Can We Really Have a Conversation about Race?
Investigating Race-of-Interviewer Effects in the Contemporary South

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Interviewer Effects

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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.
  - The interviewer, whose role is to administer the survey as uniformly as possible.
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- 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.
- Of the complete interviews, 297 conducted by black interviewers; 324 interviews by other racial/ethnic groups (mostly white).
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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?”
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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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>51.9</td>
<td>60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly acceptable</td>
<td>67.4</td>
<td>76.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat acceptable</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat unacceptable</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly unacceptable</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know/Not sure</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot of real progress</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>54.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasn’t been much real progress</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>35.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black lwr</th>
<th>Black lwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot of real progress</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasn’t been much real progress</td>
<td>39.9</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A lot of real progress</td>
<td>40.1</td>
<td>44.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hasn’t been much real progress</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black lwr</th>
<th>Black lwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>75.6</td>
<td>69.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort Level</th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very comfortable</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat comfortable</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat uncomfortable</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>35.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very uncomfortable</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easier</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More difficult</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>20.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non-Black Iwr</th>
<th>Black Iwr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes (vol.)</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33.5</td>
<td>26.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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?

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Black lwr</th>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>65.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sometimes (vol.)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
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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?

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Better</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>47.8</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worse</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
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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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