Asking women what determined the birth of a child: An examination of interaction on a field-coded (semi-open) question in Negotiating the Life Course

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Introduction

Field-coded (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:4–5, 107–127) or semi-open (Smit 1995:117) questions are commonly used in surveys. *Negotiating the Life Course* (NLC) has used numerous questions of this format in the three waves of the survey conducted in 1997, 2000 and 2003. Previous research has identified this type of question format as problematic (Foddy 1993; Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000; Oppenheim 1966; Smit 1995; Smit *et al.* 1997; Sudman and Bradburn 1982). Fowler and Mangione (1990:88–9) and Oppenheim (1966:44–6) warn against using field-coded questions because they cause 'considerable bias and loss of information'. Oppenheim (1966:45–6) concludes: 'The question is not how we can avoid loss of information, but rather at what point we can best afford to lose information'. Without recording and analysing the interaction that occurs between interviewers and respondents, however, it is difficult to determine how well interviewers succeed in obtaining the information intended by the survey designer and where information might be lost.

This paper examines negotiation of responses to Question 167 (Q167), a field-coded question on the timing of women's first birth or pregnancy. The examination focuses on the interaction between an interviewer and 25 of the 27 NLC Wave 1 respondents contacted in 1998 for the *Women on Children* (WOC) Survey.[1] The extent to which women plan or determine the timing of the birth of a child, the mechanisms and processes involved in this 'planning', and the extent to which first births are deferred, are the subject of much demographic research worldwide (Council of Europe 1998; Lesthaeghe and Willems 1999; McNicoll 1998; van de Kaa 1998). In Australia, reliable information on what determines the timing of first births is important in shaping policy relating to issues of low fertility (Australian Academy of Science 1995; Australian Broadcasting Commission 1999; Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000;

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[1] The *Women on Children* Survey formed the basis of research for my PhD thesis, *Asking Women about Having Children: Interaction in telephone-survey interviews*, completed in 2002 in the Demography and Sociology Program, Research School of Social Sciences, the Australian National University.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 1999; Kippen and McDonald 1998; McDonald 2000a, 2000b; McGuinness 2000:37; Young 1997).

First, the paper outlines Q167 and its response options, showing how the women responded in NLC Wave 1 1996–7 and the 1998 WOC Survey. Because the responses seem to differ according to the age of the woman, the analysis divides the WOC respondents into two groups: those born in or before 1950 and those born later. Interviews where the interaction on Q167 between interviewer and respondent is relatively straightforward (that is, leads to a speedy response) are presented in contrast with those where the interaction is troublesome. The two groups—the pre-1950 and post-1950 women—are discussed separately. The paper concludes with a more detailed discussion of what makes the interaction over Q167 difficult and the difficulties in interpreting responses.

The *Women on Children* (WOC) Survey

The 1998 *Women on Children* (WOC) Survey examined the interaction between 27 NLC Wave 1 women and an interviewer by re-asking the NLC Wave 1 questions concerning children. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using the detailed transcription conventions of Conversation Analysis (CA), with the aim of shedding light on how questions were asked and responses negotiated. Transcripts were analysed using a CA, or talk-in-interaction, framework. Analysis of the responses to field-coded question yielded some puzzling discrepancies that warrant further investigation. The impression at 'first listen' was of more uncertainty and hesitation in the interaction over Q167 compared with other NLC questions on children.[2] The taped interaction and subsequent transcription also showed difficulties with Q167.

As only one interviewer was used for the WOC Survey, the interviewer comes under close scrutiny. Even during training, interviewers are not usually subjected to the kind

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[2] Schaeffer and Thomson (1992) and Schaeffer *et al.* (1993) note and address similar uncertainty in asking women about wanting a child and asking respondents about labour-force participation.

of close scrutiny that is possible using the micro-detail of CA transcription. Some questions place interviewers in a difficult position in their task of obtaining responses and completing interviews. However, the objective of this research was primarily to examine the effects of particular questions on the interaction between interviewer and respondent rather than to evaluate the performance of the interviewer as such. The analysis of interaction indicates the difficulty in obtaining responses for Q167. Because of the nature of field-coded questions, this would in all probability also be the experience of other interviewers.[3] Oppenheim (1966:45) notes in respect of field-coded questions: 'Even with the best interviewers in the world some bias and some loss of information cannot be avoided'.

NLC and WOC Q167 on the determinants of timing of first pregnancy or birth

Q167 had three variants to be asked of NLC and WOC respondents in different situations.[4] The wording and options are shown below (Box 1):

Box 1 *Women on Children* **Survey 1998, Question 167**

Q167: (If Q154 = 0 and Q164 = not 1):	**What will determine when or if you have your first child?**
(If Q154 = 0 and Q164 = 1):	**What determined the timing of this pregnancy?**
(If Q154 = not 0):	**What determined the timing of your first child?**
Prompt for two reasons (Any other reasons?)	

I have to get a partner first	01
Convincing my partner that it's a good idea	02
It will happen when it happens	03
Unplanned, it just happened	04
Failure of contraception/family planning method	05
Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage	06
Being established in my career	07
My partner being established in their career	08
Having enough money to buy a house	09

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[3] Recorded interviews from NLC Waves 2 and 3 show similar difficulties with field-coded question, regardless of interviewer.

[4] Q154 reads: 'How many children have you ever had?' and Q164 reads: 'Are you currently pregnant?'.

Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child		10
My relationship with my partner being well-established		11
After having time to enjoy myself before settling down	12	
When I/we feel/felt right about it	13	
Feeling financially secure		14
Other (specify)	15	

To respondents, a field-coded question appears to be an open question that they can answer in their own way. The interviewer, on the other hand, has in front of her a list of possible response options for the question. In effect, for her, it is a closed question with 'forced-choice' responses (de Vaus 1995:86; Foddy 1993:135; Oppenheim 1966:44–5). Sudman and Bradburn (1982:294) describe a field-coded question as follows:

> In a field-coded question, the question itself usually is identical to that of an open-answer format. Instead of a blank space for the interviewer to record the respondent's answer verbatim, a set of codes is printed. Interviewers should simply check each topic that is mentioned. Field coding should be avoided unless the interviewer records the verbatim response as well, so that the field coding can be checked when the questionnaire is processed.

The respondent's answer, then, has to be translated and formatted (coded) by the interviewer into one of the allowable response options (Fowler and Mangione 1990:88). Thus, the design of the question sets up a contradiction between the interviewer's task and the respondent's expectation of how she should answer. It is common for field-coded questions to have a category 'Other', perhaps because of this contradiction.

NLC contains numerous field-coded questions. It may be that field-coded questions are used in telephone surveys when the list of possible responses makes the question too long to be easily read out over the telephone. De Vaus (1995:95) notes:

> The reliance on respondent's retaining all the spoken information in the question places real limits on how much information can be packed into one question. If

too many response categories are included in the question, there is a danger that the respondent will arbitrarily select one.

