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CORRELATES OF RESPONDENT ACCURACY IN THE DENVER VALIDITY SURVEY*

BY DON CAHALAN†

Although social research has seen substantial advances in methodology in recent years, the "Denver Validity Survey" (as it is called by those familiar with its findings), which was conducted almost twenty years ago, still remains the only probability sample survey designed specifically for the purpose of measuring against official records the relative accuracy of responses on a range of questions of fact. Previous articles have discussed the project design and the sample plan, the relationship of interviewer characteristics to responses received, and the aggregate findings regarding respondent accuracy on factual items.[1] The primary focus of the present article will be upon the relative accuracy of respondents of different characteristics—such as age, sex, and socioeconomic status—on the various types of factual questions.

BACKGROUND

The operating details of the 1949 Denver study have been described in detail in the preceding articles in this series. To summarize: 920 interviews were conducted in an area probability sample of adults, drawn from a new city directory, with interviewers given randomly

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1 The Denver study was conducted by the Opinion Research Center, University of Denver, with collaboration in the design and analysis by staff members of the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago. It was supported by funds of the University of Denver; by a special grant from the Rockefeller Foundation; and by NORC funds for a Study of Interviewer Effect, which was sponsored by the joint Committee on Measurement of Opinion, Attitudes and Consumer Wants of the National Research Council and the Social Science Research Council. Acknowledgments to individuals who contributed counsel have been published in the articles stemming from the study: Hugh J. Parry and Helen M. Crossley, "Validity of Responses to Survey Questions," *Public Opinion Quarterly,* Vol. 14, No. 1, 1950, pp. 61-80; Helen M. Crossley and Raymond Fink, "Response and Non-response in a Probability Sample," *International Journal of Opinion and Attitude Research,* Vol. 5, No. 1, 1951, pp. 1-19; and J. J. Feldman, Herbert Hyman, and Clyde W. Hart, "A Field Study of Interviewer Effects on the Quality of Survey Data," *Public Opinion Quarterly,* Vol. 15, No. 4, 1951, pp. 734-761.

selected assignments designed to be equivalent on several major demographic variables such as socioeconomic status and sex. The forty-five interviewers were selected to represent a range of independent variables such as sex, age, socioeconomic status, and experience in interviewing in different types of surveys. The content of the questionnaire was designed both to provide a test of variation attributable to interviewer differences and to measure variability in respondents' accuracy of report on a series of factual questions, the answers to which were later checked against official records. The survey covered attitudes and behavior related to issues of primarily local concern; neither the interviewers nor the respondents knew that the accuracy of their responses would be checked.

The cited Parry and Crossley article provides an extensive discussion of the definition and relevance of validity and reliability in survey research in general, and presents findings on the general level of accuracy of report on each of the separate questions of fact covered in the Denver survey. Fifteen issues of fact were selected for testing respondent accuracy: these included questions regarding various possessions (telephone, home, automobile, valid Colorado driver's license, valid library card); voting in various elections over the preceding five years; and whether the respondent had contributed individually to the latest Community Chest drive. The respondents' statements of fact were checked against official records by supervised clerks of the Opinion Research Center, except in the case of the Community Chest contributions, where for security reasons the Community Chest staff itself checked the facts.

Since the selection of questions was limited to issues that permitted a check against records, the factual issues were not representative of all types of factual content. Moreover, it is entirely possible that, for each of the issues of fact on which a substantial degree of inaccuracy was found, a more intensive inquiry—such as devoting several questions, in a variety of forms, to pinning down facts on each single point—might have yielded a considerably higher aggregate level of accuracy. However, two perspectives must be kept in mind: (1) the questions in the survey were patterned after the common garden variety of factual questions ordinarily used in surveys, and (2) the study was more concerned with the *relative* accuracy of various types of respondents talking to various types of interviewers than with the absolute levels of accuracy on individual questions. The chief concern here is a methodological one regarding the *kinds* (rather than amounts) of inaccuracies that may affect survey results unless extreme vigilance is applied.

