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"I didn't write the questions!" - Negotiating telephone-survey questions on birth timing

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Abstract

This paper examines interviewer-respondent interaction in the collection of demographic data. Conversation analysis (CA) makes transparent the interaction between an interviewer and 25 respondents on a question about pregnancy and birth timing in an Australian telephone survey, Negotiating the Life Course. The analysis focuses on the troubles that occur and the work interviewers do to fit respondents' answers to the survey researcher's categories. Interviewers are shown to act as mediators in difficult interaction, with responses often distorted by question format, the imperative of achieving an allowed response, and the need to keep the respondent in the survey.

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