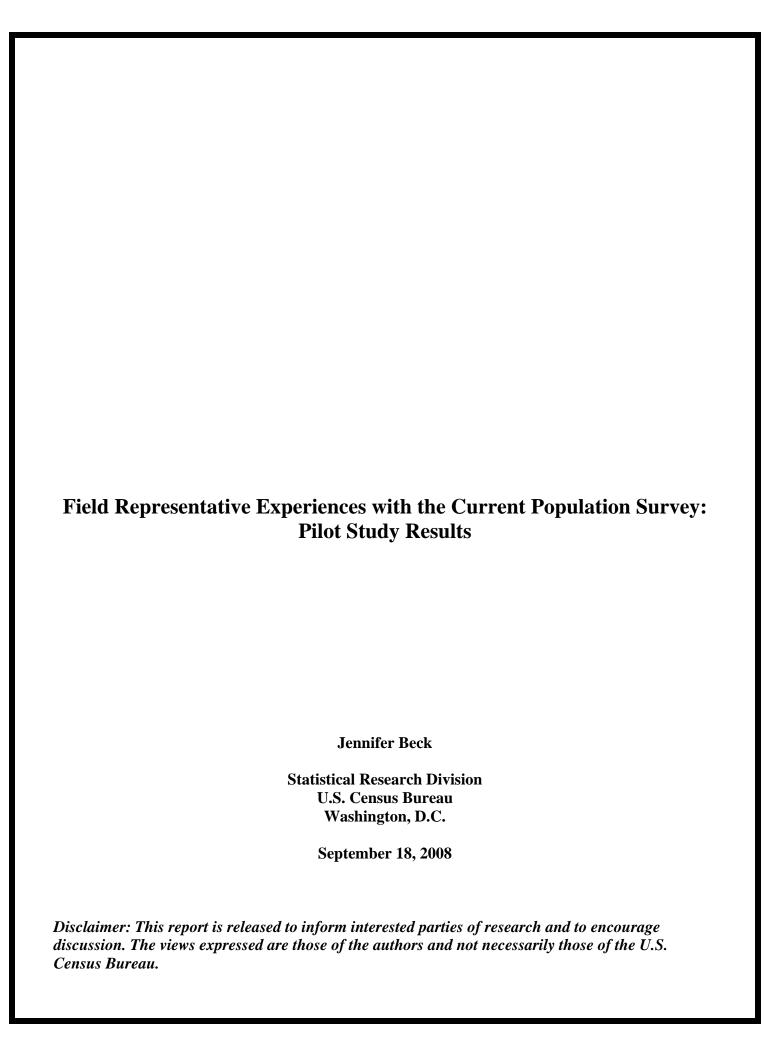**Field Representative Experiences with the Current
Population Survey: Pilot Study Results**

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Field Representative Experiences with the Current Population Survey

In September 2007, U.S. Census Bureau researchers completed a third pilot study on factors that contribute to gaining cooperation and successfully completing survey interviews. This pilot study was part of a larger effort to systematically study interview dynamics and how they affect respondent cooperation with Census Bureau surveys. The results of this study will add to extant data on two previous pilot studies on gaining cooperation behavior (Beck, Wright, & Petkunas, 2007).

In 2006, we collected data from Program Coordinators, Program Supervisors, and Senior Field Representatives (SFRs) working on (Beck, Wright, & Petkunas, 2007). The current pilot study involved collecting information from a sample of Census Bureau survey interviewers, called Field Representatives (FRs), throughout the United States. Like these other "field" employees, FRs work from one of the twelve Census Bureau Regional Offices, which are responsible for the management of field data collection.

The FRs filled out a brief questionnaire asking them to list practices, techniques, and recommendations they felt were either successful or unsuccessful at gaining respondent cooperation with Current Population Survey (CPS) interviews. The CPS is a panel survey involving eight monthly interviews with each sampled household. Respondents complete four consecutive monthly interviews, rotate out of the interview sample for eight months, and then complete the final four consecutive monthly interviews. The first and fifth interviews are in-person interviews, while the remaining 6 interviews can be telephone or in-person interviews. These multiple interviews and multiple modes make CPS a complex and interesting survey in which to study cooperation. While the current study specifically focused on the CPS, future studies may involve other Census Bureau surveys.