SUMMARY OF AGGREGATE LEVELS OF ACCURACY

The aggregate levels of accuracy on the individual items ran from 98 per cent on telephone ownership to 56 per cent on Community Chest contributions, as shown in Table 1, adapted from Tables 1 to 6 in the Parry-Crossley article. It will be noted that the four items on which accuracy was higher than 90 per cent—telephone, home ownership, automobile ownership, and age—are all issues related to the *present* rather than the past, and thus should prove less of a strain on the respondent's memory than the recall of voting on one of a number of somewhat similar local elections held from one to five years previously. It is not likely that these four issues are any less sensitive to considerations of status or prestige than are some of the elections, on which respondents were much less accurate, although it is obvious that inaccuracy is preponderantly in the direction of exaggeration of responses in a prestige-enhancing direction.

In general, there was a fairly high correlation (.65) between the rank order of accuracy and the rank order of performance of the behavior on the thirteen items (excluding the age items, on which "performance" is inapplicable). This is a reflection of the fact, as discussed by Parry and Crossley, that in a situation where invalidity is generally in the direction of exaggeration, and where there is a higher incidence of performance of the behavior, there is obviously a smaller number of persons who are likely to give incorrect responses.[2]

Two general conclusions can be drawn from the aggregate results. One is pessimistic in tone: "In five of the six elections, using the respondent's unverified statement to classify him as a 'voter' or 'non-voter' would result in misclassifying from 22 to 30 per cent of the respondents."[3] The other conclusion is more optimistic: On issues of present reality rather than past behavior, practically all the responses are accurate, even on such presumably highly status-involved issues as whether the respondent owns his house, owns a car, or has a telephone. The lesson appears to be that the average person is basically honest in his reports on his *present* status, when the facts are so unambiguous that he must choose between telling the truth or a self-recognized untruth. However, the findings are clearly consistent with the hypothesis that if the question permits the respondent to misinterpret or reconstruct his memories so he can give

[2] Parry and Crossley, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[3] Don Cahalan, "Validity of Behavior Reports in Opinion Surveys," paper read before the American Statistical Association annual meeting, December 30, 1949.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF OVER-ALL ACCURACY OF RESPONDENT REPORTS
(*in per cent*)

		Respondent Report				*Performed the Behavior*
	(*N*)	*Correct*	*Exaggerated*	*Underreported*	*Other*[a]	
Telephone in household	(920)	98	1	1		85
Home ownership	(920)	96	3	1		54
Ownership of automobile[b]	(920)	94	3		3	59
Age by driver's license record	(411)	92	4	4		[d]
Possession of driver's license	(920)	88	10	2	[c]	46
Valid library card	(920)	87	9	2	2	13
Voting in 1948 presidential election	(920)	86	13	1	[c]	61
Age by election registration records (male registrants only)	(297)	83	8	9		[d]
Whether registered or voted in Denver 1943–1948	(920)	82	16	2	[c]	69
Voting in November 1944 presidential election	(920)	73	23	2	2	38
Voting in May 1947 mayoralty election	(920)	70	28	1	1	36
Voting in September 1948 primary election	(920)	69	21	3	7	27
Voting in November 1946 congressional election	(920)	69	19	2	10	29
Voting in 1947 city charter election	(920)	60	28	2	10	19
Contributed to Community Chest in 1948 drive[b]	(920)	56	34		10	25

[a] Includes "don't remember" and "no answer."
[b] Respondents' negative reports on Community Chest contributions (31 per cent) and on ownership of automobile (35 per cent) were presumed to be correct, and hence were not checked.
[c] Less than one half of 1 per cent.
[d] Not applicable.

a response that is more congruent with his own self-respect than the actual facts would be, he may tend to rewrite history more in line with what he thinks he ought to have done than with what he actually did.

SOURCES OF ERROR

There exists no organized body of theory on accuracy of report to give us clear guidance on what to expect in the way of subgroup differences in accuracy in the Denver study. Past studies have focused, in the main, on analyses of accuracy that were incidental to specialized

problems of measurement of incidence of behavior.[4] There are, however, a number of hypothetical sources of error regarding questions of fact on which the Denver data might be examined for hints as to the most fruitful perspectives with which to approach any future research into accuracy of report.

