Interviewer Effects in a RDD Telephone Pre-election Poll in Minneapolis 2001
An Analysis of the Effects of Interviewer Race and Gender

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Previous Research

Interviewer effects in opinion polls have been acknowledged since the beginning of survey research (Cantril, 1944). Race of interviewer effects have been found in face-to-face surveys (Hyman, Coob, Feldman, Hart, & Stember, 1954; Sudman & Bradburn, 1974), in telephone surveys (Cotter, Cohan, & Coulter, 1982; Davis, 1997b), in self administered paper and pencil surveys with an administrator (Campbell, 1981; Danso & Esses, 2001), and in computer-assisted self-interviewing (CASI) surveys with virtual and live interviewers (Krysan & Couper, 2003). The majority of studies concentrates on the interviewer/respondent interaction between Whites and African American. However, race of interviewer effects have been noted with other races as well, such as with Mexican Americans vs. Anglos (Reese, Danielson, Shoemaker, Tsan-Kuo, & Huei-Ling, 1986), and with Asian vs. non Asian (Worcester & Kuar-Ballagan, 2002).

Gender of interviewer effects have been studied in both face-to-face surveys (Landis, Sullivan, & Sheley, 1973; Sudman & Bradburn, 1974) and telephone surveys (Groves & Fultz, 1985; Huddy et al., 1997; Hutchinson & Wegge, 1991; Kane & Macaulay, 1993; Leuptow, Moser, & Pendleton, 1990).

Race of the interviewer effect is especially prominent when the questions are dealing with racial issues, but it also extends to political attitudes, voting, and perceptions of citizens' duties (Anderson, Silver, & Abramson, 1988). Cantril (1944, p. 116) found that African American respondents were more willing to admit that they would have been treated worse if the Japanese conquered the U.S.A. when reporting to a White interviewer (45%), than when reporting to an African American interviewer (25%). Hatchett and Schuman (1975, p. 525) reported that respondents gave more liberal or pro-black opinions to African American interviewers for questions of a racial nature.

Findings in the same direction were found in studies of gender of interviewer effects. For gender-related issues, female students gave more feminist responses to male interviewers on questions about women's roles (Landis et al., 1973). Male respondents gave different responses on questions dealing with gender inequality in employment, and female respondents gave different answers for questions related to collective actions, policy, and group interest (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). However, gender effects occur for items that are not gender-related. For example, Groves and Fultz (1985) reported that male interviewers elicited more optimistic responses on questions related to the respondent's economic outlook.

In one of the first studies on this topic, Cotter, Cohan, and Coulter (1982) hypothesized that interviewers' race would matter little, if not at all, in terms of affecting respondents' answers in a telephone survey. They gave two reasons for their hypothesis: 1) it is difficult to determine the interviewer's race because the interview is not face-to-face, and 2) the social and psychological distance between the interviewer and respondent should cancel out the effect. However, in a telephone survey of Alabama residents, the authors found race-of-interviewer effects for some racial items. In a preelection poll done in Virginia, Finkel, Guterbock, and Borg (1991) reported a substantial effect: Whites were 8%-11% more likely to claim support for an African American candidate if interviewed by an African American interviewer than a White interviewer. This effect was more prominent among undecided voters. In the studies reviewed thus far, the respondent was interviewed only once. If race-of-interviewer effect were strong, we would predict that the same respondent would change his/her answer to the same item if questioned a second time by an interviewer of a different race. This is what happened in the 1984 National Black Election Study (Davis, 1997a). The most dramatic change was found when the interviewer changed from African American in the preelection poll to White in the post election poll panel study. In an analysis of the same dataset Davis (1997b), extended race-of-interviewer effect to non-racial items such as trust in government, political efficacy, support for defense spending, and candidate placements on issues. To verify the hypothesis that race-of-interviewer effects can extend to knowledge questions as well, Davis and Silver (2003) varied the race of the interviewer in a series of factual political knowledge questions such as: "How many years is the term of office of a United States Senator?". In the experiment the "intimidation level" of the questions was varied with a threatening or a non-threatening introductory statement. In the case of knowledge questions there is a "true" answer: correct or incorrect. While the mean number of correct responses was not influenced by the perceived race of interviewer for White respondents, it was influenced a great deal for

African American respondents, who correctly answered an average of 3.4 political knowledge questions when interviewed by an African American interviewer, compared with only 2.8 correctly answered items when interviewed by a White interviewer. The level of threat of the questions did not have any statistically significant effect on the number of correct answers.