Responses to NLC and WOC Q167

Instructions for Q167 on the WOC interview schedule (as with the NLC interview schedule) asked the interviewer to prompt for two reasons: *Prompt for two reasons (Any other reasons?). Any other reasons?* was suggested as the neutral prompt. One woman had no reasons listed, and two women had five (more than two reasons would not been recorded had the CATI system been used). Table 1 shows the distribution of responses to this question according to the 15 response options provided on the WOC questionnaire.

Table 1   Reasons recorded as determining timing of respondent's first birth, same respondents, NLC 1997 and WOC 1998

Reason	NLC[a]	WOC[b]
01 I have to get a partner first	2	1
02 Convincing my partner that it's a good idea	0	1
03 It will happen when it happens	0	0
04 Unplanned, it just happened	8	11
05 Failure of contraception/family planning method	2	5
06 Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage	3	3
07 Being established in career	2	2
08 My partner being established in their career	2	2
09 Having enough money to buy a house	2	1
10 Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child	2	3
11 My relationship with my partner being well established	4	5
12 After having time to enjoy myself before settling down	0	0
13 When I/we feel/felt right about it	7	12
14 Feeling financially secure	2	5
15 Other (specify)[c]	1	8

Notes: **a** First and second responses are not distinguished here but are distinguished in Table 2. In 12 cases a second response was not recorded (see Table 2).   **b** The number of responses recorded for each response option does not add up to two reasons for each respondent as more than two responses were sometimes listed for this question. Responses given here are from 25

respondents.   c In all but one case 'Other' was not circled, but a comment was written on the
form under the response option 'Other'.

Sources: NLC 1997, WOC Survey 1998.

Two reasons were much more frequently recorded than others: (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* (Table 1).

Option (15) *Other (specify)* was the next most frequent, although it was circled only once of the eight times it occurred. Notes written on the interview schedule near (15) *Other (specify)* in the case of the other seven respondents are also taken to be 'Other' responses. The response options (03) *It will happen when it happens* and (12) *After having time to enjoy myself before settling down* are not among the responses noted for the WOC women. The individual reasons given, however, are not as useful in showing what determined the timing of the first child as the combinations of responses for each woman.

Table 2 shows the responses recorded for each of the women asked this question in NLC Wave 1 and the WOC Survey.

Table 2   Responses to Q167, NLC 1997 and WOC 1998

Respondent	NLC		WOC		
birth year	R1	R2	question	reasons[1]	interviewer comment
In or before 1950					
Debra	04	-	(c)	04, 05	'young and silly'*
Helen	06	04	(c)	06	
Joanne	11	-	(c)	13, 14	
Kerry	04	-	(c)	04, 06	
Lindy	15	-	(c)	10, 13	'trying for 8 years and pregnancy happened'*
Liz	09	08	(c)	04, 13, 14	
Merilyn	13	-	(c)	06	
Nadia	04	-	(c)	04	
After 1950					
Andrea[2]	11	13	(b)	15	'Age—wanted to have a child before getting any older'
Annegret	07	11	(c)	02, 07, 13	
Carol	11	07	(c)	07, 08, 09	

				11, 14	
Coral	04	05	(c)	04, 05	
Dale	10	08	(c)	10, 13, 14	'age was a factor didn't want to be too old. Friends had kids & we liked hanging around them so we decided to have one too'*
Edith	05	-	(c)	04, 05, 13	
Jenny	13	-	(c)	08, 10, 11, 13, 14	
Jess	01	14	(c)	04	
Karen	04	-	(c)	04, 11, 13	
Kristen	06	13	(c)		'trying c. fertility drugs'*
Lyn	04	-	(c)	04, 05, 13	'had a miscarriage & then in the next cycle after miscarrying had a failed contraceptive method & got pregnant with D.'*
Melinda	13	06	(c)	10, 13	
Noelle	13	10	(c)	11, 13	'was getting a bit older'*
Ricky	04	-	(c)	04	
Sonya	04	-	(c)	04, 05	
Tina[3]	01	14	(a)	01	'oops. accidentally asked this. Age < 40 yrs old'*
Tonia	13	09	(c)	11, 13	

Notes: **1** Interviewer did not circle response option (15); she added written comment in all but one case *indicates that 'Other' was not circled. **2** Andrea's responses cannot be compared because the responses applied to different births. **3** Tina was asked Q167 in error in the WOC survey; her response is included for interest. - indicates a skip (no response entered). **NA** Not asked. **R1, R2** Response 1, Response 2. (a) *What will determine when or if you have your first child?* (b) *What determined the timing of this pregnancy?* (c) *What determined the timing of your first child?*

Sources: NLC 1997, WOC Survey 1998

WOC Survey respondents

For six respondents only one response option was circled (Table 2); in three of these instances the reason given by the respondent was (04) *Unplanned, just happened*, a reason circled for 11 of the 25 respondents. For 11 respondents two reasons were circled. Five of these 11 respondents had the combination (04) *Unplanned, just happened* and (05) *Failure of contraception, family planning method*. The maximum number of options recorded for any respondent was five—Carol and Jenny each had five responses circled. This problem is the result of using a survey designed for CATI in a non-CATI situation. The CATI system allowed only two responses to be entered

on the screen. The next section shows how Annie and the WOC respondents interacted to obtain the responses shown in Table 2 above.

Comparison between NLC Wave 1 and WOC Survey

The women's responses to the same Q167 asked in both Wave 1 NLC in 1996–7 and the WOC survey in 1998 differ considerably (Table 2). Only three respondents, Ricky, Coral and Nadia, had exactly the same responses in both surveys; 22 of the 25 differed on at least one reason. Some differed markedly. For example, Lindy had (15) and a skip recorded for NLC, whereas her recorded responses for the WOC Survey were (10) and (13); For Joanne, (11) and a skip were recorded for NLC compared with (13) and (14) for the WOC Survey.

It is not unusual for people's stories to change in different tellings; researchers disagree about the reasons for this and whether it matters (Bernard, Killworth, Kronenfeld and Sailer 1984; Briggs 1986:14; Cicourel 1973, 1974:195ff; Converse and Presser 1986:20–3; Foddy 1993; Ross 1991). Converse and Presser (1986:20) observe that 'it is increasingly apparent that memory questions in general tend to be difficult':

> Recalling an event or behavior can be especially difficult in any of several circumstances: if the decision was made almost mindlessly in the first place, if the event was so trivial that people have hardly given it a second thought since, if questions refer to events that happened long ago, or if they require the recall of many separate events.

All WOC women had been asked the question in 1996–7. It might be expected that the reasons older women give for having their first child, often more than 20 years earlier, could have stabilised in the telling. The younger women, however, may still be formulating their stories, and the telling may differ according to the recipient and the interviewer, especially given the format of the question (Foddy 1993:7). Foddy (1993:89) observes:

Unfortunately, given no guidelines about the answers they should give, respondents often change the kind of answers they give when allowed to answer for a second time.