1. *Errors due to chance.* As discussed by Parry and Crossley, if the incidence of a behavior is high and errors tend to be in the direction of overstatement of it, the person from a high-incidence group is more likely to be right merely because it is more difficult for him to be incorrect through exaggeration. By this token, older persons, men, and those of higher socioeconomic status should tend to be *more* accurate than others on such things as voting—an influence contrary to the persistence-forecast hypothesis noted below.

2. *The error of the persistence forecast.* If the respondent ordinarily votes in elections, he would be more likely to assume that he had voted in a specific election. Therefore, the higher the level of performance of the behavior within a group, the more one would expect to find exaggeration on the part of any group members who did not happen to perform the behavior that specific time. Thus, one would expect older persons, men, and those of upper socioeconomic status to tend to perpetrate more inaccuracies through persistence forecasting than other groups, since these groups ordinarily have a higher rate of voting in most elections.

3. *Status-induced errors.* If the respondent is aware that a high proportion of persons perform a certain civic duty, he should be more tempted to exaggerate his performance than if only a small percentage were known to perform the prestige behavior. Thus there should be a greater tendency to exaggerate his voting on elections where there is a high turnout (such as presidential elections) than on elections where the turnout is low.

4. *Errors stemming from self-image or identity factors.* If the respondent has a self-image of being a public-spirited citizen, he would be more likely to exaggerate his performance in a prestige direction.

[4] Parry and Crossley *(op. cit.)* cite a number of classical studies, of which that of Herbert Hyman ("Do They Tell the Truth?" *Public Opinion Quarterly,* Vol. 8, No. 4, 1944, p. 557) is most apposite to the present study. Here Hyman found that there was a differential in inaccuracy in terms of denial of cashing in of war bonds, with many more (43 per cent) among the more well-to-do denying cashing in the bonds than among the poor (7 per cent).

A highly useful bibliography of studies of accuracy of report is the one prepared by John Forsythe, "List of References on Results and Methodology of Matching Studies, No. 1," *Response Research Branch Report No. 66-4,* Bureau of the Census, Feb. 1, 1966. Most of the studies cited are census quality-control studies; but there are also many cited from the field of vital and health statistics.

Thus (other things being equal, as they seldom are) one might expect those who might have a self-image of being irregular voters (such as women, younger people, and those of low socioeconomic status) to exaggerate their voting less than would those coming from groups where high levels of voting are the norm.

5. *Errors arising out of interaction between respondent and interviewer.* These might include attempts on the part of lower-status respondents to impress interviewers of higher status (as by exaggerating their voting or Community Chest contributions), and interviewer errors of accommodation, where interviewers who talk to upper-status respondents may be more likely to classify them as voters or Community Chest contributors in cases of uncertainty. The latter type of error would lie in the direction of preserving the congruity of interviewer "set" regarding the attributes to be expected of persons of a certain status.

Obviously, these various sources of error can and do interact with each other, so that it is impossible to partial out the net effects of each source unless one conducts a series of controlled experiments in which all relevant components are varied systematically, in known amounts. The most that can be expected of any single survey is that it may point to the sources of error that are most plausible in terms of being congruent both with the findings and with accepted social-psychological theories regarding behavior, leaving the final verdict on causes of error up to the courts of future experimental studies.

SUBGROUP DIFFERENCES IN ACCURACY

In the analysis that follows, eight of the fifteen items of fact presented in Table 1 have been singled out for study: five elections, the library card issue, the driver's license issue, and the issue of contributing to the Community Chest drive. We have set aside the items on which the level of accuracy was so high that subgroups could not differ materially: this includes the questions on telephone, home, and auto ownership. We have also set aside the two age questions, because age data were obtained only on the fractions of the sample who had drivers' licenses or were men who were registered to vote (women were not required to report their ages in registering). Finally, we have excluded from the summary analysis the September 1948 primary, because it entailed the added complication of whether the respondent was a registered Democrat or Republican, and the question of whether registered or voted in Denver at any time between 1943 and 1948, because it is redundant with the specific elections. The

reader is assured that this selection of items for subgroup analysis yields as much useful information as would be obtained for all items taken together.

