

PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE AMOUNT OF INTERRACIAL PREJUDICE DEPEND ON RACIAL GROUP MEMBERSHIP *AND* QUESTION ORDER

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Abstract Few studies have attempted to examine how racial group membership may interact with survey context to influence responses to questions about race. Analyzing over 9,000 respondents from split-ballot experiments embedded in national polls, this research examines the extent to which question order interacts with one's self-reported racial group to influence beliefs about the amount of interracial prejudice that exists between Blacks and Whites. The results show that in-group members (e.g., Blacks) tend to view out-group members (e.g., Whites) as having more dislike toward their in-group (e.g., Whites dislike Blacks) only when the in-group is asked about first—a contrast. When in-group members (e.g., Blacks) are evaluated after out-groups (e.g., Whites), they will view their in-group's dislike as similar to that of the out-groups—an assimilation. The results serve to remind survey researchers and practitioners of the careful attention that must be paid to context and response biases.

Introduction: Discussing Race in Survey Settings

The mass public, media organizations, political leaders, and academics alike rely on public opinion data to understand the dynamics of race relations in society. For example, research from surveys suggests that overt racial prejudice is on the decline, and more subtle forms of prejudice are now commonplace

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(Kinder and Sanders 1996; Schuman et al. 1997; Sears, Sidanius, and Bobo 2000; Sniderman and Piazza 1993). But consumers of public opinion data should hold some healthy skepticism about the accuracy of expressed attitudes and opinions on race. Social desirability (Krysan 1998), the race of the interviewer (Davis 1997a, 1997b; Krysan and Couper 2003), and question wording (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman Peffley et al., 1997; Schuman and Presser 1981) are all well-documented survey design-related or “contextual” factors (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996) that can influence the survey response process, particularly when race is the topic of the “social conversation” (Bradburn, Sudman, and Wansink 2004; Schuman and Converse 1971). Another well-documented context effect, but one that has received less attention with regard to race, is question order (Schuman and Presser 1981).

Question-order-based context effects are a known source of response bias in survey settings (Bradburn, Sudman, and Wansink 2004; Hyman and Sheatsley 1950; Schuman and Presser 1981; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996). Question order alone may affect response judgments (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000), or it may interact with salient group memberships or particular topics to produce response biases (Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996). These group-based considerations and any subsequent emotions activated during the survey interview may influence responses to related questions (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000); thus, question order may affect survey response for racial groups evaluating their own group versus others. This relationship between context, racial group membership, and question topic has not been empirically verified in the survey research literature.

Thus, I examine how question order can affect racial differences in perceived racial prejudice.¹ In the following sections I briefly explain the nature of question-order effects, discuss the theory and expectations for race-related effects, summarize the data used in the analysis, and present my analytical findings and subsequent conclusions.

Question-Order Effects

Question-order effects are said to occur when earlier questions bring to mind information that can significantly influence responses to later questions (Schuman and Presser 1981; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000). Empirically, question-order effects present

1. I use “dislike” and “prejudice” interchangeably throughout the text. This language is consistent with Allport’s (1954) view that prejudice is an antipathy or unfair negative attitude toward a group and its members, and Petty and Cacioppo’s (1996) characterization of attitudes as positive or negative feelings about an object such as a group.

themselves as changes in the response distributions of two or more questions after being considered under two or more randomly assigned conditions (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000). The items considered first are done so in a non-comparative or “top-of-mind” context, and items presented later are answered in a comparative context (Moore 2002). When aggregate responses to a question asked in a non-comparative context vary significantly from the same question asked in the comparative context, the response variation is said to result from the question order.

There are two main types of question-order effects (Schuman and Presser 1981; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996; Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000). *Assimilation* (also known as “consistency”) effects occur when responses to a later question are brought closer than they would otherwise be to those already given to an earlier question; *contrast* effects, on the other hand, lead to greater differences between responses to two or more questions as a result of the ordering (Schuman and Presser 1981).

In the context of race, the sensitive nature of America’s racial history can prime self- or group-reflective emotions such as pride, resentment, frustration, and sympathy, all of which can influence survey response (see, e.g., Strack, Schwarz, and Gschneidinger 1985). If earlier questions heighten the salience of group membership, and thus foster group comparisons (Turner 1975) along with motivations to view one’s in-group more positively and an out-group more negatively (Brewer 2001; Tajfel and Turner 1986), then these cognitions likely influence judgments and responses to later questions considered in the group-based context. When questions specifically deal with salient emotional cues, such as interracial hostility among Blacks and Whites, question context and racial group membership should interact to strengthen in-group and out-group categorization leading to a desire to favor and differentiate one’s in-group over the out-group—a *contrast* effect (Brewer and Weber 1994).