Groves and Fultz (1985) used two years of data from the monthly Survey of Consumer Attitudes where 40 male and 80 female interviewers were randomly assigned to respondents. The authors did not find any gender effect on factual items, but respondents expressed a greater optimism on a variety of economic indicators when interviewed by males. The analysis took into account the clustering of interviewers and controlled for other confounding elements in assessing the impact of interviewers' gender. Other studies dealt with political issues. Hutchinson and Wegge (1991) found males more sensitive than females to the gender of the interviewer on political questions such as the candidate best able to keep U.S. out of war. In a pre-election poll for the 1992 presidential election, Ballou (1993) obtained more "true" or "honest" responses, closer to the election outcome, when the respondent was polled by a female interviewer. Phillips and Schuldt (1993) in a preelection poll of 1992 in Illinois, found a gender of interviewer effects more prominent for undecided or "not very sure" respondents. When the questions are more gender-related, the effects are more pronounced. Male respondents gave significantly different responses on questions dealing with gender inequality in employment to male and female interviewers, while women respondents gave different answers on gender-related collective actions, policy and group interests (Kane & Macaulay, 1993). Similar results were obtained by Huddy et al. (1997).

Perceiving Race and Gender of the Interviewer Over the Phone

In all the studies the authors reviewed, the perceived race of the interviewer was measured in a very similar way. At the end of the interview the respondents were asked to report the perceived race of the interviewer with a question such as: "Finally, what do you think my racial background is?". Meislin (1987) reports that three quarters of New York respondents were able to correctly guess the race of the interviewer. Walford at al. (1995), using data from the 1993 National Black Politics Study, estimated a correct identification of 73.1 percent using solely African American interviewers. Similar results were found by Harms (1995) in a study of African American respondents interviewed by African American interviewers. Davis (1997b), using data from the National Black Election Study (NBES) of 1984 estimated a correct guess of 79%, but in this case both White and African American interviewers were used. Tate (1998), reporting on the

1996 NBES, obtained a lower recognition rate; African American interviewers were identified correctly 62.9% of the time; this rose for White interviewers to 71.5%. In a more recent study (Wilson & Olesen, 2002), the Gallup Organization interviewed a national sample of US adults. African American interviewers were identified correctly 73.8% of the time, while White interviewers were identified correctly 82.2%. Moreover, African American respondents correctly identified White interviewers 89.5% of the time, while White respondents correctly identified African American interviewers 75.8% of the time.

Most of the studies found in the literature used surveys where the target population was African Americans and some of them used solely African American interviewers. Nonetheless the results of these studies are confirmed by more controlled laboratory studies (Lass, Tecca, Mancuso, & Black, 1979). It is also interesting to note that it does not take long for a person to come up with a judgment of the speaker's race. Purnell, Isardi, and Baugh (1999) made undergraduate students listen to a 3.5 seconds sentence: "Hello, I'm calling to see about the apartment you have advertised in the paper". The participants correctly identified the African American dialect among different speakers of 87.6% of the time. In addition, the Hispanic American dialect was correctly identified 85.3% of the time, and Standard American dialect was correctly identified 87.5% of the time.

The gender of the interviewer is easier to identify over the phone compared to the race. Following this assumption, almost no gender effect studies reviewed asked a specific question at the end of the survey. We were able to identify only one study: In a telephone interview of Chicago residents, 97% of respondents recontacted were able to correctly identify the gender of the person who interviewed them (Schejbal, Sachs, & Lavrakas, 1993). In a lab experiment, Lass et al. (1979) manipulated the race and the gender of the speaker. He found an overall mean percent of correct sex judgment of 98.7% for African American speakers, 99.4% for White speakers, 99.2% for male speakers and 98.9% for female speakers.

In the case of gender, respondents are not the only participants in the interview to guess someone's gender on the phone. Interviewers guess the gender of the respondents all the time since they are trained not to ask about the gender of the respondent unless they are uncertain.

The Minneapolis Study

In November 2001, the two-term Mayor Democrat S. S. Belton was challenged by the Democrat R.T. Rybak for the upcoming general election. Belton was the first African American and the first female mayor of the city of Minneapolis. Rybak was a White Internet consultant and

businessman. He won with 65.1% of the votes while Belton received 34.9%.

The results are based on a secondary analysis of a combination of two pre-election polls conducted by the Star Tribune Minnesota Poll just prior to the 2001 Minneapolis mayoral race. (The newspaper conducted similar polling for the St. Paul mayoral election, which had a while male incumbent and a white male challenger; few, if any, gender-race effects were apparent, and researchers decided to focus on the Minneapolis mayoral dataset.) One Minneapolis poll was conducted the Tuesday-Friday before the election, Oct. 30 – Nov. 2, with results of the 806 likely voters published on Sunday prior to Election Day. The newspaper conducted a tracking poll Sunday and Monday, Nov. 4-5, with the results of the 408 likely voters published on Wednesday after the election to help demonstrate last-minute shifts. Both samples had similar call-outcome rates (AAPOR RR3=22%).