For all the subgroup analyses, two quite different measures of accuracy are presented: (1) aggregate correctness, as shown by the distribution of responses of the subgroup as a whole, and (2) the proportion of those claiming to have performed the behavior who actually did perform the behavior according to the official records. The first index of correctness is more appropriate if one is primarily interested in correspondence of *aggregate* accuracy of claims against aggregate behavior—for example, the validity of reported buying habits of a particular group, compared with actual purchases. The second index is more appropriate if one is concerned primarily with the correctness of the claim of each *individual* who says he performed the behavior. The first index treats response errors as differing from a true value in either a positive or negative direction, so that errors tend to cancel each other; the second index cumulates response errors and yields a gross measurement rather than a net measurement.

Differences by sex. Results for men and women are presented in Table 2. In *correctness of response,* on 6 of the 8 items the women are shown to be more accurate than the men, but usually only slightly. However, the women had a lower incidence on all the behavior items checked except having a valid library card. It could be argued that the women perceived the norms for women's voting to be lower than for men—and thus had less temptation to overclaim. Or, since women voted less often than men, possibly they were less likely to think that since they "usually" voted, they must have voted on that occasion. At any rate, the differences in aggregate correctness of men and women were trivial except in the cases of Community Chest contributions and having drivers' licenses, where the women were markedly more accurate.

In the *proportion performing among those claiming,* women had a higher proportion for six of the eight items. However, none of the differences between men and women on this index was statistically significant (.05 level).

Although differences in accuracy by sex were of little practical consequence in this particular survey, the results suggest the need for vigilance to minimize differences between men and women in overclaiming.

Differences by age level. Younger persons were expected to be more accurate than older persons about their voting behavior, both because they were assumed to have a less demanding "good citizen-

TABLE 2

RELATIONSHIP OF PERFORMANCE TO CLAIMS, BY SEX
(*in per cent*)

	1948 Presidential Election	*1947 Charter Election*	*1947 Mayoralty Election*	*1946 Congressional Election*	*1944 Presidential Election*	*Library Card*	*Driver's License*	*Community Chest*
Correct in response (neither overclaiming nor underclaiming):								
Men	85	59	67	66	76	88	84	51
Women	87	60	70	71	71	86	91	69
Total	86	60	69	68	73	87	88	61
Claimed performing the behavior:								
Men	74	50	66	50	57	22	78	80
Women	72	40	61	43	60	27	33	52
Total	73	45	63	46	59	25	54	63
Per cent performing of those claiming:								
Men	81	35	53	54	63	51	82	42
Women	83	39	56	62	59	46	84	44
Total	81	37	55	58	61	48	82	44

NOTE: Of the total sample of 920, 423 were men, 497 women. For the Community Chest data, in this and all subsequent tables, 72 interviews were omitted because they could not be checked, leaving 378 men and 470 women.

This table should be read as follows (first column): Of the 423 male respondents, 85 per cent were correct in their response on voting in the 1948 election, and 74 per cent claimed they voted. Of the 312 men who claimed they voted (74 per cent of 423), 81 per cent were noted in official records as actually voting.

On none of the eight items were there a statistically significant (.05 level) difference between men and women in the ratio of performance to claims.

ship" norm regarding voting and because (being poorer at voting) they would be less likely to make an exaggerated persistence estimate of having voted. A further factor that should have contributed to above-average accuracy of younger voters was the smaller opportunity to become confused as to the specific elections in which they had participated, since they had had fewer opportunities to vote.

