

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

2019 Workshop: Interviewers and Their Effects
from a Total Survey Error Perspective

Sociology, Department of

2020

Chapter 5: Exploring the Mind of the Interviewer: Findings from Research with Interviewers to Improve the Survey Process

Appendix 5

Robin Kaplan

Erica Yu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociw>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Sociology, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in 2019 Workshop: Interviewers and Their Effects from a Total Survey Error Perspective by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Chapter 5: Exploring the Mind of the Interviewer: Findings from Research with Interviewers to
Improve the Survey Process

Appendix 5

Robin Kaplan and Erica Yu

Full book reference:

Olson, K., J. D. Smyth, J. Dykema, A. L. Holbrook, F. Kreuter, B. T. West. 2020. *Interviewer Effects from a Total Survey Error Perspective*. Boca Raton: CRC Press.

Appendix 5A Interview Protocol

Thanks for talking to me today. During our hour together, we're just hoping to hear about what it's like being an interviewer and what the most challenging parts of interactions with respondents are. We've got a set of questions that we want to get through but we'll also make sure to leave some time at the end in case there is anything that we missed and that you want to make sure that we know about. We'd like to audio record our meeting just for later analysis and note-taking purposes – so we can talk with you instead of trying to write everything down. Only the few folks on the research team will have access to the tapes, and the information won't be used in any way that would identify you as a participant in the research. Is that OK?

How long have you been an interviewer at [agency name]?

How long have you been an interviewer?

What surveys do you work on? [SEE LIST]

Do you primarily do CAPI or CATI data collection? Or some of both?

What's your favorite part of interviewing?

What's the most challenging part of interviewing?

Let's start first with some broad questions to get us thinking about the topic.

WORKING WITH RESPONDENTS - SENSITIVITY

We think it must be challenging to work with respondents. We know that there are times when respondents and their circumstances are unpredictable, and you've got to think on your toes to react and collect the data we want and keep the interview moving. For instance, asking someone about their job status when they just told you they had recently been laid off.

Do you find any questions to be "sensitive" for the respondent? What does it mean for a question to be sensitive? [Explain if necessary: A description of a sensitive question is one that may seem personal, invasive, or threatening to a respondent. It may make them feel uneasy answering the question.]

What kinds of cues [clues/indications/hints/signs] do you look for in a respondent's behavior that indicates they find a question sensitive?

How do you approach asking sensitive questions? Does it differ from how you'd ask more neutral questions?

- Are there different cues for in-person vs on the phone?
- Do you ever modify the language of the question before you ask it?
- Do you try to tailor the question or lead-in to the question?

Do you use different follow-up questions or probes to address the situation?

What do you think helps reduce the sensitivity of the questions?

How do you handle these situations where a question is unexpectedly sensitive for a respondent?

What do you think are the top causes of the question sensitivity?

Do you find any questions to be sensitive for you as the person asking the question?

Did you receive any special training for asking sensitive questions, such as questions about income?

WORKING WITH RESPONDENTS - DIFFICULTY

One part of your job that we find really interesting is that you are asking the same survey questions of lots of different types of respondents. Likely for some questions, some respondents have trouble answering the questions while others answer them without any problems at all.

What kinds of cues [clues/indications/hints/signs] do you look for in a respondent's behavior that indicates they are having trouble with the question?

How do you approach asking difficult questions? Does it differ from how you'd ask more neutral questions?

- Are there different cues for in-person vs on the phone?
- Do you ever modify the language of the question before you ask it?
- Do you try to tailor the question or lead-in to the question?

Can you tell us about a question that you always anticipate is going to be difficult and how you handle it?

Similarly, respondents may not be able to recall information you're asking them about. How do you help respondents remember information?

WORKING WITH RESPONDENTS - COOPERATION

We all know that some respondents aren't always the most cooperative. Sometimes, they don't try as hard as we would like to answer a question accurately.

How do you handle situations where the respondent gives you an answer but you know it's not the best answer – maybe they guess instead of looking at records, or maybe you can just hear in their voice that they are making up an answer?

Are there any follow-up questions that you might ask?

Sometimes respondents give answers that don't match any of the response options for a survey question, but you have to decide what response to record. How do you handle a situation like that?

Are there any situations when you would see that a respondent is not giving their best answer, but you would consciously decide not to pursue a better answer?