Nevertheless, all women[5] had had at least one opportunity to think through and tell this story in 1996–7 during the first wave of the survey. The difficulty for survey researchers is that it is expected that the same standardised question asked of the same women should yield the same information, regardless of the interviewer and when it is asked.

Foddy (1993:91) notes an additional problem; that is, there is a difference in asking people about intentional and non-intentional behaviour. It is useful to ask people only about behaviour that was intentional:

...the conclusion that is relevant here is that it is sensible to ask people only about their past intentional behaviour. Because respondents are unlikely to be aware of the causes of past unintentional behaviours, it makes little sense to assume that they will be able to recall such processes.

This may be relevant information in the case of the women in the two surveys who had unintentionally become pregnant or for whom intention did not appear to play a role.

The interaction between interviewers and respondents in NLC Wave 1 was not recorded. The comparison between the two surveys is limited, therefore, in that it cannot compare how the responses were achieved in each case. Only the responses can be compared. Even when the same responses are recorded for the WOC Survey and NLC Wave 1, it is not clear which WOC response was recorded first. What is clear is that in the two surveys the women answered differently or talked in a different way, or the interviewer behaved differently, or a combination of these differences occurred. The number of skipped second responses for NLC implies that either the interviewer did not probe for a second response in these cases (Table 2), or, if prompted with *Any other reason?*, the respondent answered 'no'. A point to note is that the order in which

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[5] Except for Dale and Jess who had not had their first births at the time of NLC Wave 1.

the WOC responses were recorded on the interview schedule is not known, unlike the NLC, where first and second reasons are distinguished. It may be that more than two reasons emerged in the NLC Wave 1 interviews but were not able to be recorded by CATI. Closer examination of the interaction between the interviewer and the WOC respondents will show how responses to this question are negotiated, but does not always show how or at what point in the interaction a respondent's answer became a response option for the interviewer.

Interaction on WOC Q167

The interaction between the interviewer, Annie, and the WOC respondents for Q167 was rarely straightforward, in the sense of two reasons being immediately forthcoming and achieved with the clear agreement of both parties. A rough indicator of whether the interaction was straightforward is the number of turns that it took for the reasons to be negotiated and the response options to be agreed. Easy agreement on a response takes fewer turns than more problematic interaction because less interaction work is required. The number of turns is used as an indicator in this analysis, with the beginning of the interaction marked by the asking of the question and the end of the interaction by the move to the next question. Alternative ways of estimating the length of the interaction would be to count lines of transcription or to time each interaction; however, the number of turns is a slightly better indicator of the complexity of the interaction than a simple measure of time or the number of lines of transcription, as it takes into account the aspect of negotiation of a response between the two interview participants.[6] In any case, the length and complexity of interaction are useful indicators for survey researchers. This is because the length of interaction as measured in number of turns over each question has an impact on the total duration of an interview and on the overall cost of conducting a survey.

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[6] Additional problems with using the number of lines of transcription as a measure are (1) that where the speech is inaudible and, hence, untranscribable, it is difficult to know how the speech would translate into word space; (2) interruptions are difficult to take into account; and (3) different methods of transcription may also yield different numbers of lines.

The following discussion deals first with WOC respondents born after 1950, then with those born in 1950 or before, because the responses of the older women seem to form a distinct group, and a comparison of the two groups highlights some of the changes that have occurred for Australian women in attitudes to determining the timing of their first births. In both groups the interaction ranges from relatively straightforward, with responses negotiated in five turns, to quite complex, taking up to 24 turns to complete the interaction on this question. Where the number of turns is large, more than two reason are sometimes negotiated, even though only two are required by the interview schedule. However, it is often difficult to determine at which point an answer becomes a response. Turn numbers are, therefore, difficult to compare and a rough measure only. As with earlier interview segments, the responses for Q167 in both surveys are included in brackets after the segment number and name of respondent. The first figures are for NLC; those after the semi-colon are for the WOC Survey. For reasons of space, not all interviews are presented in full in this discussion.

WOC respondents born after 1950

Seventeen of the 27 WOC women were born after 1950 (Table 3). Of these, Andrea and Tina are not included in the discussion on this question. Table 3 shows year of birth, year of marriage and age at first birth for the women born after 1950.

Table 3   Year of birth, year of first marriage and age at first birth, WOC
                  respondents born after 1950

Respondent	Year of birth	Year first married	Age at first birth
Andrea	1961	1982	31
Annegret	1963	1984	31
Carol	1960	1985	28
Coral	1961	1979	20
Dale[a]	1966	1996	33
Edith	1954	1977	26
Jenny	1960	1982	26
Jess[a]	1962	na	37
Karen	1961	1985	29
Kristen	1953	1974	23
Lyn	1959	1982	27

Melinda	1958	1977	23
Noelle	1960	1989	31
Ricky	1959	1982	21
Sonya	1970	1991	20
Tina	1962	na	na
Tonia	1966	1988	24

Note: **na** not applicable

Source: NLC 1997; **a** Dale and Jess had their first births after NLC Wave 1. Their age at first birth was calculated from WOC Survey 1998 data.

Ricky was one of the few respondents whose recorded responses were identical for NLC Wave 1 and WOC (Table 2). Her interview, although unclear in parts, was also one of the most straightforward, taking seven turns to complete the question:

Segment 1 Ricky   (04; 04)

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81.    Int:       ↑u:m now what determined the timing of your first child.
82.               (1.0)
83.    Ricky:     °↓stupidity.° (0.6) °ha ha ha° ha ha ha ·hh mistake. bad
84.               new[s.
85.    Int:          [so it was- it was an accident [(like    )
86.    Ricky:                                        [oh yea::h. a big
87.               accident heh heh
88.    Int:       (ah                                      failure of
89.               contraception          )
90.    Ricky:     ↑u:m (.) (                              )
91.               unplanned (                         )
92.    Int:       (                                             )
93.               ↑now i'm going to ((next question))
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[MMPh#11:81–93]

Annie circled only one response on the interview schedule: (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*, although the interaction in lines 88–9 seems to indicate an attempt to obtain a second reason. This attempt was partly inaudible on the tape[7] but contained the words 'failure of contraception', words contained in response option (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*. Annie seems to be asking whether (05) applied. This attempt is treated as having failed, as a second reason was not circled and Annie does not continue probing. In line 91 Ricky uses the term 'unplanned', which may have given Annie the information she requires to circle (04) on the interview schedule.

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[7] Parts of this interaction with Ricky (lines 87–9) were affected by a buzz on the telephone line and were difficult to transcribe. Some audible words give a clue to what was being said.