The remainder of this paper will discuss the methodology and results of the gaining cooperation behaviors our respondents view as contributing to successful or unsuccessful respondents cooperation.

Method

Participants
We distributed questionnaires to a sample of 60 FRs working on the CPS. We worked with the staff from the Field Division at Census Bureau Headquarters to draw a sample of FRs following specific criteria. We randomly selected five Field Representatives from each of the twelve Census Bureau Regional Offices to ensure that the sample contained responses from at least one FR from each of the twelve Regional Offices. As in the previous pilot study, we did not collect any demographic information on our participants.

Questionnaire
The questionnaire collected information about the Regional Office from which the FR worked, his or her average number of assigned cases per month, his or her language proficiency (other than English), the length of time he or she had been working on the CPS, and the length of time he or she had been working as a field interviewer (including other job experience). We then asked the FRs to provide candid information on successful and unsuccessful factors that contribute to gaining respondent cooperation with CPS interviews. We intended to communicate a broad definition of what might contribute to gaining cooperation. Participants could include any practices, techniques, or recommendations they might have used for successfully completing interviews. These practices, techniques, and recommendations could include interview behaviors directly pertaining to interactions

with a potential respondent or more general factors geared toward organization and case management. Appendix A contains the full questionnaire we distributed to the FRs.

FRs listed these factors that they perceived to be successful at gaining respondents' cooperation in response to the following instructions:

> What are the practices, techniques, and/or recommendations *you* use that *you* believe to be **most successful** for gaining cooperation in the Current Population Survey?

FRs also listed factors that they perceived to be unsuccessful at gaining respondent cooperation in response to following instructions:

> What are the practices, techniques, and/or recommendations that *you* have used in the past that *you* believe **were not** successful at gaining cooperation in the Current Population Survey?

Procedures
We mailed out questionnaire packets to the sample during the month of August, 2007. The questionnaire packets included a brief letter introducing the purpose of this pilot study, a copy of the self-administered questionnaire, instructions on filling out and returning the questionnaire, and a pre-paid return envelope. The FRs filled out the questionnaires and mailed them directly back to us at the Census Bureaus Headquarters.

Results and Conclusions

The analysis for this pilot study included the responses from 37 participants. We received back 54 questionnaires, but excluded the data of 17 participants because they did not provide complete or legible responses to the two critical questions. Although we collected information on our participants' work experience, language proficiency and any other job-relevant training, for this brief summary of results, we did not analyze these variables. We may analyze these variables at a later point in the project.

Data coding
Because we intend to use the data we collect to guide research questions for future studies, the primary data were the content of our participants' responses to the two gaining cooperation questions. To analyze the content of participants' responses, we again categorized them into the same three broad categories we used in the previous pilot studies: administrative behaviors, which characterized responses that focused on the management of case loads and general organization and scheduling; self-directed behaviors, which characterized responses that focused on the interviewer's appearance or attitude, and interview behaviors, which characterized responses that focused on conducting the interviews and interacting with respondents.

Also, similar to SFRs in the previous pilot study, the FRs tended to report successful and unsuccessful behaviors that were not easily interpreted or codeable into one of the three existing categories (Beck, Wright, & Petkunas, 2007). For example, these miscellaneous behaviors included "being pushy" as unsuccessful at gaining cooperation. This "pushiness" could refer to administrative behaviors, such as repeatedly visiting a household and leaving notes, or it could refer to a style of interacting with the respondent. Because there seemed to be a large number of these unspecified and undefined behaviors, we included them as a separate category in the analysis. These vague or unspecified behaviors may be

the foundation for future experiments, as we attempt to disambiguate their meaning. We coded a total of 247 responses across all 37 participants. Table 1 provides examples of each type of coded behavior.