Table 3 shows results for five age groups. In over-all correctness, younger respondents (aged 21 to 29), as expected, were generally more accurate than their elders on their voting performance, but less so on driver's license and Community Chest contributions. Fewer of the younger respondents claimed to have voted. However, the younger respondents who did claim to have voted had a greater tendency to overclaim their voting (statistically significant at .05 for four of the five elections) than did older persons. The same was true of Community Chest contributions. Thus our hypothesis of greater accuracy on the part of the young is not borne out with respect to the truth of those claiming to have voted. The findings are taken as another indication that subgroups with a lower level of performance of prestige behavior will tend to overclaim performance more than other groups.

Differences by socioeconomic status. Interviewers classified respondents according to the traditional A, B, C, and D levels of socioeconomic status, on the basis of living standards, occupational level, education, and income. Groups A and B are combined to yield sufficient interviews for the three-group comparison shown in Table 4.

While those of lower (D) status were not consistently lower in over-all accuracy, those of lower status who claimed to have performed the various behaviors were consistently lower in the ratio of performance to claims. This overclaiming was particularly marked with respect to Community Chest contributions.

These differences might be attributable to several causes, such as response to "good citizenship" prestige norms for the whole society, or a greater attempt on the part of the lower-status citizen to please upper-status interviewers. However, the following analysis of the relationship of interviewer characteristics to accuracy of report indicates that interviewer factors probably did *not* have very much to do with the differences in accuracy among socioeconomic groups.

INTERVIEWER EFFECTS

Among the many possible interviewer effects upon the responses of the respondent that are discussed by Hyman in his comprehensive

TABLE 3

RELATIONSHIP OF PERFORMANCE TO CLAIMS, BY AGE
(*in per cent*)

	1948 Presidential Election	*1947 Charter Election*	*1947 Mayoralty Election*	*1946 Congressional Election*	*1944 Presidential Election*	*Library Card*	*Driver's License*	*Community Chest*
Correct in response:								
Age 21–29	87	78	80	84	87	85	84	56
30–39	83	60	66	63	65	86	85	58
40–49	84	55	65	64	70	87	87	66
50–59	88	54	66	67	73	88	92	61
60-up	86	52	69	66	72	88	90	64
Claimed performing the behavior:								
Age 21–29	55	15	30	15	18	31	55	59
30–39	70	40	60	39	50	26	63	66
40–49	78	58	70	53	70	24	61	63
50–59	77	57	77	59	74	21	57	71
60-up	84	55	76	62	80	20	31	57
Per cent performing of those claiming:								
Age 21–29	76	12	44	40	48	57	77	30
30–39	76	23	48	42	41	53	84	40
40–49	83	36	52	55	61	43	80	48
50–59	86	42	57	65	69	38	88	48
60-up	84	49	64	69	69	46	75	45
Difference in ratio of performance to claims significant[a]	(No)	(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	(Yes)	(No)	(No)	(Yes)

[a] At .05 level, chi-square test.

NOTE: Seven persons who were not classified by age were omitted. The age distribution of the remaining 913 was as follows: 21–29 (169); 30–39 (207); 40–49 (177); 50–59 (179); 60 and up (181).

TABLE 4

RELATIONSHIP OF PERFORMANCE TO CLAIMS, BY SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS
(*in per cent*)

	1948 Presidential Election	*1947 Charter Election*	*1947 Mayoralty Election*	*1946 Congressional Election*	*1944 Presidential Election*	*Library Card*	*Driver's License*	*Community Chest*
Correct in response:								
Upper SES (A + B)	92	55	69	68	73	84	87	65
Middle SES (C)	84	62	68	68	75	88	88	60
Lower SES (D)	85	59	68	69	63	91	92	58
Claimed performing the behavior:								
Upper SES (A + B)	84	45	75	59	68	36	72	75
Middle SES (C)	70	43	60	42	55	22	53	61
Lower SES (D)	65	31	56	40	60	15	22	50
Per cent performing of those claiming:								
Upper SES (A + B)	90	43	61	64	66	52	84	55
Middle SES (C)	79	36	53	56	61	47	81	40
Lower SES (D)	76	24	50	48	48	41	75	26
Difference in ratio of performance to claims significant[a]	(Yes)	(Yes)	(No)	(No)	(No)	(No)	(No)	(Yes)

[a] At .05 level, chi-square test.