This interaction illustrates a number of features common to the interaction on Q167 in the WOC interviews. First, when Ricky, the respondent, answers after a long pause,[8] her answer '° stupidity.° (0.6) °ha ha ha° ha ha ha ·hh mistake. bad news.' is not in a form that exactly fits any of the response options on the interview schedule.[9] This happens with all except one respondent in answering this question. Ricky's answer puts Annie in a difficult position; she has to work out how to interpret it in terms of an allowable response option. She responds with a formulation 'so it was- it was an accident (like)'.[10] Annie's formulation also does not exactly match the words of any of the response options. However, Ricky's answer is a definite 'oh yea::h. a big accident heh heh'. Ricky uses several terms to describe the reason: 'stupidity', 'mistake', 'bad news' and 'a big accident'. To translate this into 'Unplanned, it just happened' is perhaps not such a great leap; but the force and negative judgment in Ricky's own description is not present in the way the pre-determined response option is phrased.

Ricky's answer is followed by laughter. In the WOC interviews laughter usually occurs as a response to laughter by the respondent, with the interviewer joining in the respondent's laughter, or as a response to something said by the respondent. Laughter

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[8] Schaeffer *et al.* (1993) discuss pauses in asking and answering questions about labour-force participation. Pomerantz (1984b) shows that a long pause can indicate three problems for the respondent: an understanding problem; confusion about what is known; and recipient disagreement or lack of support for the speaker's assertion.

[9] Ricky's quieter, low pitched ° stupidity° is characteristic of intimate talk in which self-disclosure occurs (Pritchard 1993:67). Pritchard's (1993) study examines the linguistic and paralinguistic devices used by women who have survived rape to achieve 'affiliation' in their talk with each other about their experiences. The successful use of these devices affects the women's self-disclosure that is crucial in overcoming their trauma. While the WOC women may not have suffered such trauma, the use of such devices in the interviews may lead to greater intimacy and, thus, greater self-disclosure in answers to questions from the interviewer. It may be that these devices are also used in talk about sensitive issues. See also Jefferson's (1984) work on laughter in troubles talk and Lavin and Maynard's (2002) work on the way interviewers handle laughter in telephone surveys.

[10] Heritage and Watson (1979:149ff) show that formulations are common in this kind of situation, because they have three components: deletion, preservation and transformation. At the same time as checking understanding, a formulation allows a speaker to transform what is said into something else without totally losing the thread to the original.

is rarely initiated by the interviewer. This is characteristic of many of the interviews. This segment of the interview with Ricky illustrates features that also occur frequently in other interviews: pauses and long delays in responding, laughter, formulations by the interviewer, not getting an answer that translates to an appropriate response option, and problems in obtaining the correct number of responses. These are illustrated further by examples from other interviews in the course of examining how responses were negotiated.

Only one respondent, Annegret, gave an answer that used one of the topic words of a response option:

Segment 2 Annegret   (07, 11; 02, 07, 13)

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63. Int:         and what determined the timing of your first child?
64. (2.3)
65. Annegret:    ↑u:::mhhh (2.0) i- hh my um (.) career had >sort've<
66.              reached a point where i felt (.) i could- (.) take a-
67.              (.) break, i guess,
68. Int:         ↓sure, so you felt established.
69. Annegret:    a- an- and um (.) my husband was (.) finally ready.
70.              huh huh huh huh [•hhh so, um yes (°sort of°),
71. Int:                         [oi:: see::,
72. Int:         (so let's just see) (0.6) •hh there is one here which
73.              says- i've got a whole list of (.) um possible (.) um
74.              reasons, and one of them is °convincing my partner it was
75.              a good idea(h).°
76. Annegret:    $yeah hh yeah that's one of them$ huh huh huh
77.              [huh hhh
78. Int:         [$o(h)k(h)ay uhm i don't want to put words in your
79.              mouth,$
80. Annegret:    huh huh [•hhh hhh]
81. Int:                 [ oka:y  ] and was it also that your
82.              relationship was established and (.) you felt like
83.              (.)°it was (.)it was time° to (just),
84. Annegret:    ↑um •hhhh (1.0) o::h no:: >i mean< we- we've had a
85.              (.) very long relationship, so i don't think that
86.              sort of really came into [it=
87. Int:                                  [right.
88. Annegret:    =it was just a matter of (.) that we were both ready.
89. Int:         •hhh (4.0) a::nd how many children ((next question))
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[MMPh#1:63–89]

The interaction with Annegret over Q167, in contrast to Q165, is one of the least troublesome for Annie. The interaction yields two responses quite quickly and with little probing. Although the question takes 14 turns to complete, this is mainly because Annie goes on (line 81ff) to probe, unnecessarily, for a third reason. On the interview

schedule Annie circled three response options: (02) *Convincing my partner that it's a good idea*, (07) *Being established in my career*, and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*.

Annie formulates Annegret's answer using the words of response option (07): '↓sure, so you felt est<u>ab</u>lished.' Annegret signals tacit agreement by moving on with no pause to provide a second reason: 'a- an- and um (.) my husband was (.) <u>fi</u>nally <u>rea</u>dy. huh huh huh huh ·hhh so, um yes (°sort of°),' The mention of her husband allows Annie the possibility of linking Annegret's answer with response option (2) *Convincing my partner that it's a good idea*. Annie then acknowledges her list of response options and mentions this option. Annegret laughingly agrees. Annie checks again and makes the point explicitly that she does not want to put words into Annegret's mouth. Using the words of a response option as a probe has proved a successful strategy for Annie; it has resulted in a speedy outcome. In the interaction so far the negotiation of two reasons has been relatively smooth. The negotiation of the third reason—not required for the survey—causes more trouble. In NLC Wave 1 the two response options recorded for Annegret were (07) *Being established in my career* and (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established*. Annie rejects response option (11) here (lines 84–6). Her answer in line 88 appears to be translated into response option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. This is not confirmed or rejected by Annegret.

In the face-to-face in-depth interview with Annegret on the day following the WOC survey interview, I asked Annegret about this question. Her reaction to the question was as follows:[11]

> **Annegret:**   o yeah it probably was- it was just the way it was written. I
> mean the way the questions were posed were really leading questions in many

[11] For reasons of space and transcription time and because the in-depth interviews are a secondary source of data, the in-depth interviews have been 'roughly' transcribed; that is, CA symbols have not been used but the transcription is of the detail that would normally be included in qualitative research in any discipline (Briggs 1986:14). The focus is not on the interaction, though it is acknowledged that this is just as important in in-depth or unstructured interviews (Briggs 1986:21ff; Cicourel 1974; Mazeland and ten Have 1998); the purpose is to compare what the respondent says on two occasions. This transcription is limited compared with the detail revealed in a CA transcription.

ways anyway so then you ask a question that it's very hard to pick the answer and then you have to prompt the answers and then you know...

Marian: and the way you prompt can then-[12]

Annegret: yeah well that was that actually happened last night with the- or whenever it was that the girl rang me yesterday uhm why I chose to have a child and you know I just said something like uhm you know well basically we were ready for it so she was trying to prompt me to get- she obviously had some other things so she said 'oh was it- was it that you were you know- you were happy with your relationship?' and I thought why is she asking that? I said 'no actually as a matter of fact it had nothing to do with it' but you know you could just see that people- people would grab at that and say oh yeah that probably was the- you know- and you- if you were in a hurry or you didn't particularly want to be asked the questions or whatever you could easily end up with not quite the right answers to some of those things...I mean it's harder to do the analysis if you just have a- you know a blank- a blank line and say you just write what someone said but I think you actually end up with lots more valid results when you're codifying something like that... you get more

Later...

