

## THE EFFECT OF A STATUS CUE ON PERSONALLY INITIATED SELF-ADMINISTERED SURVEYS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes how a white lab coat can be used to enhance the status of a survey taker. Following this discussion, three experiments are described in which survey takers alternated either wearing or not wearing a white lab coat during a personally initiated self-administered survey. The effect of the white lab coat on survey response was tested on three populations - high school students, university students, and hospital patrons. While the white lab coat increased the response rate to the survey among university students and hospital patrons, it had no effect on the response rate with high school students. One must wonder why the white lab coat failed to affect the response rate from high school students. High school students are, of course, younger than the other two populations. Because of their young age, they may not have developed as much respect for authority as the other older populations. The high school students may be in a rebellious stage of their life, making them unwilling to acquiesce to a request from an authority figure. If the population being approached by the survey taker has little respect for authority, enhancing the authority or status of the survey taker should not be productive. Another factor that may have diminished the response rate among the high school students is the environment in which the survey was conducted. The high school students were just getting out of class as the survey takers attempted to poll them. As students exited the high school, they no doubt had a desire to get away from the constraints of school and to be free. In this state of mind, they were probably not very receptive to the request of a survey taker. So while the white coat can increase the response rate to some surveys, it can not be expected to induce a survey response from a resistant population in a poor survey environment.

References Available on Request.