NOTE: Seven respondents who were not classified on socio-economic status were omitted. Of the remaining 913, 216 were upper SES, 587 middle SES, and 110 lower SES. For the Community Chest item, data were available on somewhat smaller numbers, being based on 201, 534, and 106 persons respectively in the three SES groups.

treatment of interviewing phenomena,[5] the one most relevant here is the relationship of socioeconomic status of interviewer and respondent. Hyman discusses the pioneering work of Katz, who found that the responses of working-class respondents talking to working-class interviewers came out on paper as less conservative and middle-class in orientation than the responses of working-class respondents talking to middle-class interviewers.[6] Katz attributes the differences to "better rapport" obtained by working-class interviewers; Hyman points out that such differences may stem from differences in the ideology or expectations of the two groups of interviewers rather than from the reactions of respondents.

The Katz study would indicate that we should expect a difference in the responses of persons of varying socioeconomic status interviewed by higher-status interviewers, in comparison to those interviewed by lower-status interviewers. While no sure-fire index of interviewer socioeconomic status is available in the Denver survey, each interviewer was required to rate his own socioeconomic status. The accuracy of respondents' answers was tabulated according to the respondent's socioeconomic status, holding constant the interviewer's self-rating of socioeconomic status. It cannot be demonstrated that the ratings of socioeconomic status of respondent and interviewer are comparable: interviewers should find it harder to rate themselves with objectivity than to rate respondents. Nor did the interviewers span the full range of socioeconomic status. At a minimum, however, it can be said that the interviewers tended to identify psychologically with the socioeconomic stratum into which they classified themselves, and it is assumed that this self-identification should have had some effect in the process of interaction between respondents and interviewers.

To test the relationship of respondent and interviewer socioeconomic status to results obtained in the Denver survey, the interviewers were divided into upper (A and B) and lower (C and D) socioeconomic groups according to their own self-ratings, and respondents were also divided into upper and lower groups. The differential effect of relative socioeconomic status was then tested in two ways: by analysis of respondent *attitudes* on four questions about political affairs, and by analysis of differences in *accuracy* on eight items of fact.

The four attitude items were concerned with the importance of

[5] Herbert H. Hyman and associates, *Interviewing in Social Research,* Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1954, especially Chap. 4.

[6] Daniel Katz, "Do Interviewers Bias Poll Results?" *Public Opinion Quarterly,* Vol. 6, 1941, pp. 248-68.

voting and the respondent's degree of interest in presidential and mayoralty elections. These items were chosen because it was asssumed that lower-status respondents would tend to express greater interest in the civic duty of voting when talking to upper-status interviewers than when talking to lower-status interviewers. While the results (not shown here because they do not warrant the space) showed a very slight trend in the expected direction, none of the differences was statistically significant (.05 level) or of any real consequence.

The test of differences in accuracy on the eight factual items is shown in Table 5. For each item, the accuracy of respondents of upper socioeconomic status interviewed by interviewers of upper status is compared with that of upper-status respondents interviewed by lower-status interviewers; and the same comparisons are drawn for lower-status respondents.

The comparisons reveal that in six of the eight instances, results for lower-status respondents are in the expected direction: a higher proportion of performance in relation to claims (i.e. greater candor) on the part of lower-status respondents when interviewed by lower-status interviewers than when interviewed by higher-status interviewers. However, in none of the eight instances were the differences significant at the .05 level. The inference is drawn that the respondents were not unduly sensitive to differences in status vis-à-vis their interviewers in *this* particular survey. But it may well be that differences of greater magnitude might be expected under conditions in which the socioeconomic differentials between respondents and interviewers were more marked and more clearly definable than in the Denver survey, or when issues more highly sensitive to matters of status were involved.