Assimilation-based effects can result from a norm of “evenhandedness,” also invoked when one group is favored over another (Schuman and Ludwig 1983; Schuman and Presser 1981). The norm proposes that “if an advantage (or disadvantage) is given to one party in a dispute, it should be given to the other as well” (Schuman and Ludwig 1983, p. 112). When an evaluation of the out-group has already been expressed in a non-comparative context, the in-group member feels dissonance, particularly in the presence of an interviewer, and thus justifies and reports a consistent response to give the appearance of evenhandedness.

Both contrast- and assimilation-based question-order effects should occur with adjacent questions asking about Whites’ and Blacks’ levels of dislike toward the other. Groups will contrast (i.e., differentiate) their in-group with an out-group when their own group is considered first, but will assimilate (i.e., integrate) their group to the out-group in a comparative context. In practical terms, after Blacks have been asked to evaluate how many “Blacks dislike

Whites,” they should perceive that more out-group members (Whites) dislike their group (Blacks) than their in-group dislikes Whites, but if the order is reversed and Blacks consider how many “Whites dislike Blacks” first, they will tend to report that similar amounts of dislike exist between Blacks and Whites. This same response pattern should occur for Whites.

Data and Methodology

Nine split-ballot experiments conducted by the Gallup Organization² between 1996 and 2002 were analyzed. The two questions under investigation gauge perceptions of interracial dislike (i.e., prejudice), asking respondents “Do you think only a few White [Black] people dislike Blacks [Whites], many White [Black] people dislike Blacks [Whites], or almost all White [Black] people dislike Blacks [Whites]?” The split-ballot experimental design was the same in each of the studies: one random half of the sample was asked the question about White dislike first and Black dislike second; the other random half was asked the Black dislike question first and White dislike second. The data were pooled to make for a more robust analysis of Black-White comparisons within the data.³ The final analytic dataset contained only those Black and White respondents ($N = 9,927$) who provided valid responses to both questions in the experiment.⁴ Table A in the Appendix section contains more details about each dataset.

Variables indicating the respondent’s race (White=1, Black=0) and whether or not a respondent was asked about their in-group or the out-group first are included in the analysis. A small number of demographic variables—age, sex, and education—that were consistent across studies also were included. Self-reported age is measured in years. Sex is a dummy variable coded 1 for males and 0 for females. Education is measured by a dummy variable indicating whether respondents earned a college degree (coded 1) or not (coded 0). A

2. Gallup is an independent public opinion research organization with over 70 years of experience in polling. The Gallup telephone survey data used in this research were collected using list-assisted landline numbers obtained from Survey Sampling, Inc. (SSI). Respondents were randomly selected adults (18+ years of age) in the United States contacted via random digit dialing (RDD) procedures.

3. Random effects modeling suggests that interracial dislike did not vary over time ($F(8,11,405) = .27$, n.s.), and an intraclass correlation coefficient ($ICC = .00$) between year (time) and average interracial dislike was extremely close to zero ($ICC = .00$), making it safe to assume that time is not a significant factor explaining the perceptions of the amounts of interracial prejudice. However, time was included and reported in some analyses below for added rigor.

4. The pooled data include 5,443 (55%) females and 4,484 (45%) males. The mean age is 47 years ($Median = 45$, $SD = 17$). There are 7,673 (77%) White respondents and 2,254 (23%) Black respondents. A total of 3,410 (34%) persons reported having earned a college degree, and 6,486 (66%) persons reported having no college degree.

variable indicating the year in which the study took place was also included as a statistical control.

Results

Table 1 contains responses to the two questions on interracial dislike. The in-group bias is readily apparent. For instance, just over half of Blacks (51%) believe that *only a few* “Whites dislike Blacks,” while three in five Whites (60%) hold this belief. This distribution is almost perfectly reversed for the second question, where just over half of Whites (52%) believe that *only a few* “Blacks dislike Whites,” while about three in five Blacks (62%) hold this belief.

The response distributions in Table 1 show that most of the variance is between the two middle categories, and given the small proportions in the other two, it is reasonable to dichotomize the variable into “low” (“none” and “only a few”) and “high” (“many” and “almost all”) categories. Thus, for both questions, respondents reporting either “almost all” or “many” are characterized as having higher or “more” dislike (=1), and those reporting “only some” or “none” are characterized as having lower or “less” dislike (=0). The remainder of the analyses will refer to these two categories of response.