Marian: so like there was that question about having a first child and like how did that come about what determined it and you were saying before that you that you'd decided like you were going to have your family very soon straight away

Annegret: yeah well we- we- i mean- we'd been married for a long time and uhm i mean- we'd always intended to have children it was like just a question of sort of being ready to have children uhm and we sort of said oh yeah but one day you know

Marian: yeah

Annegret: anyway eventually we agreed that it was about the right time and uhm i'd been off the pill about six months and so then practically the first thing i actually got pregnant so it was it was sort of uhm it was just a good time in in my career to uhm take the time and Brian was- knew it'd be a lot of hard work and we were realistic about that but but like we'd been saying afterwards we wanted to be sure that it was such a big step to the extent that she was born in the mid-semester break so that he could take time off

Marian: ((laughing)) that's good timing

Annegret: we're just lucky we got pregnant shh honey ((to child)) if you keep talking to me it'll take even longer to get to Ros's yeah so that was just really lucky you know we were able to get pregnant and take time off to have lectures and stuff to be at home for a week it's funny i mean probably the second time I know I think he would just basically say oh it doesn't matter when it happens I'll do it anyway but uhm the first time although you know it's gonna be- like I want to work but you still don't know until it actually happens without thinking about

---

[12] The type of probe also affects interaction in in-depth interviews. However, this topic is not pursued in this research.

what that means in terms of parenthood and all of that- all the emotional thing that goes with it yeah so

Annegret's information above highlights the way in which one respondent perceives a field-coded question. When describing her reaction to Annie's probe that used the words of the response option, she says, 'I thought why is she asking that?'. Her longer answer here touches on all the responses obtained in both surveys. Annegret's interview is unusual in this.

In all WOC interviews except Annegret's Annie had to do more work to interpret the respondent's 'unformatted' first answer and format it in terms of a response option. In some cases this seemed, on the surface, a reasonable interpretation. For example, Coral's 'bad luck,' Karen's 'accident.', Jess and Sonya's 'fate' first answers were recorded as (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. In three of these four cases, however, examining the interaction raises doubt that this might be an over-simplification, leading to a loss or distortion of information. Karen's interview went this way:

Segment 3 Karen   (04; 04, 11, 13)

```
78.    Int:        °°to stop pregnancy (              )°° a:::h what
79.                determined the timing of your first child.
80.    Karen:      accident.
81.    Int:        accident.
82.    Karen:      ah hah hah hah [hah
83.    Int:                       [was it actuall(h)y- hh was it a failure?
84.                of contraception? or family planning method? or just
85.                unplanned.
86.    Karen:      just unplanned actually¿ we'd been- we'd been- married
87.                for five years, and we thought we'd try, and then we
88.                tried and (.) nothing much happened so i started
89.                studying and (.) blow me down my second study packages
90.                arrived and i find i'm pregnant. [ah hah hah hah hah
91.    Int:                                         [o::::h.
92.    Int:        so you'd actually got to the point where you
93.                felt right about it=>(sort of/things) you know< like-
94.                you were established in your relationship and
95.                [(              )
96.    Karen:      [yeah. o::h definitely. [definitely.
97.    Int:                                [yeah? well we'll put that down
98.                too then. (0.6) u:m (1.3) t! (1.0) yep (.) •hh ↑and ↑a:h
99.                (.) i'm going to read out ((next question))
```

[MMPh#19:78–99]

Karen's 'accident.' is eventually reformatted and recorded as (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*, the only response option circled for this question. Annie probes, giving Karen a choice of three options, the first two of which did not apply: 'was it

actuall(h)y- hh was it a <u>failure</u>? of contraception? or family planning method? or just unplanned.' (lines 83–5). The word 'unplanned' is used first by Annie and then confirmed by Karen. Karen's answer implies that the timing was unplanned but the birth itself was planned. Because it is asked as a yes–no question, this probe is directive and suggestive to the respondent of how she should answer. For Annie it is a pragmatic solution to her difficulty of obtaining a response option that matches the list.

Karen's story suggests far more detail and complexity than can possibly be captured by response option (04). Annie puts up a candidate answer (lines 92–5). This answer is formulated in terms of two response options, (11) and (13), and presented together as one yes–no question. Again, Annie has infringed the interviewer's rule of probing only in a neutral way. This seems to have led to her circling options (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. Both these options give the impression that this was 'determined' timing, but neither came spontaneously from Karen. Karen signals definite agreement, however. The interaction here raises the question of what constitutes 'planning' when it comes to the timing of a birth. Is it 'unplanned' when Karen becomes pregnant at this stage, having wanted to become pregnant in the past? As will be apparent from other interview segments analysed in this chapter, the ambiguity of the phrase 'timing of your first child' means that sometimes the question could be interpreted as referring to the timing of the conception of the child and sometimes to the timing of 'having' a child or continuing the pregnancy.[13] It is hard to see what conclusions could be drawn from these responses without the benefit of Karen's story.

For Sonya, with four children in 1998, options (04) and (05) were circled:

---

[13] This assumes that termination was a choice for these women. Young and Ware (1978:8–9), reporting results from the 1977 *Melbourne Survey*, note that '4 per cent of women in the follow-up and recently married groups have had an abortion, and another one-third of the follow-up sample and one-quarter of the recently married sample would possibly consider it—for reasons largely related to not wanting any more children. An additional one-third from each sample could imagine having an abortion in extreme circumstances—generally for reasons such as medical indications in the mother or the baby'.

Segment 4 Sonya   (04; 04, 05)

```
103.                    a:nd (.) a:h ↑what determined the timing of your first
104.                    child.
105.    (1.6)
106.    Sonya:          ↑u:m fate¿
107.    Int:            (°                                              °)
108.    Sonya:          hah hhh [yeah]
109.    Int:                   [u:m ] was it er- a failure of contraception.
110.                    or                  )
111.    Sonya:          ↑u:m (2.0) ↑no:: ↑it ↑wasn't. ↑no.
112.    Int:            (°just unplanned                        °)
113.    Sonya:          yep- i- ↑yeah. i- i've- ↓yeah.=i've had lots of
114.                    problems=i've fallen pregnant on the pill and they've
115.                    (.) given me stronger ones and it doesn't work for me.
116.                    yeah. oh well.=
117.    Int:            =but this time it was just unplanned (°it was just-°
118.    Sonya:          yeah it was unplanned. i was on contraception. (but) it
119.                    failed.
120.    Int:            (°right°)
121.    Sonya:          yep
122.    Int:            (°              8.0                  °)
123.    Sonya:          we only planned one child.
124.    Int:            °right.° (one child)
125.    Sonya:          yep
126.    Int:            ↑now i'm going to read out ((next question))
```

<div align="center">

[MMPh#7:103–26]

</div>

If, like Sonya, a respondent gives a first answer that implies no control or external control of timing, Annie records (04) on the interview schedule. She usually then follows up with a yes–no question, based on (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*, asking directly whether it was a failure of contraception or family planning method, rather than using the instruction on the interview schedule *Any other reasons?* as a prompt. Without a directive probe, would Sonya have come up with response option (05) herself? At one point in the interview (line 111) Sonya says repeatedly, after some thought, that it was not a failure of contraception: '↑u:m (2.0) ↑no:: ↑it ↑wasn't. ↑no.' After further checking from Annie, however, Sonya says emphatically, 'yeah it was unplanned. i was on contraception. (but) it failed.' The impression is that there is more to this story than meets the eye; perhaps if the interaction had proceeded differently different response options could have been recorded. Options (04) and (05) are logically related and may reflect what occurs during this interaction, but how accurately do they represent Sonya's situation?

