

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

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) held its fifty-fourth annual conference at the Tradewinds Resort, St. Pete Beach, FL, May 13–16, 1999. This marked AAPOR's return to a resort hotel venue with a full American plan covering group meals for the entire conference. This "traditional style" of conference was last held in 1995. Since then AAPOR has successfully experimented with other types of venues and meal/room plans to accommodate the diverse preferences of members who wanted an occasional change from the traditional conference venue (this preference was documented in AAPOR's 1995 membership survey). The 1999 conference site and program appeared to be an excellent one for the vast majority of the record numbers of attendees.

The 1999 program contained a balance between public opinion research and research on survey methods. There were 61 organized sessions in the program; five of the sessions were cosponsored by the International Field Directors/Technologies Association. The 61 sessions included:

- 36 paper sessions, with 146 paper presentations and 42 discussants;
- 13 panels, seven of which had formal papers presented and six that did not;
- three poster sessions, two of which were on survey methods and one on miscellaneous topics in public opinion, totaling 34 poster presentations;
- four roundtable informal discussions, including one at breakfast;
- three short courses for continuing professional education purposes, two of which were held on the opening day and the other the afternoon of the final conference day; and
- two evening plenary sessions.

In all, a total of 483 people contributed to the 1999 AAPOR conference program, either as invited speaker, other presenter or coauthor, session chair/moderator, and/or discussant.

1999 also marks the first time that AAPOR's conference was almost completely planned using the Internet. In addition to numerous announcements about the conference that went out by email and/or were posted on the AAPOR website (<http://www.aapor.org>), the vast majority of submissions were made via the website, and email was used for almost all communications to those who proposed panels, papers, posters, and round-

tables and who served as chairs and discussants. Many AAPOR members expressed satisfaction that the Internet made conference information (e.g., the preliminary program) so readily available. In getting this technology to work, AAPOR gives many thanks to Trevor Tompson, Seawon Choi, Kaiya Liu, and Jes Banks of the Ohio State University Center for Survey Research.

Official registration for the conference was 609—a record number for AAPOR. This compares to 566 in 1998, 547 in 1997, and 568 in 1996. Of those who registered in 1999, 523 were AAPOR members, which is about one-third of the total AAPOR membership. First-time attendees to an AAPOR conference numbered 124. Student registrants totaled 42. A breakdown of registration by employment sector showed 40 percent from the commercial sector, 38 percent from academe, 12 percent from government, 6 percent from not-for-profit organizations, and 3 percent other. On early Saturday morning, 35 hearty souls officially participated in the annual Fun Run/Walk along the beach; how many did so unofficially is not known. Countless numbers also attended a wonderful Saturday evening postbanquet get-together generously sponsored and hosted by AAPOR President Michael Kagay and his wife, Carol Kagay.

Three professional development short courses were offered. The two offered on the afternoon of May 13 were scheduled so that they would not overlap, thereby allowing an interested party to attend both. The first, “Focusing on the Matter: Pragmatists’ Lessons for Successful Focus Group Research,” was taught by Nancy Belden and Kate Stewart of the Benden, Russonelo & Stewart Group. This course had an enrollment of 58 and offered a detailed introduction on how best to gather insightful information using a focus group. The second course, “An Introduction to the Psychological Processes Underlying Survey Response,” was taught by Roger Tourangeau of the Gallup Organization, and Lance Rips of Northwestern University. The course had 84 registrants and addressed advanced issues in questionnaire design and respondent-related measurement error. The third course was scheduled for the afternoon of May 16, after the rest of the conference had been completed. This course was organized as part of AAPOR’s effort to “partner” with the International Field Directors/Technologies conference, which started later that day. The course, “A Brief Introduction to Survey Quality,” was taught by Paul Biemer of the Research Triangle Institute, had 29 registrants, and focused on various features of what is likely to make for a reliable and valid survey and how to monitor and assess this. As in past years, AAPOR owes a great debt to the course instructors, all of whom volunteered their services for the good of the association.

