# HE SAID/SHE SAID: VOTE CHOICE IN THE 1992 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESPONDENT/INTERVIEWER GENDER INTERACTION EFFECTS IN PRE-ELECTION POLLING

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## INTRODUCTION

The pre-election polling done by the *Star Ledger/ Eagleton Poll* (SLEP) for the 1992 Presidential election provided an opportunity to look at the impact of gender interaction effects with respect to political issues. There were three main pre-election public opinion polls conducted by the SLEP that assessed a variety of election topics which were conducted from September 9-15, 1993; October 16-22, 1993; and October 23-29, 1993. In addition, the 1992 Presidential election provides a unique opportunity to use exit poll survey results (provided by Voter Research & Surveys [VRS]) to compare the SLEP results with external information about how male and female voters "actually" voted.

The main objective of the paper is to focus on respondent/interviewer gender interaction effects as a possible source of error in pre-election polling.

## BACKGROUND

The research on gender interaction effects is important for several reasons. First, there is limited information, although growing, about respondent/ interviewer effects using the telephone mode. Second, it is expected that the telephone mode would increase gender awareness. Since the telephone tends to neutralize other intervening cues such as social status and age, gender becomes the most obvious way for the respondent and the interviewer to establish their role in the communications (interviewing) relationship. Third, it is important to be able to classify the types of subjects where gender interaction effects are more/less likely to occur. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time gender interaction has been tested as a possible source of error in pre-election polling.

## OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Past research supports the theory that responses to survey measures are affected by a variety of factors. Sudman and Bradburn (1974) summarize the studies measuring these effects and identify 46 independent variables that they suggest influence the response frequencies to survey measures. Response effect is defined as "the amount of error in the response to a question that is associated with the respondent's misunderstanding of the question, that associated with faulty memory, or that associated with attempts to enhance one's self-presentation." (Sudman and

Bradburn, 1974, p.3).

Respondent and interviewer roles have been investigated in studies that have looked at the social class, age, race and gender of these actors in the survey research process. At this time the findings of this research have been inconclusive. Some studies show an increase in variance in the interview situation where respondent and interviewer characteristics are not matched (e.g., Katz, 1942; Hyman, 1954; Shuman and Converse, 1971; Freeman and Butler, 1976); other studies show little effect when the interviewer and the respondent have different characteristics (e.g., Carr, 1971; Johnson and Delmater, 1976). In addition, the matching of interviewer and respondent traits has also been suggested as a cause of response error (Hyman, 1954; Colombotas and Dohrenwend, 1968).

The studies of gender effects on survey measures of general population samples have been somewhat limited for several reasons. Usually survey research interviews have been conducted by women (Hyman, 1954; Freeman and Butler, 1976). This personnel bias reduces the number of studies that have a sufficient number of responses collected by male interviewers for meaningful analysis. Also, studies that have looked at gender effects are usually those where the topic is most sensitive to these effects, for example, sexual behavior (Hyman, 1954; Benny, Riesman and Star, 1956; Colombotos, Elinson, and Lowenstein, 1969; Strasser and Stephens, 1979). Thus, these effects have not been investigated over a wide range of content items.

Although the existing findings are inconclusive, the tendencies that are reported in several studies suggest systematic gender effects. In general, there is more variation in male responses that responses given by females (Strasser and Stephens, 1979; Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Ballou and Del Boca, 1980; Whelchel, 1987). However, attitudinal questions that have a socially desirable or normative response affect female respondents more (Hyman, 1954; Benny et al., 1956; Landis, Sullivan and Sheley, 1973; Moore, 1989). Male interviewers matched with male respondents show more variation in their response choices than other pairs (Hyman, 1954; Sudman and Bradburn, 1974; Benny, Riesman and Star, 1956; Ballou and Del Boca, 1980). While one would expect items of high gender saliency to have more effects than those with low gender

saliency, gender effects are found in a variety of items (Hyman, 1954; Hanson and Marks, 1958; Strasser and Stephens, 1979; Ballou and Del Boca, 1980; Hutchinson and Wegge, 1991; Kane and Macaulay, 1993).