Annie recorded (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* for the interview with Jess:

Segment 5 Jess (01, 14; 04)

```
63.   Int:    u:::m (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
64.   (0.6)
65.   Jess:   •hh fate. ahHAH HAH HAH nHAH HUH HUH HUH •hh hold on a
66.           moment until we see if he's quiet or see if he
67.           squeals=no=totally unexpected.
68.   Int:    and was it actually a failure of contraception or family
69.           planning method?
70.   (1.0)
71.   Jess:   o:::hhh let's see::, let's see: ubwa wa wa wa (.) •hh i
72.           guess¿ yeah¿ hhh[hh  ](h)
73.   Int:                    [     ]
74.   Jess:   well actually no:: no:[:   ] not- no:: not at all. just-=
75.   Int:                          [no. ]
76.   Int:    =it was just unplanned
77.   Jess:   °ye:ss. it was unplanned.°
78.   Int:    (°                                               °)
79.   Jess:   MM HM yars
80.   Int:    ↑a::h ↑no::w ↑how many children ((next question))
```

[MMPh#9:63–80]

Jess was asked a different variant of this question in the Wave 1 NLC interview as she had not yet had a child at that time. Her responses, then, might be expected to differ between the two surveys. The earlier responses for Jess were recorded as (01) *I have to get a partner first* and (14) *Feeling financially secure*. In the WOC interview Annie records only one response for Jess—(04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. She attempts to obtain a second by using a yes–no question, a directive probe based on response option (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*. At first Jess signals a dispreferred response with lengthened syllables, discourse markers, repetition and pauses, ending with rising intonation. This question is difficult for her. When questioned further by Annie's 'yes?' she changes her mind: well actually no:: no:: not- no:: not at all. just-,' again showing features of a dispreferred response. Annie finishes her sentence for her, providing her with a candidate answer: 'it was just unplanned'. Jess confirms this: '°ye:ss. it was unplanned.°' and Annie moves on to the next question without trying for a second reason. Annie makes a decision based on Jess's responses to her directive probes without knowing the situation Jess is recalling; Jess is answering Annie's questions without knowing that some answers are acceptable as responses but not others.

The pattern in the interview with Jess resembles what occurs with Sonya and Karen (Segments 3 and 4). Regardless of whether the recorded options reflect these women's situations, Sonya's, Karen's and Jess's first answers were fairly easily interpretable and able to be formatted in terms of one of the response options—(04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. Those of Carol and Tonia took more effort. Both respondents had (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established* recorded as an option, though it is impossible to tell in which order the options were circled.

Carol's first answer was as follows:

Segment 6 Carol   (11, 07; 07, 08, 09, 11, 14)

```
 93.   Int:      ↑um (.) what determined the timing of your [first child.
 94.   Carol:                                                [•hh
 95.   Carol:    hh o::h hh um now, let's see. •hh >what was that<
 96.             ↑↑well. um. (0.6) •hh we'd been married fo::r hh •hh hh
 97.             ↑well we'd been together f- •hh now ha- >how long-
 98.             nineteen eighty three she was born and< •hh so we'd been
 99.             together for about five yea::rs, we came back to
100.             Australia, •hh we (.) bought a hou:se, so- it- we sort
101.             of seemed fairly settled, •hh
102.   Int:      and ah was it also that your relationship was
103.             established?
104.   Carol:    mm hm
105.   Int:      and financial considerations as well? [or you were=
106.   Carol:                                           [↑um
107.   Int:      =feeling right about [it (           )?
108.   Carol:                         [•hh ↑well- financial
109.             considerations hh •hh were a concern,=like- i wouldn't
110.             have done it before i had •hh ah- we both had regular
111.             permanent jobs.
112.   Int:      oh. i see. (°          you were established in
113.             your career [and=
114.   Carol:               [y-
115.   Int:      =your partner was estab[lished] in his career        °)
116.   Carol:                           [yeah  ]
117.          (2.3)
118.   Int:      ↑u::m (.) ↑a:nd (.) i'm going to read ((next question))
```

[MMPh#15:93–118]

Annie recorded five responses for Carol, although only two were required. In her first answer (lines 95–101) after a series of false starts, discourse markers and cues that indicate difficulty in answering immediately, Carol tells a story, summarising it herself with a formulation: 'so- it- we sort of seemed fairly settled, ·hh.' The frame of Carol's answer is in terms of the duration of their relationship and, together with the concept of 'settled', might be interpreted in terms of option (11) *My relationship with my*

partner being well established. Carol's response is not exactly in terms of any response option, and Annie checks the appropriateness of her interpretation using a directive yes–no probe based on response option (11). If she does not use the words of the response option in her probe, there is no certainty that Carol will herself produce the exact wording of the option. Carol responds with an acknowledgment token, 'mm hm'. Without using a formulation it is hard to see how Annie could control the flow of the interview in the direction of negotiating a response. Without the suggestion of a frame for her answer in such a formulation Carol's response could take even longer.

In lines 105–7, Annie proposes two more candidate responses, using some of topic words of options (14) *Feeling financially secure* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. Annie's choice of these options seems arbitrary as nothing in the previous interaction seems to suggest them. Carol responds positively to (14) but does not address (13). The response (09) *Having enough money to buy a house* is circled on the basis of what Carol says in her first answer. Whether having enough money to buy a house determined the timing of her first child of itself is not clear from this interaction. The causal relationship is not transparent. Yes, they had enough money to buy a house, but whether this was a reason for the timing of the first child is unclear.

Options (07) *Being established in my career*, (08*) My partner being established in their career*, and (14) *Feeling financially secure* seem to be derived from lines 108–11, although what Carol says about financial considerations does not necessarily amount to feeling financially secure. Again, Annie is in the position of having to decide on options unknown to the respondent, supposedly without probing in a directive manner. Why did Annie choose (11) and (14) as probes? She could equally have used different response options as probes—(02), (10) or (12) for example—with different response options perhaps being circled on the interview schedule as a result.

