

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIFTY-THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) held its fifty-third conference May 14–17, at the Marriott Pavilion Downtown in St. Louis, MO. The program cover, using the colors of the AAPOR Web site to suggest that the conference was like a web with infinite links along many dimensions of interaction, contained the theme: “Linking Us Together: Professionally, Personally, Intellectually and Socially.” The program included 59 sessions with 36 paper sessions, 11 panel discussions, four roundtables, three short courses, three poster sessions, one plenary, and a collaborative workshop on pretesting techniques. The Saturday afternoon poster session was jointly sponsored by the International Field Directors/Technologies Conference. Twenty of the sessions were organized in advance along a specific theme of interest; the others were formed from individual submissions to the conference chair. In all there were 147 papers and 40 posters listed in the program.

Official registration was 566, including 77 new members. There were 159 first timers of which 72 were students. A breakdown of the registration revealed 44 percent affiliated with academic institutions, 37 percent commercial, 10 percent government, 6 percent nonprofit, and 3 percent other. A total of 460 people were listed as participants in a variety of roles: session organizers, plenary speakers, short-course instructors, panelists, chairs, discussants, authors, and presenters of papers.

The three short courses at the conference attracted a record enrollment of 189. On Thursday afternoon, 80 took “Designing Good Questions” taught by Jon Krosnick of Ohio State University, and 39 attended “Market Segmentation and Segmentation Analysis” taught by Lynd Bacon of Lynd Bacon and Associates and Tony Babinec of SPSS. On Sunday 70 researchers attended “Nonresponse in Household Interviewer Surveys” taught by Robert Groves of the University of Michigan.

In keeping with the tradition for conferences held during even-numbered years, the conference site was shared by the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), whose conference ran May 13–15.

Joint AAPOR/WAPOR paper sessions included the themes of public opinion in developing countries, comparisons across cultures, and surveys and the courts. There was also a joint panel on "Focus Groups Today and Tomorrow."

The Thursday night plenary, organized and chaired by Mark Schulman of Schulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, was "The Market Research Industry in 2010" and featured three presidents from major market research firms. Sol Dutka, president of Audits and Surveys, expressed great concern that bad research will continue to drive out good research and urged the audience to study and reaffirm AAPOR's standards. He distinguished between science and art in survey research and between probability sampling and quota sampling and emphasized looking at mean square error rather than just the variance.

Gordon Black, president of Harris Black International, said that the Internet is having the fastest adoption rate of any technology in history and predicted that it will become a replacement technology, just as the telephone has replaced face-to-face interviewing. The Internet will have a penetration rate of 60 percent by the year 2000 and is becoming more demographically representative. Research on the Internet offers low cost, large samples, the ability to focus on small subpopulations, routine use of visuals, and easy access to low-incidence samples, such as people suffering from lupus. He described his firm's commitment to the Internet, including forming partnerships to develop large databases of users.

Jim Clifton, president of the Gallup Organization, said that market research is becoming the victim of its own success. Research has so proven its worth to business, and the budgets have become so large, that accounting and management consulting firms with direct connections to the top executives are getting the contracts and then treating the research firm as the data collector. He argued that we needed to develop strategies to get to the top of the "food chain" or risk giving up our role in the analysis of the survey data.

In the role of discussant, Robert Groves asked whether we would be up to the task of expanding our traditional role. We would need to develop skills to formulate the problem before any research and then translate the results into the direct actions and decisions of the company. He pointed out that the speakers expressed both pessimistic and optimistic views of the future. Will bad research drive out good or does repeated use create a taste for better information? Groves also said it was important to distinguish the Internet population as an interesting group by itself from its use as a proxy for the population as a whole. Is it a replacement technology, or just a new one with its own problems of inference and sampling?

The role of the Internet was a strong theme throughout the conference. In addition to the program cover, it was the theme of the presidential

address and three individual sessions. "Users of the Internet: New Bottles or Old Bottles?" contained papers that described characteristics of the people using the Internet and discussed the problems generalizing from this subpopulation. In addition to describing the many benefits of using the Internet for research, the presentations in "Using the Internet for Surveys," included a method integrating E-mail with traditional mail surveys, and a demonstration designed for the conference that was accessed directly on their own Web site during the session. The third session was "Software and Methods for Conducting Internet Surveys," which featured seven panelists who elaborated on issues of computer-human interaction, content design, user interfaces, survey control, security, and costs associated with getting various types of Web and E-mail surveys at one's fingertips.

Another session developed to appeal to commercial interest was "Customer Satisfaction Trends, Measurement and Use" organized by Barbara Bryant from the University of Michigan. She presented her research using the American Customer Satisfaction Index, which demonstrates the decline in customer satisfaction for a majority of the 34 measured industries and seven sectors of the economy and what has happened to such drivers of satisfaction as customer expectations, perceived quality, and perceived value. Two users of this data in their consulting described how companies are using satisfaction measurement as input to systems for making quality improvements in services and products to enhance customer satisfaction.