In addition, as pointed out by Whelchel, the interview situation reflects the "real life" interaction that occurs between males and females. The developing pool of research on male/female communications adds an additional dimension to the study of respondent/interviewer gender interaction effects.

*SUMMARY OF METHODOLOGY*

As noted in the introduction, The *Star-Ledger/* Eagleton Poll conducted a series of three pre-election polls in the fall of 1992. Interviewers used for these surveys are experienced, professional interviewers who in general have about a year or more experience. All interviewers are monitored at least once during each shift and are given feedback on their performance. An average of 10-15 different interviewers are used to conduct the interviews.

Respondents for all of these studies were selected from a randomized proportional probability sample of New Jersey residents. Interviewers are randomly assigned phone numbers that have quotas or male and female respondents. There is no reason to expect there to be any systematic differences between respondents contacted by male versus female interviewers. However, it should be noted that respondents may self-select on the basis of their perceptions about the interview and the interviewer.

The analysis is conducted in several ways. First, the statistical reliability of these gender effects was tested using the chi square formula. Next, the VRS exit poll results are used as an "absolute" value of the "actual" results of the election by gender. The differences between the frequencies of the VRS results and the SLEP results are reviewed. Then the VRS results are compared to the gender interaction dyads.

To conduct a descriptive analysis of gender interaction effects, the vote choice question was cross-tabulated with a created variable that combined interviewer gender and respondent gender. The classifications used in the analysis refer to the following dyads of respondents and interviewers. Note that the letter (M or F) of the gender designation of the respondent always precedes that of the interviewer.

RM/IM--Male respondent/male interviewer
RM/IF--Male respondent/female interviewer
RF/IM--Female respondent/male interviewer
RF/IF--Female respondent/female interviewer

*RESEARCH RESULTS*

The overall research shows that there are respondent/interviewer gender interaction effects in the pre-election polling results. This analysis begins by looking at the total vote choice and then peeling away two layers to identify possible methodological issues related to respondent/interviewer interaction. The first layer is gender differences in candidate selection and the second layer is the respondent/interviewer gender interaction dyads.

The top of Table 1 shows the differences between the actual vote, the VRS total vote and the SLEP pre-election vote choice. The main difference between the SLEP results and the actual vote is the under-representation of the percentage of people selecting George Bush by 8 percentage points. It should be noted that this analysis focuses on "likely" voters. As in any pre-election polling, the SLEP also has results for registered voters and probable voters. The results that are most accurate in reflecting the actual Presidential vote in New Jersey are for probable voters. However, the number of cases in some of the dyads are smaller than desirable for this analysis. Therefore, likely voters are used for this analysis.

In comparing the vote intentions by respondent gender in the VRS results and the SLEP results, there is an over-reporting of intentions to vote for Clinton by SLEP female respondents by 7 percentage points compared to the VRS data and an under-reporting of the choice for Bush by 10 percentage points.

Table 2 peels away the last layer in this analysis and shows the vote choice question by the respondent/interviewer dyads. As was noted above, the largest overall differences in the SLEP results and the VRS results is for female respondents. Among the dyads in this table, the main effects (differences of 5% points or more) are in the vote choice of the female respondents. Specifically, female respondents are much more likely to say they will vote for Bill Clinton when they are interviewed by a male (56%) than a female (42%)--a 14 percentage point difference. Conversely, support for George Bush is stronger when a female respondent is interviewed by a female (40%) than a male (29%)--an 11 percentage point difference. Assuming that the VRS vote- choice result for female voters is accurate, the responses that females gave to female interviewers are more "reliable" than those given to male interviewers. While the differences between the VRS and the SLEP results are 2 (Clinton) and 3 (Bush) percentage points for responses to female interviewers, they are 12 (Clinton) and 14 (Bush) percentage points different for male interviewers. The choices for Perot are about the same.

