

Can We Really Have a Conversation about Race?

Investigating Race-of-Interviewer Effects in the Contemporary South

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Interviewer Effects

- Long recognized as an issue in the social sciences.
- One of a host of measurement issues in surveys.
- The result of the interview process involving *two* people engaged in a social interaction:
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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.
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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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- Telephone survey conducted in February 2009.
- 659 complete or partial interviews with African-American southerners.
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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.
- Attitudes on matters of race.
- Embedded experiment:
 - Two versions of question 43, each administered to half of the sample:
 - "Do you think that African Americans sometimes need to *think and act 'white'* in order to get ahead in American society?"
 - "Do you think that African Americans sometimes need to *play down their racial identity* in order to get ahead in American society?"

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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 (black/non-black).
- Dependent variables: responses to 11 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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Q9: Do you feel that the Republican Party is currently working to attract African American voters?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
Yes	34.5	26.1
No	51.9	60.0
Not sure	13.7	13.9

Entries are column percentages. $n = 617$, $\chi^2 \approx 5.374$, $p \approx 0.068$.

Q31: ... marriages between blacks and whites. Is that acceptable or unacceptable?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
Strongly acceptable	67.4	76.8
Somewhat acceptable	22.4	18.1
Somewhat unacceptable	3.1	0.7
Strongly unacceptable	4.3	1.7
Don't know/Not sure	2.8	2.7

Entries are column percentages. $n = 615$, $\chi^2 \approx 11.346$, $p \approx 0.023$.

Q37: Some people say that since the 1960s there has been a lot of real progress in getting rid of racial discrimination against blacks **in the South**. Others say that there hasn't been much real progress for blacks over that time. Which do you agree with more?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
A lot of real progress	46.3	54.6
Hasn't been much real progress	47.5	35.8
Not sure	6.2	9.6

Entries are column percentages. $n = 617$, $\chi^2 \approx 9.392$, $p \approx 0.009$.

Q38: Some people say that since the 1960s there has been a lot of real progress in getting rid of racial discrimination against blacks in **America**. Others say that there hasn't been much real progress for blacks over that time. Which do you agree with more?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
A lot of real progress	52.6	65.5
Hasn't been much real progress	39.9	28.3
Not sure	7.4	6.1

Entries are column percentages. $n = 616$, $\chi^2 \approx 10.740$, $p \approx 0.005$.

Q39: What about for other minority groups? Would you say there's been a lot of real progress getting rid of discrimination **in America** or hasn't there been much real progress?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
A lot of real progress	40.1	44.2
Hasn't been much real progress	48.4	40.8
Not sure	11.5	15.1

Entries are column percentages. $n = 614$, $\chi^2 \approx 4.127$, $p \approx 0.127$.

Q40: Do you think that the election of Barack Obama as president will lead to more real progress in getting rid of discrimination in America?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
Yes	75.6	69.6
No	13.6	18.4
Not sure	10.8	11.9

Entries are column percentages. $n = 617$, $\chi^2 \approx 3.215$, $p \approx 0.200$.

Q41: How comfortable do you think most people feel when they do have conversations *about* race with someone *of another race*?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
Very comfortable	12.1	10.5
Somewhat comfortable	34.6	38.4
Somewhat uncomfortable	41.9	35.9
Very uncomfortable	11.4	15.2

Entries are column percentages. $n = 591$, $\chi^2 \approx 3.870$, $p \approx 0.276$.

Q42: Did the 2008 presidential election make it easier or more difficult to have conversations about race with people of *another* race?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
Easier	56.5	56.7
Not sure	20.1	23.2
More difficult	23.5	20.1

Entries are column percentages. $n = 617$, $\chi^2 \approx 1.483$, $p \approx 0.477$.

Q43a: Do you think that African Americans sometimes need to think and act “white” in order to get ahead in American society?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
No	61.3	60.1
Sometimes (vol.)	5.2	13.0
Yes	33.5	26.8

Entries are column percentages. $n = 293$, $\chi^2 \approx 6.218$, $p \approx 0.045$.

Q43b: Do you think that African Americans sometimes need to play down their racial identity in order to get ahead in American society?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
No	65.2	53.8
Sometimes (vol.)	5.8	12.3
Yes	29.0	33.8

Entries are column percentages. $n = 285$, $\chi^2 \approx 5.440$, $p \approx 0.066$.

Q47: Thinking about the economy, do you think things are better for blacks than other groups, about the same for blacks, or worse for blacks in the current economic environment?

	Non-Black lwr	Black lwr
Better	9.2	6.2
Same	47.8	57.1
Worse	43.0	36.7

Entries are column percentages. $n = 589$, $\chi^2 \approx 5.631$, $p \approx 0.060$.

Conclusions

- Generally race-of-interviewer effects were **consistent with expectations** based on prior research.
- However, **some response patterns were puzzling** to us.
- Future Directions:
 - Need to use multivariate models to control for respondent characteristics.
 - Should consider a more complex research design to test whether the classical or Zaller-Feldman model explains interviewer effects.

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