

# **How Accurately do Respondents Identify the Race or Ethnicity of Their Interviewer Over the Telephone?**

**Anna Brown**

*Research Analyst*

## Background: Interviewer effects

- Survey interviews are structured social interactions (Groves, 2004)
- Many studies show that an interviewer's race or ethnicity can affect survey responses (Davis, 1997a; Davis, 1997b; Reese et al., 1986), even over the telephone (Cotter, Cohen and Coulter, 1982)
- Little research on how respondents actually perceive their interviewer's race or ethnicity over the phone

# Methodology

- Pew Research Center telephone survey conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016
- Nationally representative sample of 3,769 U.S. adults
- Oversample of black and Hispanic respondents
- Margin of error of  $\pm 2.2$  percentage points

## Measuring race and ethnicity

Interviewers were instructed to ask the following question at the end of the survey:

**You may not have thought about this ... but if you had to guess, would you say I am white, black, Hispanic, Asian or some other race? Just your best guess is fine.**

Data on interviewers' race and ethnicity were gathered from employee records.

# Respondents often misidentified interviewer's race/ethnicity

*% of respondents with a white/black/Hispanic/Asian interviewer who perceived their interviewer was white/black/Hispanic/Asian/other*

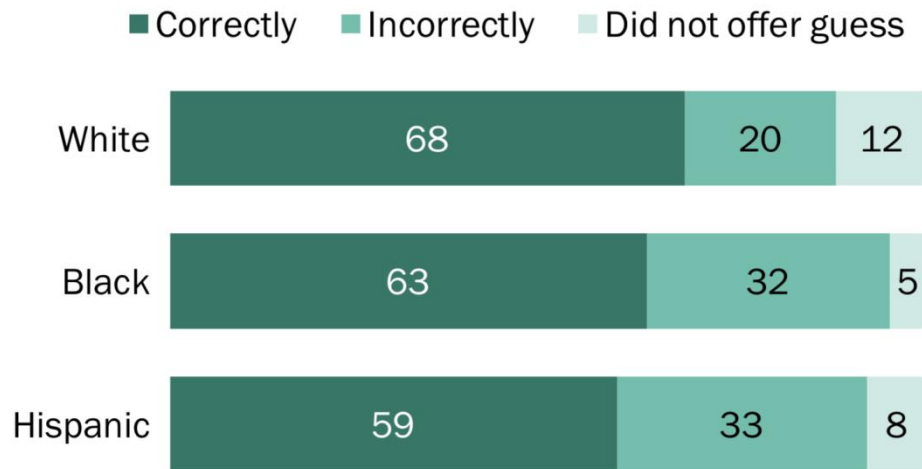
	<b>White interviewer</b>	<b>Black interviewer</b>	<b>Hispanic interviewer</b>	<b>Asian interviewer</b>
Perceived interviewer to be white	70	24	29	42
Perceived black	8	51	7	22
Perceived Hispanic	5	7	43	13
Perceived Asian	2	1	3	3
Perceived other race	5	6	5	3
Did not offer guess	9	11	13	16
Sample size	n=949	n=1,739	n=629	n=319

Note: Data are unweighted. Shaded cells are the shares of respondents who perceived a race or ethnicity that matched their interviewer's race or ethnicity. "Did not offer guess" includes those who said they cannot make a guess, don't know, or refused to answer the question. Interviewer race is based on employee records. Interviewers who were another race or who did not provide their race or ethnicity are not shown. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016.

# A third of Hispanic respondents with Hispanic interviewers guess their interviewer's ethnicity incorrectly

*% of respondents who guessed their interviewer's race/ethnicity \_\_\_\_, among respondents with interviewers of the same race/ethnicity as them*



Note: Data are unweighted. "Did not offer guess" includes those who said they cannot make a guess, don't know, or refused to answer the question. White and black respondents include only single-race non-Hispanics. Hispanic respondents are of any race. Interviewer race is based on employee records. Asians and other races not shown due to small sample size.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016.

# Why this matters

- Previous studies have found that both whites and blacks show more favorable attitudes towards blacks if their interviewer is black
- There may be a social desirability effect – people want to avoid offending the “polite stranger” who called them (Schuman and Converse, 1971)
- Important to understand the effect of *perceived* race/ethnicity on survey responses, given the high likelihood of guessing incorrectly

# White respondents' answers differed by perceived race of interviewer for questions, but not others

*% of white respondents saying each topic comes up often/sometimes in their conversations*

