

DISCUSSION

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The presentation by Rosen and Clayton tells us that the novelty called FAX still exists and that it's potential has not yet been maximized. Because the novelty hasn't worn off, items that are received by fax are accorded more attention than the customary reminder postcard. Although lacking the personal touch of a telephone call, using fax to spur response rates is a good idea because it is fast, it can be done at off hours, and is not labor intensive after the initial systems development. Technology outlay is also minimal with PC resident fax boards being of nominal cost.

Rosen and his colleagues executed a very well constructed test with all caveats thoroughly discussed. From it we have learned that using reminders sent by facsimile machines may not actually help increase overall response rates, but it doesn't hurt either. And if it's use can be set up in a manner similar to the one described in this paper, it can save money. Surveys like the CES should make the most of a good situation while the novelty of fax still works.

For all of us who conduct household surveys, Dr. McKay address a particularly salient issue. Here, underreporting is a problem of interpretation. Beyond the problem she describes of obtaining accurate household rosters, is the underlying issue of cultural differences in defining what a household is - or what anything is for that matter. This paper underscores the need for continued and expanded ethnographic research because it only goes to reason that if there are cultural differences in defining a household, then there are also serious cultural differences in defining many other characteristics we attempt to measure in cross cultural surveys. Recognizing this problem, in redesigning the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) that I work on, we have employed the use of cultural anthropologists and ethnographers to study cultural differences in interpreting and reporting questions on health status and behaviors. A question as simple as "Do you consider your health to be excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?" is riddled with cultural bias.

Because did not address the definitions and questions used by BLS to determine whether a person is a household member or whether the critical issue for inclusion is labor force participation, it is difficult to determine who should be in the sample. For example, if a relative visits for a month or two and works during that time, is he to be included even if his usual or permanent residence is another country? If so, it is understandable why standard sets of questions would miss these people. If they do not know their intentions, they may not consider themselves to be household members. It is also not surprising that these so called "missing persons" are more common in Hispanic communities than in the Non-Hispanic white control group. The control group doesn't have the same problems of being undocumented or working illegally or having

a home or family in another country. In this case, using economic status to pick the control group may not have been the appropriate variable. Are boarder groups typical of non-Hispanic white persons?

It is also not surprising that the boarder's labor force participation is usually known by the respondent since residency with the group is probably contingent upon contributing to the communal pot. Although a difference was reported for boarder versus family households, caution should be used in attributing real differences due to the very small number of boarder households examined.

It would be useful to know whether this boarder phenomenon exists among other minority populations like Asians or Haitians or other recent immigrant groups. Should we be concerned about similar underestimates of labor force participation in other hidden groups that is, undocumented or transient workers? Perhaps future efforts in this area should address these groups, also. And new batteries of questions should be evaluated for their cultural sensitivity.

The third paper presented by Keer reminds us that asking about sensitive topics is a challenge that is not new but continues to be a critical issue in data quality. The papers presented by Keer and O'Reilly are similarly concerned with response rates and the accuracy and honesty of reporting behaviors. On many subjects, but on these in particular, we expect a nontrivial amount of underreporting. We must also be concerned with the respondent's ability to use the mode of interview the researcher has chosen. Common to both researchers were noted problems with skip patterns in self-administered paper and pencil interviews.

The solution Keer notes is to have a largely blank page save for branching instructions for non users of drugs. Future analysis will tell us if this was an overly enticing way out for respondents or a solution to the incorrect skip pattern problem.

Because the drug survey is part of the NHIS it has the disadvantage of being too public. That is, at the beginning of the interview all adult family members are encouraged to participate. Getting them uninvolved to allow the one selected household respondent privacy to answer sensitive questions may be difficult. Although the use of a sealed envelope employed in this and other surveys, has proven useful, it does not preclude the interference of onlookers. The interviewer is forced to be particularly cunning when there are prying eyes in the room. In a youth survey now being conducted by NCHS, when other household members become nosy, the youth is encouraged to go to his room or to go outside the home to complete the questionnaire so he can "concentrate better"; a necessary euphemism for privacy.

An issue in Keer's analysis is whether respondents understand the difference between confidential and anonymous and whether they believe us. The trend reported in the cursory comparison between

the NHIS and the NIDA studies appears to indicate that they do if you accept the "more is better" premise. This is worth further examination when the data are available.

Privacy concerns and reporting sensitive behaviors are what Audio Computer Administered Self Interviewing (ACASI) is all about. As Jim O'Reilly knows, the subject of ACASI is near and dear to me. It is a promising new mode of data collection that has enormous potential but has undergone little if any large scale testing. Because it can almost eliminate the concerns of privacy and illiteracy, it has the potential of being the crown jewel of interview modes. But as of this time, it is still a diamond in the rough. Although it can create a "private" environment in the most "unprivate situations," there is so much we do not yet know about how to best implement ACASI. Critical questions remain related to voice quality and pacing, whether answer categories should appear on the screen, number of times questions should be read, whether answers should be repeated for confirmation, the impact of the computer on the respondent, how much control the respondent should have over the movement through the questionnaire, and the role of interviewer.

Furthermore, the technology has not fully caught up with the concept. Many agencies and organizations are beginning to test ACASI using available hard and software. None of which is ideally suited to the task.

In this paper, the ACASI was tested in a very small number of interviews in a neutral setting. Because the beauty of this mode is the privacy it affords especially where sensitive topics are concerned, testing needs to be done in a household setting using a much larger sample size. By dividing to respondents into three test groups as was done in this study we can look only at the general consistency of findings since even with random assignment one or two respondents can drive the findings. Also, given the number of items examined we expect to find a nonzero chance of significant findings. It would seem that the insignificant differences observed in the preference for ACASI over regular CASI exist because this test was conducted in a neutral site where having a family member look over one's shoulder is not a threat. ACASI might have been the clear winner if used in a household setting but much research should be conducted before it becomes a widely used mode of interviewing.