Although five response options were recorded for Carol in the WOC Survey, NLC Wave 1 allowed for only two. Options (11) and (07) were recorded. This raises the question as to whether information was given but not recorded for this question in

NLC Wave 1, thus resulting in unnecessary loss or distortion of information, or whether the interaction proceeded differently. The interaction between Carol and Annie also raises the issue of the order in which response options are mentioned and recorded. From the interaction between Carol and Annie in the WOC interview, several possibilities arise for ordering the responses eventually recorded. Option (09) could have been recorded first, as 'house' is the first topic word mentioned that coincides with the topic word of a response option. Jenny's interview raises this question also (Segment 8). It is clear that response options were not necessarily produced in discrete parts of the interaction, but often formulated from fragments of talk throughout the interaction over the question.

The first answers of Andrea, Melinda, Lyn, Edith, Jenny, Noelle, and Kristen all resulted in the interviewer and respondent doing considerable interactional work to negotiate the response options. Andrea gave age as an answer, an option not included in the list and not interpretable in terms of any other option. Kristen gave being on fertility drugs as an answer. Noelle's and Lyn's answers (Segments 7 and 12 below) caused difficulty because they answered in terms of wanting a child:

Segment 7 Noelle   (13, 10; 11, 13)

```
106.   Int:        what determined the timing of your first child.
107.   Noelle:     what did i- sorry?
108.   Int:        >sorry< what determined the timing of your first child.
109.               (0.3)
110.   Noelle:     u:m (1.3) because (.) i wanted to.
111.   Int:        because you wanted to. ↑um so, was it that you felt it
112.               was (0.3) the right time, (1.0) you felt right about
113.               it,=
114.   Noelle:     =well, i planned to, (.) so,=
115.   Int:        =yes (°it was planned°)
116.   Noelle:     °yes°
117.   Int:        was it a:h to do with - >you know< you felt like a
118.               change, or-
119.   Noelle:     •hh o:::h. no::, i think probably just because (.) i was
120.               getting a bit ↑o(h)(h)lder. hh
121.   Int:        ↑oh ↑i see,
122.   Noelle:     ↑yeah. a:nd (.) just- (.) simply because ↑yeah.=we (.)
123.               decided that that was what we both wanted, and (.)
124.               didn't want to wait any longer¿ so¿
125.   (7.0) ((interviewer's voice also very quiet here))
126.   Int:        (                                    relationship well
127.               established
128.   Noelle:     (                                                   )
129.   Int:        ↑and ↑a::h ↑now i'm going to read ((next question))
```

Noelle answers the question with her reason: 'u:m (1.3) because (.) i <u>wa</u>nted to.' As with many of the other interviews, her answer does not help Annie circle a response option. Annie formulates a candidate answer using '↑<u>um</u> so, was it that you felt it was (0.3) the right <u>time</u>, (1.0) you felt right about it,' some of the words of option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. This does not bring forth an allowable response, and Noelle comes up with another reason not on the list: '<u>well</u>, i <u>pl</u>anned to, (.) so,'.[14] Annie tries again with a yes–no question using material that does not appear to be based on any listed response option: 'was it a:h to do with - >you know< you felt like a change, or-'. This does not produce a listed response option either; instead, Noelle gives the reason of her age: '·hh o:::h. no::, i think probably just because (.) i was getting a bit ↑<u>o(h)(h)</u>lder. hh.' Then in lines 121–3 she tells Annie again her initial reason: 'a:nd (.) just- (.) <u>si</u>mply because ↑yeah.=we (.) decided that that was what we both <u>wa</u>nted, and (.) didn't want to wait any longer¿ so¿'. Although the next two turns are not clear on the tape because of the noise of children, Annie uses the words 'relationship well established', words that appear in option (11). Noelle's answer is not audible, but (11) is circled on the interview schedule.

Noelle's interview is particularly interesting in the way that none of the reasons she produces match the response options. She persists in telling her own reasons in her own way. Neither of the recorded responses was initiated by Noelle. Annie wrote underneath the list of options: 'was getting a bit older.' For NLC Wave 1 Noelle's response were (13) and (10).

Jenny's first answer was as follows:

---

[14] Schiffrin (1987:107) notes: 'When respondents do not take the ideational options offered by the form of a prior question...*well* is frequently used to mark the answer.' Pomerantz (1984a) notes that *well* prefaces disagreement, acting in the same way as *yes but* and silence, signalling responses that are in some way dispreferred. Lakoff (1973 cited in Schiffrin 1987:102) observes that *well* prefaces responses that are insufficient answers to questions. *Well* occurs more frequently after wh- than yes–no questions (Schiffrin 1987:104ff).

Segment 8 Jenny   (13; 08, 10, 11, 13, 14)

```
93.   Int:      (              ) what determined the timing of your first
94.             child.
95.   Jenny:    a::h (2.0) an agreement that we would start a f- start a
96.             family.
97.   Int:      so was it that you (                              )
98.   Jenny:    ↑um (0.3) ↑well=we had married=i hadn't worked
99.             °fulltime° for about four years, and i decided i (    )
100.            but (0.3) (my husband/like i) was twenty six then, so
101.            yea:::h.=(it seemed the time was right) (1.3) time was
102.            getting on? (um                wait any longer.)
103.  Int:      (              there are) a whole lot of options
104.            (here)=one of them is (                relationship)
105.  Jenny:    ↑yeah.
```

<div align="center">[MMPh#23:93–105]</div>

Jenny and Annie took 25 turns to complete the question, with five reasons being circled. Only the first part of the interaction is reproduced here. Jenny's first answer is not acceptable to Annie, who then asks her a yes–no question. Like Noelle, Jenny prefaces her next answer with '↑well', indicating a dispreferred response; this response does not sufficiently answer the question (inaudible) (line 97). Annie reverts to being open about the list of options in front of her on the interview schedule and outlines 'one of them'. This achieves a result in terms of the option that Annie suggests—(11) *My relationship with my partner being well established.*

The way Annie deals with Edith's first answer is different again:

Segment 9 Edith   (05; 04, 05, 13)

```
124.  Int:      °okay.° ↑now ↑what detim- what determined (.) the timing
125.            of your first child.
126.  Edith:    a::h (1.3) what determined?
127.  Int:      mm. what- was it- you know- you- you were just newly
128.            married and wanted to have a child as soon as possible
129.            (                      )
130.  Edith:    no no not at all.
131.  Int:      (°it was unplanned°)
132.  Edith:    ↑yea:h. it was.=[i was on the pill.
133.  Int:                      [hah hah
134.  Int:      oh. ri::ght.
135.  Edith:    ↑yeah. (1.0) and the second one i had an IUD.
136.  Int:      oh. right.
137.  Edith:    °°yeah°°
138.  Int:      AND AH- SO (.) but obviously you were (.) in a
139.            relationship where (you would [have  ] received a lot=
140.  Edith:                                   [°yeah.]
141.  Int:      =of support.)
142.  Edith:    °yeah. yeah.°
143.            (1.3)
144.  Int:      ↑now ↑a::h- i'm going to read you ((next question))
```

When Edith indicates trouble with the question, instead of repeating what was written on the interview schedule, Annie abandons the question. This breaches rules for interviewer behaviour.[15] She asks instead a yes–no question, formatted in terms of response option (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage.* When this is rejected, Annie puts up an apparently arbitrary candidate answer based on response option (4): '(°it was unplanned°)'. Her laughter when this was emphatically accepted by Edith was a laugh of surprise, perhaps because she had guessed correctly. Edith equates 'unplanned' with 'failure of contraception' here. Later (line 138) Annie's use of 'obviously' and her directive probing statement make it very difficult for Edith to decline Annie's formulation of her situation.[16] Annie circles option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* for this interview, when there appears to be no evidence for this in what Edith says; in fact, (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established* might have been a closer interpretation, based on the participants' interaction.