Data Analysis

The goal of this analysis was not to come to any definite conclusions about successful and unsuccessful behaviors for conducting interviews; as with the previous pilot studies, we wanted to get a general sense of what FRs perceive as important in gaining respondent cooperation. Detailed statistical analyses are not necessary to catalogue and summarize our participants' responses.

The results of interest for this brief analysis were two-fold: 1) the type of behavior participants reported most often, and 2) if this reporting differed between successful and unsuccessful behaviors. To this end, we analyzed the number of each type of response in a 2 X 4, Valence (successful and unsuccessful behaviors) X Type (administrative, self-directed, interview, and miscellaneous), Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance. The results indicate a significant main effect of Valence, a significant main effect of Type, and a significant Valence X Type interaction. Table 2 shows the mean number of each type of response.

Main Effects

Overall, FRs tended to report more successful behaviors (4.62) than unsuccessful behaviors (2.05) (F $(1,36) = 29.56$, $p > .001$). This unbalanced reporting could be due to the fact that the types of behaviors that can create a turning point in cooperation in an interview or contribute to making contact with a respondent are much more salient than behaviors that do not seem to create a turning point in cooperation. For example, when a potential respondent indicates privacy concerns, the interviewer responds to those concerns, and the respondent then agrees to participate, those specific interviewer behaviors are easy to interpret as successful cooperation techniques. However, when a participant refuses to cooperate or an interviewer has difficulty contacting a respondent, an interviewer may have difficulty determining individual specific behaviors that could have contributed to this lack of cooperation. Potential respondents could refuse cooperation for more than one reason or have *a priori* and unspecified objections to participating in a survey. Interviewers may have no way to determine why potential respondents do not want to participate, and therefore, may not have any specific feedback regarding which specific behaviors did not work.

In terms of the types of behaviors, FRs tended to report significantly more interview (1.32) and administrative behaviors (.99) than any other type of behavior (F $(3,108) = 9.50$, $p > .001$). Participants tended to view how they interact with the respondents and how they manage and organize their cases as important influences on cooperation success.

Valence X Type Interaction

Finally, when reporting successful behaviors, participants tended to report more interview behaviors (2.08). However, when reporting unsuccessful behaviors, participants tended to report more administrative behaviors (.81), while reporting very few self-directed behaviors (.14) (F $(3,108) = 4.24$, $p > .05$). This interaction suggests an interesting conclusion about how interviewers view successful and unsuccessful performance. By focusing on interactive interview skills as the key to cooperation success, and the administrative aspects of the job as contributors to lack of cooperation, interviewers are demonstrating the fundamental attribution error (Jones & Harris, 1967). Interviewers appear to be attributing cooperation success directly to their interactions with respondents, but attributing lack of cooperation success to more situational variables, such as ineffective materials and case assignment.

Also contributing to this interaction is the reporting of self-directed behaviors. Participants may have reported very few unsuccessful self-directed behaviors because these types of behaviors are the most self-relevant. Proper hygiene and dress may be behaviors that FRs take for granted. These behaviors are tightly coupled with simply maintaining a professional appearance at any job, and not just when interacting with potential respondents. Interviewers may automatically assume that their hygiene and grooming are appropriate. Also, very few interviews would probably be willing to admit that their appearance, hygiene, or attitude occasionally might not have been appropriate.

Future Directions

We intend to combine these results and the results of previous two pilot studies on Program Coordinators and Supervisors and Senior Field Representatives to develop a catalogue of successful and unsuccessful behaviors that will become a part of a larger study aimed at finding out the awareness, tools, and training necessary for gaining cooperation. Ultimately, we hope that the results of this pilot study and the results of subsequent investigations will help improve Field Division training and operations.

References

Beck, J., Wright, T., Petkunas, T. (2007). Gaining cooperation with the Current Population Survey: Experiences from the field. Study Series (Survey Methodology #2007-26), Statistical Research Division, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

Jones, E. E., & Harris, V. A. (1967). The attribution of attitudes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 3,* 1-24.