While racial differences such as those presented in Table 1 are significant, it would be premature to conclude that Whites and Blacks actually disagree about the amounts of interracial prejudice that exist.

Table 2 shows that Whites and Blacks disagree about the amounts of prejudice primarily when their in-group is considered first (columns 4–6); when the out-group is considered first (columns 7–9), there is consistent agreement across race. The cell values in table 2 are percentages (and counts) of each racial group who gave the “response pattern” shown on the left side of the table. The “Gap” columns (columns 6 and 9) indicate the magnitude of racial disagreement, with smaller gap values indicating more agreement and larger gap values indicating less agreement. To highlight the role of group bias, the results are presented controlling for question order, that is, whether one’s in-group or out-group is evaluated first.

In rows 1 and 4, where consistent responses are provided for the two items, regardless of whether the in-group (row 1, Gap of 5%, and row 4, Gap of 3.5%) or out-group (row 1, Gap of 1.1%, and row 4, Gap of 1.3%) is considered first, Blacks and Whites agree on the amounts of lower or higher prejudice. Rows 2 and 3 under the “in-group considered 1st” column show when the racial disagreement occurs. Larger percentages of Blacks than Whites perceive more dislike among Whites (Gap=25.6%), and larger percentages of Whites than Blacks perceive more dislike among Blacks (Gap=17.6%); however, in the same rows under the “out-group considered 1st” column, Whites and Blacks exhibit a pattern of agreement about the

Table 1. Racial Differences in Responses to the Racial Dislike Questions

	[How Many] Whites Dislike Blacks ^a			[How Many] Blacks Dislike Whites ^b		
	Black Respondents	White Respondents	Total	Black Respondents	White Respondents	Total
None	1% (20)	1% (99)	1% (119)	1% (32)	2% (153)	2% (185)
Only a few	51% (1,153)	60% (4,590)	58% (5,743)	62% (1,406)	52% (3,989)	54% (5,395)
Many	40% (908)	37% (2,810)	38% (3,718)	32% (715)	40% (3,105)	38% (3,820)
Almost all	8% (173)	2% (174)	3% (347)	5% (101)	6% (426)	5% (527)
Total	100% (2,254)	100% (7,673)	100% (9,927)	100% (2,254)	100% (7,673)	100% (9,711)

NOTE.—Numbers in parentheses represent cell sizes. Data are pooled from the nine studies listed in the Appendix. Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding; ^a $\chi^2(3)=176.9, p < .01$; ^b $\chi^2(3)=76.1, p < .01$.

Table 2. Question Order, Race, and Responses to the Interracial Dislike Questions

Row	Response Pattern		In-Group Considered 1st				Out-Group Considered 1st			
	1st Question Response	2nd Question Response	White Respondents	Black Respondents	Gap	White Respondents	Black Respondents	Gap	Gap	
1. Consistent Responses	Less dislike	Less dislike	47.0% (1773)	42.0% (477)	5.0% Z=1.95	46.8% (1815)	47.9% (539)	1.1% Z=-.45		
2. Inconsistent Responses	More Whites dislike Blacks	Fewer Blacks dislike Whites	2.8% (108)	28.4% (321)	25.6%** Z=8.60	11.5% (446)	9.0% (101)	2.5% Z=.78		
3. Inconsistent Responses	More Blacks dislike Whites	Fewer Whites dislike Blacks	20.3% (771)	2.7% (31)	17.6%** Z=5.41	8.5% (330)	11.2% (126)	2.7% Z=.84		
4. Consistent Responses	More dislike	More dislike	30.1% (1141)	26.6% (300)	3.5% Z=1.85	33.2% (1289)	31.9% (359)	1.3% Z=-.47		
		Total	100.0% (3793)	100.0% (1129)		100.0% (3880)	100.0% (1125)			

NOTE.—** $p < .01$. Tests of significance are based on Z-tests for independent samples. Cell values are the percentage of Black/White respondents who provided the response pattern in the far left columns, and the Gap is the difference between the two. Numbers in parentheses represent cell sizes.