In "Sex, Lies and Audiotape," organized by Warren Mitofsky of Mitofsky International, discussion focused on the large number of polls by the media dealing with President Clinton's alleged sexual relationship with a White House intern, and the influence of the polls on news reporting and on politicians. The reaction of the public to the news was more nuanced than was expected by the press. The polls froze the dire expectations of the press about Clinton's future and made it re-examine the validity of the charges. Criticism of the polls focused on the fact that many were one-day polls. In another political panel, "Pummeling the Pollsters: Case Studies of How Politicians Try to Tar the Messengers," organized by Rob Daves of the *Star Tribune*, panelists detailed case studies that showed how politicians attempt to tar the messenger when confronted by unpleasant polling news.

In "Should Questionnaires be Copyrighted?" organizers Peter Miller of Northwestern University and Dianne Rucinski of the Ounce of Prevention Fund reported the results of their pilot study of survey researchers' practices and views concerning copyrighting questionnaires at 42 commercial and academic organizations. Warren Mitofsky discussed his experience in copyrighting the results of exit polls, and the limits of copyright

law in protecting the results from appropriation by nonsubscribers. Robert Garrett of Arnold and Porter gave an extended primer on copyright law for survey researchers.

The panel, “Minimum Standards for Legal Research: Should AAPOR Have a Role?” was organized by Edward Bronson of California State University, Chico, to respond to an appeal from the American Society of Trial Consultants (ASTC) that AAPOR help in setting standards for change of venue surveys because judges are not well equipped to evaluate them. Some members expressed reluctance because it could take AAPOR into areas beyond its proper role and could create wrong or inappropriate precedents in nonvenue disputes. There was eventually some agreement that AAPOR should proceed, under the aegis of the Standards Committee, to cautiously explore a limited role in this area.

A panel organized by Tom Smith discussed AAPOR’s new report, “Standard Definitions: Final Disposition Case Codes and Outcome Rates for RDD Telephone and In-Person Household Surveys.” This report describes final outcome codes for surveys, presents formulas for the calculation of various outcome rates, and advances standards for the fair and comparable reporting of survey performance. After a short presentation by the committee there was over an hour of questions and comments from the floor.

In the “Panel on the Impact of Polls on the Public,” organized by Michael Traugott of the University of Michigan, the initial results were presented from a national survey conducted under a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to investigate the role of polling in a civil society. The survey-based papers presented results showing that there were multiple dimensions associated with public interest in public opinion, a “vertical” normative dimension related to an interest in government paying attention to polls and a “horizontal” dimension reflecting an interest in what other people are thinking about issues of the day. There was also a clear demonstration of the “third person effect” in that the public perceived that polls had more of an impact on others than on themselves.

These were just a few of the many rich and diverse sessions at the conference this year. There were 16 sessions on different aspects of survey methods including: questionnaire design, cognitive aspects, interviewer respondent effects, CAPI, and incentives. Eleven sessions discussed media and politics. There were four sessions on health issues, including one on “Surveying People with Disabilities.” And there was a double session organized by Kurt Lang of the University of Washington on “Public Opinion Theory,” a topic much more prominent in years past.

A special feature of this conference was the “Polls of 1948” exhibit, organized by Kathy Frankovic of CBS News, which brought together photographs, documents, and commentary about what has become known as

polling's biggest failure. The exhibit included examples of election coverage in 1948, suggesting that the "failure" of the polls was also a failure of political reporting in general. With the help of the Roper Center, National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and the Gallup Organization, the exhibit showcased items like George Gallup's personal apology to his subscribers; Elmo Roper's 1948 appointment book, noting scheduled appearances on CBS and NBC on election night and long lists of phone calls in the days afterwards; the Social Science Research Center's report on the election polls; charts of the trends in the public polls through all of 1948; *Life* magazine's pre-election full page photograph of Thomas Dewey, captioning him as "the next president;" and post-1948 public opinion poll results suggesting, that despite the "failure," most Americans still thought polls were accurate and had value.

Fifty years later, the polls of 1948 are part of the collective memory. One of the most visible components of that memory is the front page of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* of November 3, 1948, the image of Truman holding up the paper and its modern-day representation on items like T-shirts, glasses and tiles. The *New York Times* on the Monday following the conference featured a story about the exhibit and contained a photo of two AAPOR Council members standing in front of the exhibit, wearing the T-shirt with the front page of the *Tribune*.

This conference was unique in that it did not have the traditional full meal plan. This was an experiment by AAPOR Council in response to the results of a member survey. Instead of the traditional Thursday dinner, attendees gathered at the "Pre-Plenary Desert/Coffee" sponsored by Survey Sampling. Following the plenary was a reception welcoming the plenary speakers and after that was "Sampling Popular Culture: Rerun of the Final *Seinfeld* Episode." Instead of the usual Friday evening meal, attendees chose between a riverboat dinner cruise on the Mississippi River, a St. Louis Cardinal baseball game, or dinner on their own. Many returned back to the hotel for the first-ever "AAPOR Mixer: Posters, Discussion, and Legally Altered States." Saturday was the only "traditional" day with the presidential address at lunch and the banquet on Saturday night. Peter Miller started the program with "Further Replies to Habermas: A Very Short Course," an update of his presentation a couple years ago in which he pokes fun at AAPOR notables.