QUESTIONS – PREVIOUS ANSWERS

Sometimes respondents find survey questions to be pointless because they have already answered a similar question, or told you information that makes the question irrelevant to them. For instance, you might have to ask whether they took maternity or paternity leave from their job recently, but already know from the household roster they do not have children.

Do you ever find that you're asking respondents questions that seems repetitive? Can you tell us what that's like?

- Do you acknowledge they already gave an answer to the question?
- Do you repeat back the answer they already gave you as a lead-in to the question?
- Do you just ask the question verbatim anyway?

What do you do when you get to a question, but realize the respondent answered it earlier in the interview?

Do you acknowledge the question might not be relevant to them before reading it?

If an answer to a current question is not in agreement with, or is inconsistent with, an answer to a previous question, what do you usually do?

GENERAL QUESTIONS

Now we have some general questions about your experience as an interviewer.

One thing we are interested in is when and how interviewers decide to probe. Tell me about when you decide to probe.

When do you decide whether or not to read definitions of terms?

If a respondent pauses or is silent for a long time, what do you do?

Appendix 5B Vignettes

Employment vignettes

Ok, now we have a few scenarios that we'd like to run through with you, kind of like role-playing, and we are interested in hearing what you think about them. We'll go through a couple of these in a row and then we'll come back to discuss a few if we have time. We'd like to get your feedback on what it's like to be an interviewer for a survey that asks people about their employment status. We will read to you various scenarios that respondents may say to you during an interview when you are asking the scripted survey questions about their employment status.

Definition for SENSITIVITY: A sensitive question is one that may seem personal, invasive, or threatening to a respondent. It may make them feel uneasy answering the question.

#1 Alex [sensitive]

Imagine you're interviewing Alex. He has participated in this survey before and is familiar with the labor force questions.

You ask the question: "Are you currently doing any work for pay?"

Alex responds: "I'm not looking forward to these questions since I lost my job."

How sensitive do you think it would be for **an interviewer** to ask **Alex** this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

How sensitive do you think it would be it be for **Alex** to answer this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

#2 Pat [neutral]

Now imagine you're interviewing Pat, and ask the same question.

You ask the question: "Are you currently doing any work for pay?"

Pat responds: "Since I just graduated from college with my degree, I'm still looking for a job at the moment..."

How sensitive do you think it would be for **an interviewer** to ask **Pat** this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

How sensitive do you think it would be it be for **Pat** to answer this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

#3 Frankie [sensitive]

Now imagine you're interviewing Frankie.

You ask the question: "During the last four weeks, have you been doing anything to look for work?"

Frankie responds: "Oh... I'm so tired of getting questions about my employment. I keep hearing: 'Your resume is excellent but the position requires someone more up-to-date on the newest techniques.' I can't help how old I am!"

How sensitive do you think it would be for **an interviewer** to ask **Frankie** this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

How sensitive do you think it would be it be for **Frankie** to answer this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

#4 Jean [neutral]

Now imagine you're interviewing Jean.

You ask the question: "During the last four weeks, have you been doing anything to look for work?"

Jean says: "I just recently retired after over 35 years at my company. I've been looking for a part-time job just for fun, but haven't found anything."

How sensitive do you think it would be for **an interviewer** to ask **Jean** this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

How sensitive do you think it would be it be for **Jean** to answer this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

#5 Sam [sensitive]

Now imagine you're interviewing Sam.

You ask the question: "Do you want to work a full time workweek of 35 hours or more per week?"

Sam responds: "I am so frustrated with my job. My hours recently got cut to part-time and I haven't been able to find another full time job..."

How sensitive do you think it would be for **an interviewer** to ask **Sam** this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

How sensitive do you think it would be it be for **Sam** to answer this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

#6 Frances [neutral]

Now imagine you're interviewing Frances.

You ask: "Do you want to work a full time workweek of 35 hours or more per week?"

Frances responds: "I've only been working part time, 10 to 15 hours per week lately since I decided to go back to school."

How sensitive do you think it would be for **an interviewer** to ask **Frances** this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

How sensitive do you think it would be it be for **Frances** to answer this question?