Overall, there are less effects among male respondents. However, when there are effects they are largest for the Bush vote intent. Male respondents are more likely to tell female (42%) than male (30%) interviewers--a 12 percentage point difference-- that

they intend to vote for George Bush. Again assuming that the VRS vote-choice result for male voters is accurate, the responses males gave to female interviewers are more "reliable." The differences between the VRS and the SLEP results are 3 percentage points for Bush responses to female interviewers, while there is 9 percentage points difference for male interviewers.

## DISCUSSION

This analysis is yet another piece of information increasing our knowledge about respondent/interviewer gender interaction effects. What is still missing is a consistent pattern to these effects that can be developed into a theory. Even in the data that was used for this analysis, when the interaction effects are analyzed for each of the three pre-election polls statistically significant differences are observed, but the direction of these differences vary somewhat from survey to survey (Table 3).

Several overall patterns have been observed in previous studies that can be used to assist in understanding these results. First, the pattern that seems to have been most consistent in the past is the larger respondent/interviewer gender interaction effects have been observed for male respondents, and in particular male respondents interviewed by other males. This was not the case in this analysis. In this data, the effects are most prevalent for female respondents. While there may be several possible explanations for this occurrence, one may be that for the vote-intention question, female respondents may be reacting to a different type of task that is influenced by the gender of the interviewer.

A second pattern is that male respondents are more likely to give "status quo" responses to female interviewers. Assuming that selecting the incumbent President George Bush is the status quo response, this pattern is repeated in this study for the final poll, but is not observed in the earlier polls.

The hypothesis that female interviewers are more likely to obtain "truer" or more "honest" responses can also be tested with this data because of the external information from the VRS results. All of the interviews conducted by female interviewers are closer to the VRS results (with the exception of the female respondent/female interviewer results to the Perot choice which is very close to being the same whatever the gender of the interviewer) than the results for the interviews conducted by male interviewers. This finding is of particular interest to researchers who conduct pre-election polls where there is an external validation of their research by the election results. This is also a useful consideration because of the changing proportion of male interviewers. While historically most interviewers were females, at least for our

interviewing team, the balance is now shifting to include many more males. In fact, Table 4 shows that for all of these polls, more interviews were conducted by male than female interviewers. After checking the respondent/interviewer gender interaction in the first and second poll and observing the larger percentage of interviews being conducted by males, a special effort was made to balance the number of interviews conducted by each gender. However, at that time a large proportion of interviews had been conducted and the proportion of interviews conducted by males again exceeded those conducted by females (69% male; 31% female).

## SUMMARY

This paper again documents that there is some type of respondent/interviewer effect that takes place in telephone interviews. And, with the use of the VRS data, suggests a possible direction for that effect. In addition, it suggests the possible consequences of this effect on the vote choice question in pre-election polls. The analysis of this data is very preliminary and uses only a small portion of the data available from this study to look at gender interaction effects. Yet it suggests some possible patterns for the interaction effects that researchers can be sensitive to and might want to check when they are conducting telephone interviews. It is now clear that these effects do not only occur when the interview focuses on gender sensitive items, but for other topics as well.

In addition, other approaches need to be used to develop hypothesis about the reasons for these effects. For example, the growing body of research on male/female roles in the communication process needs to be integrated with the results of survey research respondent/interviewer gender interaction studies to increase our understanding of this effect.

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF ACTUAL VOTE, VOTER RESEARCH & SURVEYS (VRS)
EXIT POLL, AND *STAR-LEDGER* EAGLETON POLL (SLEP) IN NEW JERSEY

|  | Clinton | Bush | Perot |
|---|---|---|---|
| Actual Vote | 43.3% | 40.9% | 15.7% |
| VRS Exit Poll | 43 | 41 | 16 |
| SLEP* | 47 | 33 | 20 |
| *Vote in NJ by Gender* | | | |
| Male | | | |
|   VRS Exit Poll | 41 | 39 | 20 |
|   SLEP | 43 | 34 | 24 |
| Female | | | |
|   VRS Exit Poll | 44 | 43 | 13 |
|   SLEP | 51 | 33 | 16 |

SLEP: $X^2 = 8.09$ $P < .05$

\* These are for 'likely' voters.