Market Solutions Group of Minneapolis conducted the computer-assisted telephone interviewing on behalf of the Star Tribune. Results are based on the two combined datasets with respondents who were likely to vote on Election Day, Nov. 6. Researchers drew independent random digit dial telephone samples for the two polls using an equal-probability-of-selection method for all prefixes in the city. They used the most-recent-birthday method to select respondents from within the household.

The voter preference measure read: "If the general election for Minneapolis mayor were held today, would you vote for Sharon Sayles Belton or R.T. Rybak?" The order of the two candidates' names was randomly rotated. The options of voting for someone else, not voting, and saying "don't know" was not mentioned and accepted only if voluntarily expressed. The perceived race and gender of the interviewer was not collected during the poll. Because of this, we are using self-assessed race and gender of the interviewer as proxy.

The initial sample size contained 1,623 cases. After verifying whether the number dialed was in the city boundaries, interviewers excluded those who said they would not vote in the election[1] (410 cases). Of the remaining 1,213 cases, 386 said they will vote for Belton (31.8%); 599, Rybak (49.4%), 157, undecided, the voluntary DK (12.9%); 20, another candidate (1.6%); and 51 refused to answer the question (4.2%). We concentrate our analysis on respondents who said they would vote for Belton, Rybak or didn't know. The data analysis used a final sample size of 1,142 cases (we compare Af-

rican American versus non-African American respondents who said they will vote for Belton, Rybak or did not know at the time of the interview and who were interviewed by either an African American interviewer or a non-African American interviewer). Of the 1,142 respondents, 1036 were classified as non-African American and 106 as African American[2] (see also Table 2).

Because of the particular combination of race and gender of the two mayoral candidates in that election – a white male challenger and a two-term African American female incumbent – we expected to find a combined race and gender of interviewer effect on the respondent's voting intentions. The studies reviewed so far analyze generally either race or gender of interviewer effects, but rarely both of them. In addition we analyze the "don't know" responses to study which interviewers elicit more "don't know" answers. In our study, unlike Finkel et al. (1991), the option to say "don't know" on the voting preference question was discouraged by the question wording. If respondent initially indicated that they didn't know whom they would vote, interviewers asked which candidate they were leaning toward. Only if they remained undecided after this prompt, a "don't know" response was coded by the interviewer.

Results

Table 1 originated the present paper. It presents the distribution of answers to the voting intention question by race and gender of the interviewer. It's apparent that there are variations in answers depending on which interviewer was conducting the poll. For example percentages of people saying they would vote for Sayles-Belton ranged from 28.9% when interviewed by a Non-African American female to 38.4% when interviewed by an African American female, a difference of almost ten percentage points. The case is similar with people willing to vote for Rybak: from 47.7% when interviewed by an African American female to 56.2% when interviewed by an African American male, a range of 8.5 points. A similar variation (8.4% difference) is in the percentages of voluntary "do not know," 9.2% when interviewed by a non-African American male to 17.6% when interviewed by a non-African American female. Table 2 presents the distribution of answers to the voting intention question by race of respondent. This table helps to interpret the results of Table 1 and provides an idea of the distribution of race and gender in the sample.

Log-linear models have become widely accepted as a tool for analyzing relationships among discrete variables. In this paper, we study the relationship between voting intention and the race and gender of the interviewer, con-

[1] Question wording: "Some people actively participated in politics, and some do not. How about you? Do you think you will vote in the next week's general election that included Minneapolis mayor, or will you not vote until the next statewide election in 2002?" This analysis uses the unweighted results from screening out people who said they would not vote. For newspaper publication, the Minnesota Poll staff modeled a likely electorate by weighting these cases on additional likely voter questions.

[2] Question wording: Which of the following do you consider yourself to be? White or Caucasian, Black, Asian, multiple races (specify) or some other race (specify).

trolling for the race and gender of the respondent. In addition, a powerful feature of log-linear modeling is its ability to handle dependent variables with more than two categories. Three models were tested: the willingness to vote for Belton versus supporting the other candidate or being undecided (Model 1, Table 3), the willingness to vote for Rybak versus supporting the other candidate or being undecided (Model 2, Table 4), and the undecided versus supporting one of the candidates (Model 3, Table 5) We use Lemwin to estimate our models (Vermunt, 1997).