- Not at all sensitive
- Moderately sensitive
- Very sensitive

Income and Program Participation Vignettes

Now we'd like to change gears a bit and ask you to tell us what you think about a few survey questions. These are questions are from a survey about income and program participation. It is a longitudinal survey that asks respondents about their income, job history, health insurance, and other related topics. We'll read the question to you, and then we'll ask you to rate the question as to how difficult you think the question would be for respondents to answer, and what it would be like for interviewers to ask.

Here's a scenario: Imagine that you are collecting the household roster. For each person on the roster, you ask -

#1 Roster [neutral]

**Next we need to record each person's relationship to you.
(NAME) is your _____.**

Would you say it is easy or difficult is for a respondent to answer that question?

[IF NECESSARY: understanding the question, retrieving the information needed to answer the question, or forming an answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And, for that same question, would you say it is easy or difficult for an interviewer to ask that question?

[IF NECESSARY: read question verbatim because it's long, wordy, or complex, the respondent would interrupt you or wouldn't give a straight answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

This question you ask for each person who lives in the house -

#2 Support payments [sensitive]

The following questions are about regular or lump sum support payments you might have made between January 1st and the end of December 2015 to people living outside your household.

To which of the following people who lived outside your household did you make support payments: [READ ANSWER LIST]

- 1. Your parent or parents**
- 2. Your child 21 years old or older who lived elsewhere**
- 3. Someone else related to you**
- 4. Your ex-spouse or ex-partner**
- 5. Someone else not related to you**
- 6. Did not make support payments**

Would you say it is easy or difficult is for a respondent to answer that question?

[IF NECESSARY: understanding the question, retrieving the information needed to answer the question, or forming an answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And, for that same question, would you say it is easy or difficult for an interviewer to ask that question?

[IF NECESSARY: read question verbatim because it's long, wordy, or complex, the respondent would interrupt you or wouldn't give a straight answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

Now the next question is -

#3 Savings account [sensitive]

The next few questions are about assets and other investments, either individually or jointly owned. Between January 1st and the end of December of 2013, did you own, either individually or jointly, a savings account?

Would you say it is easy or difficult is for a respondent to answer that question?

[IF NECESSARY: understanding the question, retrieving the information needed to answer the question, or forming an answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And, for that same question, would you say it is easy or difficult for an interviewer to ask that question?

[IF NECESSARY: read question verbatim because it's long, wordy, or complex, the respondent would interrupt you or wouldn't give a straight answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

The next question is -

#4 Healthcare products [difficult]

Last year, how much was paid out-of-pocket for your non-prescription healthcare products such as vitamins, allergy and cold medicine, pain relievers, quit smoking aids, AND anything else not yet reported.

Would you say it is easy or difficult is for a respondent to answer that question?

[IF NECESSARY: understanding the question, retrieving the information needed to answer the question, or forming an answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And, for that same question, would you say it is easy or difficult for an interviewer to ask that question?

[IF NECESSARY: read question verbatim because it's long, wordy, or complex, the respondent would interrupt you or wouldn't give a straight answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And the next question is -

#5 Biological children [sensitive]

If the respondent is female:

Do all of your biological children have the same biological father?

If the respondent is male:

Do all of your biological children have the same biological mother?

Would you say it is easy or difficult is for a respondent to answer that question?

[IF NECESSARY: understanding the question, retrieving the information needed to answer the question, or forming an answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And, for that same question, would you say it is easy or difficult for an interviewer to ask that question?

[IF NECESSARY: read question verbatim because it's long, wordy, or complex, the respondent would interrupt you or wouldn't give a straight answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

At the end of the interview, one of the last questions is –

#6 Recontact [difficult]

We will recontact this household in the future to update information. We would like to use some of the information you have provided today to make that interview shorter and more efficient. When we come back next time, whether we speak to you or someone else you are living with, is it OK if we use some of your answers as a starting point?

(Only a limited amount of information (such as whether you attended school and whether you are married) is passed forward into the next interview.)

To see a comprehensive list of content that would be passed forward, see the Help Screen.

Would you say it is easy or difficult is for a respondent to answer that question?

[IF NECESSARY: understanding the question, retrieving the information needed to answer the question, or forming an answer]

- Easy

- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult

And, for that same question, would you say it is easy or difficult for an interviewer to ask that question?

[IF NECESSARY: read question verbatim because it's long, wordy, or complex, the respondent would interrupt you or wouldn't give a straight answer]

- Easy
- Neither easy nor difficult
- Difficult