TABLE 2

VOTE CHOICE: RESPONDENT/INTERVIEWER GENDER INTERACTION

|  | Male Respondents | | | Female Respondents | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | I Male | I Female | (Diff.) | I Male | I Female | (Diff.) |
| CLINTON | 44% | 39% | *(5)* | 56% | 42% | *(14)* |
|   * VRS | 41 | 41 | | 44 | 44 | |
| *(Difference)* | *(3)* | *(-2)* | | *(12)* | *(-2)* | |
| BUSH | 30 | 42 | *(-12)* | 29 | 40 | *(-11)* |
|   * VRS | 39 | 39 | | 43 | 43 | |
| *(Difference)* | *(-9)* | *(3)* | | *(-14)* | *(-3)* | |
| PEROT | 25 | 19 | *(6)* | 15 | 17 | *(-2)* |
|   * VSR | 20 | 20 | | 13 | 13 | |
| *(Difference)* | *(5)* | *(-1)* | | *(2)* | *(4)* | |
|  | (n=263) | (n=109) | | (n=237) | (n=121) | |

$X^2 = 19.85$ $p < .005$

|  |  | (n) | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Interviews by | Males = | 500 | 68 |
|  | Females = | 230 | 32 |
|  | TOTAL = | 730 | 100 |

\* These are the vote choice by gender only, not by gender dyads.

TABLE 3

OVERVIEW OF VOTE CHOICE: RESPONDENT/INTERVIEWER GENDER INTERACTION

| | Male Respondents | | | Female Respondents | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I Male | I Female | (Diff.) | I Male | I Female | (Diff.) |
| CLINTON | | | | | | |
| September | 53% | 58% | (-5) | 54% | 44% | (10) |
| October A | 42 | 36 | (6) | 49 | 49 | (0) |
| October B | 41 | 36 | (5) | 49 | 38 | (11) |
| BUSH | | | | | | |
| September | 44 | 36 | (8) | 38 | 46 | (-8) |
| October A | 29 | 31 | (-2) | 33 | 31 | (2) |
| October B | 28 | 39 | (-11) | 25 | 37 | (-12) |
| PEROT | | | | | | |
| September * | -- | -- | | -- | -- | |
| October A | 21 | 28 | (-7) | 12 | 8 | (4) |
| October B | 23 | 18 | (5) | 13 | 16 | (-3) |
| DON'T KNOW | | | | | | |
| September | 3 | 5 | (-2) | 8 | 10 | (-2) |
| October A | 8 | 5 | (3) | 7 | 12 | (-5) |
| October B | 7 | 7 | (0) | 13 | 9 | (4) |

Significance: September - $X^2$ = 15.68 $p < .01$

October A - $X^2$ = 32.62 $p < .0001$

October B - $X^2$ = 26.62 $p < .005$

* Perot not in the race at this time.

TABLE 4

ACTUAL NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS

| | Male Respondents | | Female Respondents | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | I Male | I Female | I Male | I Female |
| September | 224 | 119 | 159 | 169 |
| October A | 257 | 134 | 223 | 127 |
| October B | 283 | 117 | 273 | 133 |

TOTAL INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED BY:

| | Males | Females | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| September | | | |
| (n) | 383 | 288 | 671 |
| % | 57% | 43% | 100% |
| October A | | | |
| (n) | 480 | 261 | 741 |
| % | 65% | 35% | 100% |
| October B | | | |
| (n) | 556 | 250 | 806 |
| % | 69% | 31% | 100% |