Table 3. Logistic Regression Coefficient Estimates Predicting Beliefs about “All/Many” Out-Group Members Disliking One’s In-Group

	<i>Evaluations of Out-Group’s Dislike Toward the In-Group^a</i>					
	Model 1			Model 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>(SE)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>(SE)</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
Constant	.214*	(.10)	1.24	-.152	(.11)	.86
Year	-.043**	(.01)	.958	-.042**	(.01)	.958
Age	.006**	(.001)	1.006	.006**	(.001)	1.006
Sex (male=1)	-.121**	(.04)	.886	-.122**	(.04)	.885
College (degree=1)	-.008	(.04)	.992	-.015	(.04)	.986
Race (white=1)	-.142**	(.05)	.868	.327**	(.07)	1.387
Question order (Blacks dislike Whites first=1)	-.138**	(.04)	.871	.580**	(.09)	1.786
Race x question order				-.931**	(.10)	.394
	-2LL Statistics					
	13296.79			13205.82		
χ^2 (<i>df</i>)	71.1 (6)**			90.9 (1)**		
Pseudo <i>R</i> ²	.022			.032		
% Correctly classified	54.5			55.8		

NOTE.—**p* < .05, ***p* < .01, *N* = 9,664; The χ^2 statistic in Model 2 represents the change in the -2LL from Model 1 to Model 2.

amounts of more White (Gap=2.5%) and Black (Gap=2.7%) dislike of the other in their respective groups.

Results from a logistic regression analysis further show the influence of race (Whites=1, Blacks=0), question order (Blacks dislike Whites asked first=1, Whites dislike Blacks asked first=0), and the interaction effect between race and question order. The dependent variable in the analysis is a dummy variable indicating perceptions of more (=1) or less (=0) interracial dislike toward out-group members. Age, sex, education, and year of data collection were included as control variables. Estimated coefficients and their standard errors are presented in table 3. Perceptions of more and less amounts of out-group prejudice are indicated by significant positive and negative coefficients, respectively.

The results confirm the in-group bias hypothesis—that question order produced a significant effect on perceptions of out-groups (*B* = -.138, *p* < .01, *Exp(B)* = .871). Controlling for age, sex, year of data collection, college education, and race, the odds of expressing a “higher” level of prejudice decreased by 13 percent when respondents were asked the “Blacks dislike Whites” question first. Moreover, the interaction term between race and question order, when entered in model 2, is statistically significant (*B* = -.931,

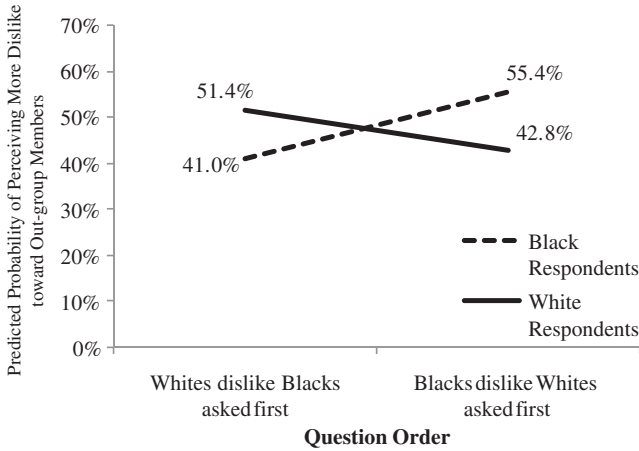


Figure 1. Race of Respondent by Question Order Interaction Pattern [Vertical Axis Caption:] Predicted Probability of Perceiving More Dislike Toward Out-Group Members

$p < .01$, $Exp(B) = .394$). This finding indicates that the direction of question-order effect is different for White and Black respondents. Additional tests (not shown in tables) reveal that Blacks ($B = .576$, $S.E. = .086$, $p < .01$, 95% $C.I. = .407, .745$) and Whites ($B = -.352$, $S.E. = .047$, $p < .01$, 95% $C.I. = -.444, -.260$) are influenced in opposite directions depending on whether they first answer questions about their in-group or the out-group. This interaction pattern is presented visually in figure 1 above. Black respondents perceive more out-group dislike—Whites dislike Blacks—when they answer questions about their in-group first (55.4%) versus second (41%). In the opposite direction, Whites perceive more out-group dislike—Blacks dislike Whites more—when they consider their in-group first (51.4%) versus second (42.8%).

In addition to the aforementioned effects, age and sex were statistically significant predictors of perceptions of dislike: older individuals and females were more likely to express higher levels of dislike. Also, the significant “year of data collection” variable implies that since these experiments have been conducted, the data show a decline in perceptions of out-group dislike. Having a college degree or not was the only variable with no statistically significant effect. Finally, ancillary analyses did not reveal any other statistically significant interactions between other variables in the model and question order.