This year’s conference included two very well attended evening plenary sessions. The first, on May 13, was organized by Humphrey Taylor of Louis Harris and Associates and was entitled “How Polls and Pollsters

Influence Politicians and Policy.’’ Speakers in this plenary included Taylor, Mark Mellman of the Mellman Group (a senior political strategist for Democratic candidates and elected officials), and Bill McIntruff of Public Opinion Strategies (a senior political strategist for Republican candidates and elected officials). The moderator was Mike Traugott of the University of Michigan. The thrust of this plenary was that politicians do consider opinion poll findings when taking their stands on various policy issues, but in many instances do so only to marshal their own evidence and reasons for rejecting the positions held by the majority. In particular, these seasoned and savvy political consultants could cite no instance in which an official with whom they had worked had changed her or his issue stance because of what public opinion polls were showing was majority opinion on any issue that was part of their own central/core partisan beliefs. However, when policy stances are being taken on issues that are more peripheral to an official’s core beliefs, then the results of opinion polls sometimes take on more importance when the politician is forming a public position.

The second plenary, on May 14, was organized by Mark Schulman of Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas and was entitled ‘‘Looking Beyond the 2000 Census: Where Do We Go from Here?’’ Speakers included Kenneth Prewitt of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Barbara Bailor of the National Opinion Research Center, Norman Bradburn of the University of Chicago, and Robert Groves of the University of Maryland and University of Michigan. Schulman served as the moderator. The speakers noted that the controversies facing the 2000 Census were not entirely new, as previous censuses had been politicized, but that the method of data collection had not heretofore been as controversial. The politically sensitive topics of ‘‘race’’ and ‘‘the undercount’’ were predicted to continue to be issues of controversy in the future. In particular, Prewitt, as Census Director, noted that (1) the Bureau and the decennial census process need to be insulated from the type of partisan interference and attacks that have been commonplace for 2000; (2) the ‘‘vested interest groups’’ that were developed for 2000 to help increase public participation in the data collection process will remain political groups in their own right after the 2000 census has come and gone, and that these groups will have expectations of influence on future censuses; and (3) the new American Community Survey, which will begin full-scale implementation by 2007, will be a tremendous aid to planners and researchers alike and may take some of the pressure off those who must plan and conduct future censuses.

Among the conference programs, there were many important panels organized by AAPOR members. These included two back-to-back panel discussions on ‘‘Citizen Satisfaction Surveys’’ organized by Tom Gutterbock; a panel by David Moore on questionnaire design effects in Gallup Poll experiments; a discussion panel on ‘‘Reporting and Disclosing Sur-

vey Response Rates'' organized by Warren Mitofsky and Kathy Frankovic; a group of presentations on "Diversity within Latino Opinion" by Ana Maria Arumi; a panel of papers on RDD innovations by Mike Battaglia; and a panel organized by Jo Holz on "Conducting Research with Children." Other popular themes represented by several paper sessions at the 1999 conference were various aspects of survey nonresponse, the use of the Internet as a survey mode, drug use and other health-related surveys, and contemporary political issues.

At the Saturday evening awards banquet, President Michael Kagay presented the AAPOR Award for Exceptionally Distinguished Service to Charles Cannell and Warren Mitofsky. The 1999 AAPOR student award competition was conducted by a committee chaired by Carroll Glynn of Ohio State University. There were 11 student entrants, and the committee chose Bo (Paul) Zhou as the 1999 winner. Zhou's research, "Cognitive Ability and Acquiescence," was conducted while he was a student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Akron. His findings showed that cognitive ability is an important mediator in understanding the tendency of some survey respondents to show an acquiescence bias when they provide responses to survey questions. Furthermore, when cognitive ability is controlled, race and education no longer remain significant predictors of acquiescence.

Many people worked to make the 1999 conference the great success that it was. On the side of planning the content of the conference, great thanks are due to my core group of associates, which included my 1999 conference co-chair, Mark Schulman of Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas; my administrative assistant, Jes Banks, of Ohio State University; and Marlene Bednarz and Carol Milstein of the AAPOR Secretariat at the University of Michigan. Others who provided key volunteer service in planning the conference content included conference submissions reviewers Young Chun, Rob Daves, Barry Feinberg, Jerry Kosicki, Jon Krosnick, Dan Merkel, Peter Miller, James Newswanger, Mike Traugott, and Cliff Zukin; the Student Paper Awards Committee: Carroll Glynn (chair), Scott Althaus, Tom Gutterbock, Allan McCutcheon, Dan Merkle, Gary O'Keefe, Bob Shapiro, K. Viswanath, and Bob Wyatt; and the Program Organizing, Editing, Advertising, Mailing, and Publicity Committee: Katie Bisbee, Saewon Choi, Lillian Diaz-Castillo, Kylo Hart, Ria Ignacio, Demetrius Ivory, Kaiya Liu, Charles McNeil, Colin Odden, Ben Schechter, Dana Szymanski, Trevor Tompson, and Kim Van Wyck.