Log-linear models are also well-known for their sensitivity to interaction effects. We are especially interested in the combined effects of race and gender of the interviewer on the voting intention. Given the sensitivity to interaction effects, such effects frequently appear in a well-fitted model (Alba, 1987).

We study voting behavior in terms of race and gender of the respondent and race and gender of the interviewer. Table 3 shows lambda parameters, standard errors, and odds explaining voting intention for the first model: Sayles-Belton vs. any other answer. When focusing on the statistically significant results (bold) we want, for example, to measure the effect of gender of interviewer on the impact of gender of the respondent on voting for Sayles-Belton vs. other answers. For female interviewers the odds for voting for Sayles-Belton of female respondents are 1.1 times those of the odds for male respondents $[(.919*1.139)^2]$ but .65 $[(.919*1/1.139)^2]$ for male interviewers. Thus, when female respondents are interviewed by females, there is almost no effect (1.1), but when female respondents are interviewed by males, they are less likely than men to say that they will vote for Sayles-Belton. Or when looking at the effect of race of the interviewer on the impact on race of the interviewer on voting for Sayles-Belton, we can calculate that for African-American female interviewers the odds of saying that female respondents will vote for Sayles-Belton is $[(1.205*.988)^2]$ 1.41 times those the odds for male respondents. For non-African American female interviewers those odds are $[(1.205*1/.988)^2]$ 1.48 times those the odds for male respondents. In this case the interpretation is that no matter the race of the interviewer, females elicit more females willing to vote for Belton than males (≈1.5 times more). If looking at the gender of the respondent on the impact of race of the respondent on voting for Belton vs. any other answer we se that for an African American female respondent the odds are 5.28 times $[(2.91*.79)^2]$ those of the odds for non-African American respondents. For male African American respondents the odds of voting for Sayles-Belton are 13.58 times $[(2.91*1/.79)^2]$ those of the odds for non-African American respondents.

Table 4 shows lambda parameters, standard errors, and odds explaining voting intention for the second model: Rybak vs. any other answer. Results here are

going in the expected direction of race and gender of interviewer effect, but for this model they are less statistically significant. If one examines the gender of the respondent on the impact of race of the respondent on voting for Rybak vs. any other answer, for an African American female respondent the odds are .18 times $[(.334*.1.282)^2)]$ those of the odds for non-African American respondents. For male African American respondents the odds of voting for Sayles-Belton are .06 times $[(.334*1/.1.282)^2)]$ those of the odds for non African American respondents.

Table 5 compares undecided voters to those who support either of the candidates. For African-American female interviewers the odds of female respondents saying they are undecided is $[(.840*1.259)^2]$ 1.11 times those of the odds for male respondents; for non-African American female interviewers those odds are $[(.840*1/1.259)^2]$ .44 times those the odds for male respondents. That means African American interviewers elicit more undecided responses when interviewing females than males and that non-African American female interviewers elicit less undecided responses when interviewing females than males.

Conclusions

Researchers have been able to demonstrate interviewer effects since the beginning of survey research. In telephone interviews the race and gender of the interviewer is perceived through the voice cues and the interviewer's name with a high degree of approximation for gender and about three out of four times correctly for race. In the survey literature race and gender of interviewer has been generally studied separately. Our particular arrangement of race and gender of the two candidates for mayor of Minneapolis created a situation to explore the joint effect of race and gender of the interviewer on respondents' voting intentions. White male challenger R.T. Rybak ran against the two-term mayor Sharon Sayles-Belton, an African American woman.

The first table can be interpreted as an "if, then what" scenario. What would have happened if the interviewing company would have used only non-African-American female interviewers, or only African-American males? This is a topic of further discussion and goes in the direction of the debate about matching and not matching interviewer and respondent gender/race (Schaeffer, 1980).

Looking at race and gender of the respondent one finds that African Americans and women more often answer that they will vote for the African American woman. At the same time, compared to n-on African Americans, African Americans less often profess that they don't know whom they will vote for in the next few days (Table 2).

The results for the effects of race and gender of the interviewer show that is was important to include both

variables in the analysis. We find that there is an interaction effect between race of the interviewer and gender of the interviewer on voting intentions of the respondents. The presence of this interaction effect means that the effect of race of the interviewer depends on the gender of the interviewer and, likewise, the effect of gender of the interviewer depends on race of the interviewer. Similar to other studies, we also find that race and gender interviewer effects are dependent on race and gender of the respondent. In addition to that, we find an interaction of race and gender of the interviewer. Male African American interviewers elicit less willingness to vote for Sayles-Belton than female African American interviewers. When interviewed by an African American, respondents are reluctant to express an intention to vote for the White male candidate competing against the African American female candidate. Non-African American interviewers elicit the fewest number of "don't know" responses. It is not always easy to interpret and explain the differences we found in voting intentions as a consequence of the combined effect of race and gender of the interviewer, which should receive more attention in future research.