Discussion

Consistent with expectations, Blacks and Whites disagree about how many out-group members dislike their in-group when the out-group is considered

after the in-group, but agree when the order is reversed.⁵ When out-groups are evaluated after one's in-group is ostensibly accessible, individuals appear to make clear distinctions: "they dislike us more than we dislike them." Yet, when in-groups are evaluated after out-groups, the result is assimilation toward the out-group. This pattern suggests that in-groups may justify their group's amount of dislike as a necessary evil: "we dislike them because they dislike us." Promoting evenhandedness may serve to reduce any dissonance that may come about from conflicting feelings of in-group favoritism and fairness principles. The results also shed light on when the context effects could be occurring, suggesting that the contrast effect may occur during the judgment stage of the survey response process, while the assimilation effect could be happening during the response editing stage (Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski 2000).

Conclusion

Given the interpersonal setting of survey interviews (Schuman and Converse 1971), the sensitivity of racial issues (Krysan 1998), and the consistent differences in public opinions across race (Kinder and Sanders 1996; Schuman et al. 1997), it is important for survey researchers to examine the different ways in which race interacts with the survey setting to produce response biases (e.g., Davis 1997a; Krysan and Couper 2003; Sudman, Bradburn, and Schwarz 1996).

These findings provide a robust account of how order and group membership can interact to influence survey response. This effect may also exist in other studies—the American National Election Study (ANES) or General Social Survey (GSS)—that include adjacent lists of items such as feeling thermometers (as suggested by Schuman et al. 1997, pp. 187–88), stereotypes and metastereotypes (e.g., Sigelman and Tuch 1997), and other emotion-priming questions about in- and out-groups (e.g., religious, political, and sexual orientation).

Future research on question order and intergroup feelings might vary the positive or negative tone of terms (e.g., "like" and "dislike") to tease out whether these types of order effects are driven more by emotions or group beliefs. Another future endeavor might examine other competing groups with salient antagonistic histories, such as Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims, Democrats and Republicans, or other cross-sections of in- and out-groups. Of course, the key to further understanding when and where these effects occur is continued experimental research, respectable samples for the groups of interest, and the inclusion of "order" variables in the raw datasets.

5. The same pattern of order effects is found in each of the individual experiments, suggesting that the findings herein are not due to the larger sample size alone. These results are available upon request.

Appendix: Description of Gallup Studies

Study (Job #)	Response		Question Placement		
			Whites Dislike Blacks	Blacks Dislike Whites	<i>N</i>
Minority Rights and Relations (06-06-022)	17%	JUNE 6–25, 2006	Q23	Q24	1,935 ^a
Minority Rights and Relations (05-06-026)	22%	JUNE 6–26, 2005	Q29	Q30	2,135 ^b
Minority Rights and Relations (03-06-034)	21%	JUNE 12–15, 2003	Q35	Q36	1,320 ^c
Minority Rights and Relations (02-06-022)	33%	JUNE 3–6, 2002	Q44	Q45	1,286 ^d
Gallup Poll—June Wave 1 (98-06-017)	26.5%	JUNE 5–7, 1998	Q35	Q36	955 ^e
Gallup Poll—April Wave 1 (98-04-015)	24%	APRIL 17–19, 1998	Q47	Q48	952 ^f
Gallup Poll—July GPNS (96-06-017)	—	JULY 26–28, 1996	Q38	Q39	934 ^g
CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll (96-07-018)	—	JULY 18–21, 1996	Q22	Q23	952 ^h
Gallup Poll—June Wave 2 (96-06-015)	23%	JUNE 27–30, 1996	Q35	Q36	945 ⁱ

Note. *N* values represent the unweighted sample sizes for the study with valid responses to both “dislike” items. Response rates in the table most closely correspond to the AAPOR1 computation. Response rates for the two studies in July 1996 were not available, but according to Gallup, rates for similar telephone studies conducted during this period averaged between 25% and 35% (AAPOR1). The following Chi-square (χ^2) results test for independence of the cell frequency sizes across question order (Form A and Form B); non-significant results suggest that the randomization of items was successful: ^a $\chi^2=3.1(1)$, n.s.; ^b $\chi^2=.450(1)$, n.s.; ^c $\chi^2=.048(1)$, n.s.; ^d $\chi^2=.700(1)$, n.s.; ^e $\chi^2=.085(1)$, n.s.; ^f $\chi^2=1.21(1)$, n.s.; ^g $\chi^2=.274(1)$, n.s.; ^h $\chi^2=3.78(1)$, n.s.; ⁱ $\chi^2=.661(1)$, n.s.

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