<u>Table 1</u>. Examples of Successful and Unsuccessful Behaviors.

	Administrative Behaviors	Self-directed Behaviors	Interview Behaviors	Miscellaneous Behaviors
Successful Behaviors	"Try to know about the community" "Utilize refusal letters" "Be available at any hour" "Having thorough knowledge of survey purpose"	"Be confident" "Dress neat" "Expect to get the interview"	"Mention something you have in common with them" "Stress the contribution respondents make to [the] overall success of the CPS" "Show the results of last month's survey"	"Make people feel important" "Establish quick rapport" "Instinctively 'read' the respondent"
Unsuccessful Behaviors	"Urg[ing] the respondent to complete the interview 'right now'" "Call the respondent's home and load the answering machine with messages" "[Having] too many people working the same case"	"Having a bad attitude" "Not wanting to conduct the interview" "Dressing down in poorer neighborhoods"	"Demanding they participate or a supervisor will contact them." "Assuring confidentiality" "Threatening them with a fine"	"Being overly aggressive" "Avoid controversy" "Polite persistence"

Table 2. Mean Number of Each Type of Behavior Participants Reported.

	Administrative Behaviors		Self-directed Behaviors		Interview Behaviors		Miscellaneous Behaviors		Total	
	Mean	# of responses	Mean	# of responses	Mean	# of responses	Mean	# of responses	Mean	# of responses
Successful Behaviors	1.16	43	.76	28	2.08	77	.62	23	4.62	171
Unsuccessful Behaviors	.81	30	.14	5	.70	26	.41	15	2.05	76
Total	.99	73	.45	33	1.32	103	.51	38	6.68	247

Appendix A

CPS Field Experiences Questionnaire

Below is a series of questions about Field Representatives' experiences in the field with the Current Population Survey. Please read each question carefully and write your responses in the spaces provided. We encourage you to be as honest as possible. We would like to obtain as much candid information as possible about field practices and experiences with the Current Population Survey. Your responses will be kept confidential. **Do not write your name on this questionnaire.**

If you need additional writing space, please continue writing on the back of the questionnaire and clearly indicate which question you are answering.

Part I: Background information

This first section of questions asks about some of your background information. Although we are interested in the experiences of field interviewers in general, we also are interested in both the *similarities* and *differences* between different interviewers with different backgrounds. This information will help us understand your unique techniques, practices, and experiences.

From which Regional Office do you work? _____

On what team do you work (for example, team "A", team "B", etc.)? _____

How many cases do you typically have during a typical field period? _____

For each of the following questions, circle the appropriate response.

1) Do you proficiently speak any languages other than English?   Y   N
   If "yes", what language(s)? _____

2) How many total years have you worked as a field interviewer (include interviewing experience at other jobs)?

   a. less than 1year.
   b. 1-5 years
   c. 6-10 year
   d. more than 10 years

3) How long have you worked as an interviewer *on the Current Population Survey*?

   a. less than 1year.
   b. 1-5 years
   c. 6-10 year
   d. more than 10 years

7) List any other kinds of relevant past experience you might have that you feel contributes to your success as a Field Representative. (i.e. marketing research, telephone interviewer, etc):

_____

_____

_____

Part II: What are your experiences?

This section asks about your experiences in the field with CPS. We are interested in *your* specific practices, techniques, and recommendations for gaining respondent cooperation in a CPS interview. Only consider *your* specific experiences when answering these questions. Provide as much detail about your practices and techniques as possible. You may include examples of your practices and techniques to help describe them. **Please consider only your experiences with the Current Population Survey.**

1) What are the practices, techniques, and/or recommendations that *you* use that you believe to be **most successful** for gaining cooperation in the Current Population Survey?

2) What are the practices, techniques, and/or recommendations that *you* have used in the past that **were not** successful at gaining cooperation in the Current Population Survey?