 590$; $\chi^2 \approx 8.01$; $p \approx 0.018$.

Q47: State of the economy for blacks

Constant	-1.125*
	(0.500)
White interviewer (dummy)	-0.430*
	(0.195)
Female respondent (dummy)	-0.261
	(0.198)
Respondent's age	0.015*
	(0.007)
Black pct. pop. in county	-0.007
	(0.006)
Native southerner (dummy)	-0.002
	(0.230)
Mixed-race respondent (dummy)	-0.656**
	(0.244)
Educational attainment	0.251***
	(0.066)
Resp. fears losing job (dummy)	-0.021
	(0.216)
Resp. employed full-time (dummy)	0.246
	(0.211)
N	564
Likelihood-ratio	65.592
p	0.000