

EFFECT OF ETHNICITY OF SIGNATURE IN MAIL SURVEYS

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Abstract

The current study was a follow-up to a previous one conducted by the senior author which showed that Hispanic and Jewish names did not affect the rate of response or content of a mail questionnaire sent to travel agents. The present research showed that an apparently Black name was as effective as a "WASP" name in eliciting returns to a mail survey. The content of the questionnaire, an "attitudes towards Jews" scale, was not influenced by the ethnicity of the sender's signature.

Using a sample of travel agents, Friedman and Goldstein (1975) found no difference in the return rate of, or responses to, a mail questionnaire signed by a Jewish, Hispanic, or ethnically unidentifiable name. The purpose of the current study were: (1) to determine whether a Black name would affect the rate of response or content of a mail survey, and (2) to determine whether ego-involving questions would produce results similar to the original study.

Method

On the basis of a pretest using 73 New Jersey residents--36 males and 37 females--the authors decided to use "Leroy Jefferson" as the Black name. The other name used in the study was "John Carter III." It was identified as a "WASP" name by 63 subjects in the pretest, while 6 subjects could not associate the name with any particular ethnic group.

The sample for the study consisted of 200 people randomly selected from a Northern New Jersey directory. One hundred subjects were sent the questionnaire with "Leroy Jefferson" identified as the sender. The other 100 subjects were sent the same questionnaire with "John Carter III" identified as the sender. In the cover letter, the sender identified himself as a graduate student conducting research on attitudes concerning race and religion at a Northern New Jersey college.

Subjects were sent the short form of the Levinson and Sanford (1944) anti-Semitism scale. The original scale consisted of 52 six point Likert-type statements. The short form consisted of ten statements selected from the original 52, both on a statistical and theoretical basis. Reliabilities of .89 to .94 have been reported for the short form of the A-S scale (Robinson & Shaver,

1973, pp. 371-378). The scale consists of ten statements, all of which express unfavorable attitudes towards Jews. For instance, "I can hardly imagine myself marrying a Jew." Subjects checked the amount of agreement as one of the following: strong agreement, moderate agreement, slight agreement, slight disagreement, moderate disagreement, strong disagreement. The responses were scored +3, +2, +1, -1, -2, -3, respectively. Thus the possible range of scores was from +30, for a strongly anti-Semitic individual, to -30, for a strongly pro-Semitic individual. It was believed that subjects responding to "Leroy Jefferson" would exhibit less racist tendencies than those responding to "John Carter III." An "attitude towards Jews" scale was used, rather than an "attitude towards Blacks" scale, in order to disguise the true purpose of the study. It was felt the use of an "attitude towards Blacks" scale with "Leroy Jefferson: as the sender might cause subjects to be suspicious.

Results and Discussion

Twenty-three of "Leroy Jefferson's" questionnaires, and 27 of "John Carter III's" questionnaires, were returned. The chi-square value was not significant, $\chi^2_{(1)} = .43$. The mean scores on the anti-Semitism scale were -14.6 for the "Jefferson" group (variance = 98.0), and -14.6 for the "Carter" group (variance = 81.8). The t-value was obviously not significant at $t_{(48 \text{ d.f.})} = 0.0$.

This study provides further evidence for Friedman and Goldstein's (1975) contention that the warning of many researchers not to use ethnically identifiable names may not be valid. In addition, the use of ego-involving statements in the current study did not alter the results.

The limitations of the study are, of course, the small sample size used and the low response rate. Also, the possibility exists that bigots chose not to respond to the questionnaire, regardless of the name of the sender.

The current study was replicated by the author, using a similar methodology. The rates of response and the mean scores of the responses to an attitude toward Blacks scale did not differ, whether a "Black" name or ethnically neutral name was used. Thus, it seems, researchers may not have to disguise their names when sending out questionnaires in order to make them appear ethnically neutral.

Footnote

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