As regards other measures of interviewer effects in the Denver survey, the intensive analysis by Feldman, Hyman, and Hart found relatively few significant differences among individual interviewers.[7] In a supplementary search of the Denver data on the eight factual items under discussion, the present author failed to find any differences of consequence in respondent accuracy when the interviewers were divided according to the following attributes: length of experience as an interviewer, interviewer rating of rapport with respondent, interviewer differences in recording ability in a test, interviewer educational level, and office ratings of interviewer performance (care in probing, etc.). The relative lack of interviewer effects in this study may stem from a limited range in competence level among

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 761.

TABLE 5

RELATIONSHIP OF PERFORMANCE TO CLAIMS: INTERACTION OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF RESPONDENTS AND INTERVIEWERS
(*in per cent*)

	1948 Presidential Election	*1947 Charter Election*	*1947 Mayoralty Election*	*1946 Congressional Election*	*1944 Presidential Election*	*Library Card*	*Driver's License*	*Community Chest*
Correct in response.								
UU[a]	93	57	70	65	72	83	84	65
LU	90	52	67	69	72	84	87	66
UL	82	57	65	69	71	88	89	64
LL	86	64	72	69	74	88	89	60
Claimed performing the behavior:								
UU	78	55	73	57	70	30	69	69
LU	89	61	80	60	70	40	72	76
UL	69	38	59	33	56	22	44	52
LL	69	42	58	44	56	22	48	61
Per cent performing of those claiming:								
UU	92	43	62	66	67	61	79	51
LU	90	44	61	66	66	51	86	56
UL	75	27	46	55	54	56	79	38
LL	80	38	56	55	62	42	82	39

[a] SES of interviewer is given first. Thus, "UU" means "Interviewer, upper SES, respondent upper SES."

NOTE: Sixty-six respondents for whom SES of respondent or interviewer was not available were omitted. For the remaining 854, distribution by SES of interviewer and respondent was as follows: both interviewer and respondent upper SES, 77; interviewer lower, respondent upper, 127; interviewer upper, respondent lower, 185; both interviewer and respondent lower, 465. Data were available for somewhat smaller numbers of respondents on the Community Chest item: 74, 115, 164, and 432 persons respectively for the four SES groups.

For none of the eight items was the per cent performing of those claiming significantly different (.05 level) for upper SES respondents with lower SES interviewers, or for lower SES respondents with upper SES interviewers.

the interviewers or from respondents' tendencies to make factual errors as a function primarily of satisfying the requirements of their own self-images, not of trying to impress the interviewer.

DISCUSSION

It was noted in Table 1 that of the fifteen factual items testing respondent accuracy of report, exceptionally high accuracy was found only on items of *present* fact—having a telephone, owning one's home or auto, or giving one's age correctly—in contrast to past events such as voting in past elections or contributing to a recent Community Chest drive. It would appear that respondents generally will tend to tell the truth even when it may reflect on their prestige, provided that the question of fact concerns the respondent's present status rather than past events.

One can only speculate upon, rather than prove, the reasons why the younger and less well-to-do respondents are less accurate in their claims of voting or contributing to the Community Chest. Of the many possible explanations (only some of which have been touched upon in this article), the writer prefers the one known one that is both congruent with the facts and consistent with social-psychological theory: *the influence of social norms upon the respondent's self-image,* in which cognitive dissonance can lead to a rather consistent distortion of memory in order to reinforce continued perception of oneself as a good citizen.

The cognitive-distortion hypothesis is preferred to other alternatives because the distortions in response have been seen to be minimal in relation to present rather than past behavior, and minimal in relation to interviewer effects. The consistent exaggeration of performance of the preferred behavior by younger persons and those of lower socioeconomic status probably serves the function of enhancing self-esteem rather than of trying consciously to impress the interviewer.

If this hypothesis of cognitive distortion is true, the implication would be that "getting the truth" from the respondent is not so much a matter of establishing good rapport and being persistent in probing, but of reorienting the issue so that the respondent is unlikely to perceive a certain response as being especially threatening to his self-image. And it may well be that certain questions on past behavior simply do not lend themselves to accurate measurement through survey research approaches, not because people do not want to tell the truth to others, but because they sometimes cannot tell the truth to themselves.