On the side of conference operations, which included coordinating all on-site activities, a tremendous effort was made by the Conference Operations Committee, chaired by Dawn Von Thurn of PriceWaterhouse Coopers and co-chaired by Paul Beatty of the National Center for Health Statistics. Von Thurn was primarily responsible for selecting the Tradewinds as the 1999 venue and for negotiating the contract in 1997. She coordi-

nated all aspects of her committee member's overall responsibilities. In addition, she took the lead in working with the hotel to assure a smooth room reservation assignment billing process. Beatty assisted her in the overall management of the conference and took the lead in coordinating all things related to food and beverages. In addition, Shap Wolf of Arizona State University served as the conference AV coordinator and was the interface between the myriad of presenters and the local AV equipment vendor. Other members of the Operations Committee included Phyllis Endreny, who organized and ran the book exhibit; Bob Lee, who organized the technology exhibit; Susan Pinkus and Kat Lind, who organized and coordinated the many enjoyable social activities held throughout the conference, including the T-shirt design and slogan contest; and Rob Daves, who organized the Thursday golf outing. In 1999, conference attendees also benefited from the considerable generosity of two corporate sponsors, Genesys Sampling Systems and Survey Sampling, Inc., who provided the sumptuous appetizers that were served at the Friday and Saturday evening predinner receptions.

For those of us who attended the 1999 conference, it once again was a reinforcement of why we have chosen the profession we have and why we are AAPOR members. It both stimulated the mind and placed us in close touch with a remarkably cordial, supportive, and diverse group of colleagues and friends. Thanks once again to all those individuals and their respective organizations who made this conference possible.

PAUL J. LAVRAKAS
Conference Chair

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION
FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

PRESENTS THE

AAPOR AWARD

FOR EXCEPTIONALLY DISTINGUISHED ACHIEVEMENT
TO

Charles F. Cannell

Charles Cannell's research on interviewing has been at the forefront of survey methods for half a century.

He has made major contributions to understanding the social psychology of the survey interview, and the influences on interviewers and respondents that affect the quality of survey data.

Charles was the first director of field operations at the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, where he served from 1946-1959.


He was one of the builders of the Institute for Social Research.

From 1962 until he retired in 1984 he was professor in the department of communications at Michigan.

He was one of the founders of what is now the Field Directors' and Field Technologies group.

By honoring Charles Cannell, AAPOR also reaffirms its commitment to the importance of high quality interviewing and to the improved understanding of interviewer-respondent behavior.

1999 AAPOR AWARD COMMITTEE
Joan S. Black
Diane Colaninno
Robert M. Groves
Philip Meyer
Seymour Sudman


Michael Kagay, President
May 15, 1999
St. Pete Beach, Florida

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FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

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TO

Warren J. Mitofsky

At CBS News, as executive director of the Election and Survey Unit, Warren Mitofsky developed probability-based models for estimating the vote on Election Day, and also developed exit polling techniques for analyzing who voted for whom and why.

Warren co-created the Mitofsky-Waksberg technique for random digit dialing in telephone surveys.


He was a founder of the CBS News/New York Times Poll, which has persisted for more than two decades.

Warren was executive director of Voter Research and Surveys, a consortium of broadcast networks for producing Election Day projections and exit polls. As president of Mitofsky International, Inc., he has extended exit polling techniques to Russia and Mexico.

As a former President of AAPOR, and holder of most AAPOR offices over the years, Warren has shown strong commitment to AAPOR as a forum and to his continuing concern for survey quality. He worked hard to ensure that the AAPOR history book made it into print. He has been one of our strongest advocates for standards of survey disclosure.

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Michael Kagay, President
May 15, 1999
St. Pete Beach, Florida