

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT  
COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

Effects of Social Desirability on Interviews

Our group has chosen to study how an interview may be tainted by the interviewer. We particularly wish to see if there will be a response bias due to the gender of the interviewer. We narrowed our study to see if specifically women will answer questions differently if asked by: another woman, a man, or a survey. We see this as an important study, since so many studies are done by interviews, and could have biases that are not apparent. We feel this study will lead to a better understanding of how respondents are affected by gender, because we have added a control (surveys) to our experiment and it should prove if responses seem to be biased or not.

Axinn, William G. (1991) "The influence of interviewer sex on responses to sensitive questions in Nepal." Social Science Research, Vol .20.

This study was done to test the hypothesis that interviewer characteristics such as gender might affect responses in developing countries. Questions for the survey touched on sensitive topics such as method of making money and contraception, in order to emphasize the difference in subject response to determine if it correlated to the nature of the interviewer. Female interviewers were able to gather more information about sensitive topics from the subjects than male interviewers, and female respondents tended to be more honest about their answers to the female interviewers.

Hutchinson, Kevin L. (1991) "The effects of interviewer gender upon response in telephone survey research." Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, Vol. 6.

Political questions were posed to a sample of men and women in telephone surveys. It appeared that on certain questions, the respondents showed a difference in answers to the same questions, depending on the sex of the interviewer. Distinctively, politically conservative men tended to answer according to their predictions of the political ideals held by the interviewer based only upon his or her gender.

Lueptow, Lloyd B. (1990) "Gender and response effects in telephone interviews about gender characteristics." Sex Roles, Vol. 22.

This study aimed to support the hypothesis that interview subjects will react differently and answer with different levels of honesty and openness to interviewers of different genders. Telephone surveys were conducted using questions about the quality of life. The results showed that females were more open and disclosed more to female interviewers, and male interviewers elicited more "response effects" than females. The conclusion states that this gender bias in answering surveys serves as a critical factor in error of research.

Hornik, Jacob (1988) "Strategies to secure compliance for a mall intercept interview." Public Opinion Quarterly. Vol. 52

This study was done with subjects in a shopping mall. Subjects were approached and asked to participate in a survey. Half of the subjects were touched and gazed at by the interviewers and the other half were not. These techniques were found to increase respondent's perceived burden. The

touch and no-touch group did not differ in response quality, or apparent response bias. One interesting point which relates to our study is that it was found that the gender of the interviewer altered the response of the interviewee.

**Hypothesis:** The hypothesis is that women will be affected by the gender of the interviewer and their responses will be different when asked by a man than when asked by a woman. The survey should yield similar results of how the women responded to women interviewers and demonstrate that their responses are more free of bias when asked questions by another female than by a male.

**Method:**

- a) Subjects - Our group will personally interview 60 females, 30 interviewed by a male interviewer and 30 interviewed by a female interviewer. These females will be approximately 17-23 years of age. They are all college students living on campus in a dormitory environment. We will randomly select a dormitory and then each interviewer will conduct surveys on different floors. There will be 100 mail surveys sent out to college age women living on campus in the dormitory.
- b) Apparatus/Materials – Our group will use a list of 12 questions concerning “classic stereotypes of men.” These questions will be rated on a scale from one to five. Five being the response in which they strongly agree, while one was a response with which they strongly disagree. Each respondent has a potential score from 12 points up to 60 points. We will mail these questions out in a survey form to be filled out and returned.
- c) Procedure - We will begin our study by determining 12 male stereotypes and phrasing them as questions.

Face to Face:

- 1) We will select a dorm on campus and have the female interviewers ask 30 women on one floor while the male interviewers ask 30 women on another floor the same set of questions.
- 2) Interviewers approach subjects and give them a brief summary of what will take place and obtain the subject's consent. The interviewer will ask 12 questions and request the respondents rate the questions on a 5 point scale. Each subject could potentially receive a score ranging from 12 to 60.
- 3) Once the interviewers are finished interviewing, they will debrief the subjects by posting a debriefing on the wall near the elevator of the floor interviewed.

Campus Mail:

- 1) We will randomly select 100 females from the campus directory. We will mail a survey of the same 12 questions asked of the female subjects residing in the dormitory on campus. We will ask that the surveys be returned upon completion. We will select 30 of them and they will be scored from 12 to 60. (We understand that not everyone will return the survey so compensation will be made by sending out 100.) We will inform all the participants of how results of the study can be obtained if they are interested.

Once we have all 90 scores we will process the data to determine if the sex of the interviewer had an impact on the outcome. This will result in confirming or nullifying our hypothesis.