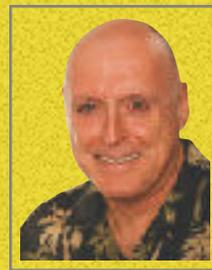


# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 981 How Much Can We Trust Surveys?

Can surveys be trusted? I've got a story today that might make you question the outcomes when somebody tells you "research" supports their particular point of view. I'm Jerry Roberts, and that's coming next, on The Extra Point.

If you're like me, you're occasionally asked to participate in a survey project of some kind. This would be more than a customer service survey from a company you do business with. It might be for a product, or how you feel about a public concern.

Surveys began as in-person interviews, then many projects moved to telephone calls. Today, a huge amount of this kind of work is done online.

Have you ever given any thought as to how accurate surveys are? I picked up on a story that might surprise you, and it involves the building of online research platforms.

The first and largest of these research platforms is Amazon-owned Mechanical Turk, which launched in 2005 for crowdsourcing work on repetitive tasks. People were paid a small amount of money to take part, and behavioral scientists immediately realized its potential value for their research. Other similar sites followed, and it's said to have quickly revolutionized several research fields.

However, there has been a lingering doubt as to the accuracy of these projects. A recent story has brought that to the surface.

A psychology student from Cornell University ran an online survey using one of these widely used industry platforms to get participants. About 300 people took his survey, and the demographics were heavily skewed toward women: 91 percent female, 7 percent male.

He checked how he presented the survey to see if he had done anything to discourage

males? There was nothing.

Then, a Yale University graduate student reported a similar gender-skewed result. After that, a postdoctoral fellow at Northwestern University's Kellogg School, reported something similar.

In all cases, the survey results were dominated by females. Researchers at Stanford University set out to solve the mystery, and the answer focused on a platform called Prolific, and a college student named Sarah Frank — who has a very busy TikTok account.

Frank posted a video on the topic of side hustles, and she listed making money on Prolific as one of her favorites. She said she made about \$15.00 a day for answering questions on surveys. That video has received well over four million views, and almost 800,000 likes.

Before I go further, Prolific did not sponsor her post, and apparently had no knowledge of it. She's just a fan of the site.

The mystery solved, Stanford contacted Prolific to advise them. The platform ran their own investigation, and their findings raised eyebrows.

Prolific said the video Sarah Franks made, seen by over four million people, led to a surge of sign-ups from Generation Z women, who then upset the results of about — are you ready — about 4,600 scientific studies.

There was no breakdown of which surveys had been impacted, but you'd have to guess the damage was widespread. Some of this research may have been sponsored, and if properly reported, what would it mean for the reputation of those involved?

Further, what about any decisions to policy that may have resulted from research that was considered to be accurate?  
(Con't.)

So, how accurate are surveys — yeah, that pesky thing called accuracy — and what about unintended consequences when they're not done right?

That's the Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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