Later in the banquet, James Beniger presented the AAPOR Award for Exceptionally Distinguished Achievement to Al Gollin. His son accepted the award and read some remarks that Gollin had written. His last remark fit very well with the theme expressed on the cover of the many linkages in AAPOR:

One final thought about AAPOR: its vital role in shaping and reshaping the "collective consciousness" in the field of public opinion research. It is

my conviction that the fun part—the social aspects—of AAPOR matter as much as the professional side in this process. Every hand of cards played, or voice raised in song, or outing or mealtime shared (especially with new members), or beach ball thrown, or whistle blown contributes to the building of that sense of professional community on which our collective consciousness largely depends. In turn, it strengthens our commitment to AAPOR as the unique “meeting place” for all those “oracles of the popular will” who are cunningly disguised as public opinion or survey researchers.

As this year’s conference chair, I had the honor of presenting the Student Paper Award to Cindy Christen and Prathana Kannaovakun, graduate students at the University of Wisconsin—Madison, for their paper, “Partisan Perceptions of Public Opinion: An Extension of the Hostile Media Effect.” In addition, two papers were cited for honorable mention in the competition: “Reacting to Crime or to Race? The Role of Prejudice in Whites’ Punitive Attitudes” by Devon Johnson of the University of California, Los Angeles, and “Fiscal Frames and Electoral Fortunes: Tax Policy Attitudes and Issue Framing in the 1996 Presidential Election,” by J. Tobin Grant and Stephen Mockabee of Ohio State University.

Many people worked together to make this year’s conference a success. Daniel Merkle, Paul Lavrakas (associate conference chair), and Dawn Von Thurn (chair of the Conference Operations Committee) formed the core group assisting me in planning the conference. Nancy Mathiowetz organized the short courses. Assisting in the review of papers were: Young Chun, Jon Krosnick, Allan McCutcheon, Peter Miller, Mark Schulman, Erik Stewart, Trevor Tompson, and Michael Traugott. Peter Miller chaired the committee that judged the student paper entries; the other judges were Doris Graber, Daniel Merkle, Diane Rucinski, and Howard Schuman. Roger Tourangeau, last year’s conference chair, provided frequent counsel.

The bulk of the administrative work in preparing the program fell to my assistant Jerry Weiss, and he was assisted by Sharon Yates and Jeff Scott in my office. Kylo Hart worked on the program in Michigan. I also had the benefit of AAPOR ‘98, a listserv group with 24 members, to help improve the sessions and to broaden the appeal of the program to the commercial sector. Patricia McGrath prepared a brochure for outreach to the commercial sector, and Jo Holz coordinated the advertising in the program. Trevor Tompson put all conference materials on our Web site and assisted me in developing the conference cover. Survey Sampling provided financial support for the preplenary reception and some other activities.

Paul Beatty assisted Von Thurn with site selection and hotel coordination. Shap Wolf handled the audiovisual arrangements, Jennifer Dykema coordinated the fun run and social activities, and Rob Daves coordinated the golf outing. Kathy Frankovic organized the Dewey versus Truman

exhibit along with Tom Smith and Lois Timms-Ferrara. Bob Lee organized the technology exhibit, and Phyllis Endreny the book exhibit. As always, the administrative staff of the AAPOR secretariat, Marlene Bednarz and Carol Milstein, played a key role in organizing the conference.

MURRAY EDELMAN

Conference Chair

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

PRESENTS THE

AAPOR AWARD

FOR EXCEPTIONALLY DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT
TO

Albert E. Gollin

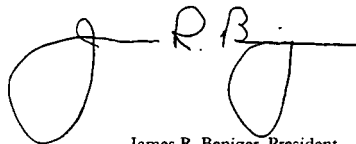
His passion is history and politics, and the role of public opinion in shaping both. An accomplished student of Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert K. Merton, and Herbert Hyman, he directed surveys at Columbia's Bureau of Applied Social Research and at Washington's Bureau of Social Science Research during the heyday of social research in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and then continued his career as a meticulous researcher and leader of research on the newspaper and its audiences at the research arm of the American Newspaper Publishers Association.

His sharp wit and warm embrace enlivened decades of AAPOR meetings. For years, he served as the organization's unofficial parliamentarian and pragmatic political mentor. Without his skills in these areas, the Standards of Disclosure would not now be a part of AAPOR's Code of Ethics and Public Opinion Quarterly might not be owned by AAPOR. The volume of AAPOR's history owes much to his unflagging encouragement behind the scenes. And as conference chair, president, presenter, and member of innumerable executive councils and advisory committees, he brought to the organization his own deep interest in, and knowledge of, the historical role played by public opinion and the history of public opinion research.

He is a generalist rather than a specialist, a man of good judgment and uncommon good sense. For all these reasons, and all these traits, the American Association for Public Opinion Research proudly confers upon Albert E. Gollin its highest honor, the AAPOR Award for 1998.

1998 AAPOR AWARD COMMITTEE

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A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. R. Beniger', with a large, stylized loop on the left and a smaller loop on the right.

James R. Beniger, President
May 16, 1998
St. Louis, Missouri