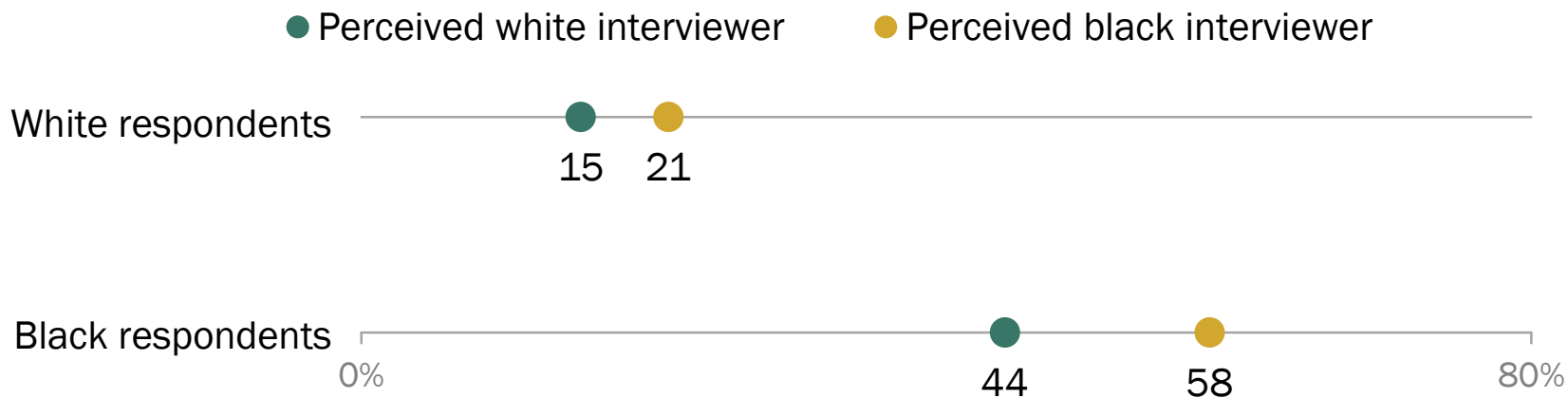


Note: Data are weighted. Respondents are single-race, non-Hispanic whites only.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016.



# On some questions, answers varied among blacks but not whites

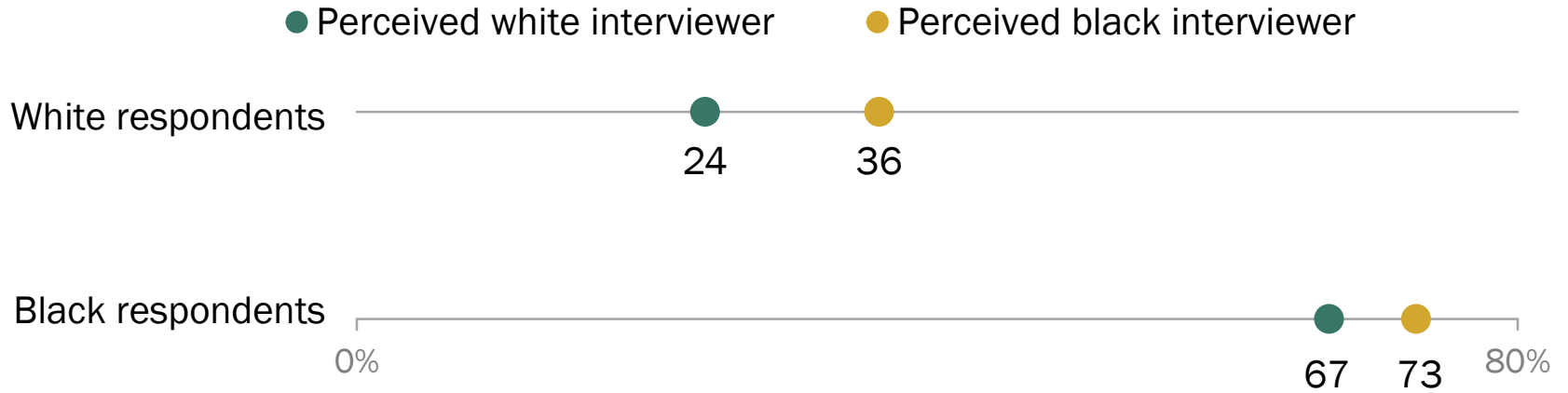
*% saying they strongly support the Black Lives Matter movement, among those who have heard at least a little about the movement*



Note: Data are weighted. White and black respondents include only single-race non-Hispanics.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016.

# White respondents more likely to say they have been racially discriminated against if they perceive their interviewer is black

*% saying they have ever personally experienced discrimination or been treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity*



Note: Data are weighted. White and black respondents include only single-race non-Hispanics.  
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Feb. 29-May 8, 2016.

# References

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**Anna Brown**

*Research Analyst*

**[abrown@pewresearch.org](mailto:abrown@pewresearch.org)**