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Tables

Table 1. Distribution of Answers to Voting Intention Question by Race and Gender of the Interviewer

Race of I	Gender of Int	Voting behavior			*Total*	*N*
		Belton	Rybak	Don't know		
Not African-	Male	34.7	56.1	9.2	100%	303
American	Female	28.9	53.5	17.6	100%	346
African-	Male	30.5	56.2	13.3	100%	105
American	Female	38.4	47.7	13.9	100%	388
	Total	33.8	52.4	13.8	100%	1142

Table 2. Distribution of Answers to Voting Intention Question by Race and Gender of the Respondent

Race of R	Gender of Resp	Voting behavior			*Total*	*N*
		Belton	Rybak	Don't know		
Not African-	Male	25.4	60.4	14.2	100%	464
American	Female	32.9	53.2	13.9	100%	572
African-	Male	80.9	9.5	9.6	100%	42
American	Female	71.8	17.2	10.9	100%	64
	Total	33.8	52.4	13.8	100%	1142

Table 3. Lambda Parameters, Standard Errors, and Odds Explaining Voting Intention for Model 1

	Model 1: Belton vs. other answer			
	Parameter	S.E.	p-value	odds
Intercept	-.648	.067	.332	.274
Race Interviewer: A-A	.071	.064	.262	1.153
Gender Interviewer: Female	-.006	.039	.873	.988
Race Respondent: A-A	**.534**	**.064**	**.000**	**2.910**
Gender Respondent: Female	-.042	.065	.516	.919
Race Int. × Gender Int. A-A Female	**.093**	**.038**	**.016**	**1.205**
Race Resp. × Gender Resp. A-A Female	**-.118**	**.064**	**.063**	**.790**
Race Int. × Race Resp. A-A Int. - A-A Resp.	.066	.061	.280	1.142
Gender Int. × Gender Resp. Female Int. – Female Resp.	**.065**	**.035**	**.063**	**1.139**
Model fit	L^2=3.136; df=7; p=.872			

Note: bold stands for p-values between .0 and below .1, italics stands for p-values slightly over .1

Table 4. Lambda Parameters, Standard Errors, and Odds Explaining Voting Intention for Model 2

	Model 2: Rybak vs. other answer			
	Parameter	S.E.	p-value	odds
Intercept	.391	.821	.000	2.186
Race Interviewer: A-A	-.630	.075	.400	.284
Gender Interviewer: Female	-.051	.036	.152	.903
Race Respondent: A-A	**-.548**	**.081**	**.000**	**.334**
Gender Respondent: Female	.054	.080	.500	1.114
Race Int. × Gender Int. A-A Female	-.039	.035	.275	.925
Race Resp. × Gender Resp. A-A Female	*.124*	*.080*	*.118*	*1.282*
Race Int. × Race Resp. A-A Int. - A-A Resp.	-.052	.073	.482	.901
Gender Int. × Gender Resp. Female Int. – Female Resp.	-.019	.032	.561	.962
Model fit	L^2=3.952; df=7; p=.785			

Note: bold stands for p-values between .0 and below .1, italics stands for p-values slightly over .1

Table 5. Lambda Parameters, Standard Errors, and Odds Explaining Voting Intention for Model 3

	Model 3: DK vs. Belton/Rybak			
	Parameter	S.E.	p-value	odds
Intercept	1.045	.094	.000	8.085
Race Interviewer: A-A	-.056	.090	.536	.894
Gender Interviewer: Female	**.115**	**.052**	**.029**	**1.259**
Race Respondent: A-A	-.111	.089	.210	.801
Gender Respondent: Female	.059	.091	.513	1.125
Race Int. × Gender Int. A-A Female	**-.087**	**.051**	**.086**	**.840**
Race Resp. × Gender Resp. A-A Female	.027	.087	.756	1.056
Race Int. × Race Resp. A-A Int. - A-A Resp.	-.086	.086	.314	.842
Gender Int. × Gender Resp. Female Int. – Female Resp.	*-.080*	*.050*	*.110*	*.852*
Model fit	L^2=7.414; df=7; p=.387			

Note: bold stands for p-values between .0 and below .1, italics stands for p-values slightly over .1