Does <u>yeah</u> (particularly °yeah°) always mean 'yes'? Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000:121–7) gives many examples of respondent acquiescence, noting: 'The standardized survey interview is typically a social interaction in which the respondents readily agree with the interviewers' statements, even though they may not be (quite) correct.' Molenaar and Smit (1996) show that respondents usually give agreeing answers to 'one-sided positive yes–no questions', a strategy in 'normal' conversation'. In her study of the interactional function of soft talk in research interviews Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997b:3,5) notes that the use of low volume is associated with passivity: 'Conversationalists use low volume to indicate that they are not ready to take the turn, or to indicate their preparedness to give up the turn'. It appears that often the

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[15] See, for example, Suchman and Jordan (1990a:233f). Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997a:613) and Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki (1997:295) note that this is frequent interviewer behaviour.

[16] Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997:299) found that declarative questions such as this have the same effect as leading or directive questions. They are used when speakers have good reason to believe the proposition to be a fact; that is, when they already believe that they have the answer.

respondent, like Edith, is going along with what the interviewer is saying as a response to a formulation. To say 'no', a respondent must do more interactional work, particularly when her decision is to reject the interviewer's formulation. It is much harder to disagree than to agree with a formulation. This is particularly so if the formulation is not inaccurate. However, without knowing the response options, the respondent is not in a position to agree to the 'best fit' among all response options. Here, Edith seems to assent to Annie's understanding.

A respondent puts an interaction in jeopardy by 'disconfirming' an interviewer's formulation (Heritage and Watson 1979:136–53), hence putting the sense of the interaction so far back to 'square one'.[17] Molenaar and Smit (1996:133–4) found that, since 'both the interviewer and the respondent care about their relationship,' some contributions may reflect 'an act of politeness rather than a sincere opinion'. Houtkoop-Steenstra (1996:216-9) notes, on the basis of Dutch interviews, that 'yes' (*ja*) often may not mean 'yes', but, rather, be acquiescence in the face of difficulties in addressing the frame of the question.

Kristen's WOC interview produced none of the listed response options. In NLC Wave 1 (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* were recorded. Annie wrote underneath the list: 'trying c. fertility drugs.' This segment is an example of what happens when Annie does not use formulation based on the response options to obtain a response:

Segment 10 Kristen   (06, 13; –)

```
131.   Int:         ↑u:m and what determined the timing of your first child.
132.   Kristen:     pardon?
133.   Int:         what determined the timing of your first child.
134.   Kristen:     well i was on a fertility drug with my first one,
135.   Int:         right. [were you- eventually-        ]
136.   Kristen:           [because they said i couldn't-] yeah. cos they
137.                said i couldn't get pregnant.
138.   Int:         ri:ght. (0.3) ↑so you were actually trying.
139.   Kristen:     yeah. i was actually trying. yeah. but there was
140.                something wrong with him too=he had a low sperm count.
141.                •hh
142.   Int:         °ri:ght°.
```

---

[17] For a more detailed discussion see Heritage and Watson (1979), Pomerantz (1984a) and Sacks (1987).

```
143.   Kristen:    so:: i think there was a bit of a problem with both of
144.               us, and (.) •hh then i fell pregnant with Ben and then
145.               (.) Patricia:, hh it was just automatic,
146.               [it was really ↑good,]
147.   Int:        [oh  r i: g h t    ] right=
148.   Kristen:    =so it was good. i m- wasn't on the fertility drug with
149.               her,
150.   Int:        °ri:ght°=
151.   Kristen:    =so that was good.
152.   Int:        (°right°) ↑u:m [and when-
153.   Kristen:                   [a bit of a surPRISE $actually$
154.               [hh  HA  HA  HA ] •hh $yea:::h$.
155.   Int:        [°yea::hheh heh°]
156.   Int:               so the next question is, ((next question))
```

[MMPh#6:131–56]

Kristen's interview is by far the longest of the WOC survey interviews. Kristen's strategies for keeping her turn are well developed, and as the interview progresses Annie yields more and more to Kristen's strategies. Kristen is able to keep her turn in this interaction (lines 136, 148, 151) and keeps talking, preventing Annie from taking a turn. Annie misses a chance in line 138, where she takes the opportunity to formulate a probe; however, because the probe is not in terms of one of the listed response options, Kristen's agreement does not yield an allowable response. She has another opportunity to take a turn at line 142, and produces a sequence-closing third, indicating a possible close to the sequence. Annie's use of 'right' here (lines 142, 147, 150, 152) acknowledges Kristen's answers, but since she still has not obtained an allowable response, it might indicate that she is still trying to put the information together to fit a response option.[18] Kristen continues talking about her pregnancies. Annie makes a final attempt in line 152 to ask a question, but Kristen keeps talking and Annie gives way. After 19 turns no response options are forthcoming from Kristen, and Annie ends the interaction on this question.

What Annie says during Melinda's interview is unclear in parts. However, the interaction translated into two response options, (10) *Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*:

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[18] In interviews the response token, 'right,' seems to have a sense of 'putting the bits together', a recognition of something mentioned before, and then moving on (Gardner 1999). The entire interview with Kristen demonstrates the difficulty of making connections between what Kristen says and the demands of the questions.

Segment 11 Melinda (13, 06; 10, 13)

```
79.   Int:          now (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
80.   (1.6)
81.   Melinda:      t! u:m (.) just ready,
82.   Int:          °jus[t ready°
83.   Melinda:          [i- i was ready, and my (            ) husband was
84.                 ready and (we were) both keen and-
85.   (3.0)
86.   Int:          well (                                              )
87.   Melinda:      sorry,
88.   Int:          >sorry< (it- it just
89.                     the whole                                       )
90.   Melinda:      oh i see
91.   Int:          (                                   one of them is
92.                 feeling able to cope with the demands of a child)
93.   Melinda:      yes. yes.
94.                 (1.3)
95.   Int:          ↑u:m (.) ↑now i'm going to read you ((next question))
```

[MMPh#16:79–95]

Melinda's answer 't! u:m (.) just ready,' also does not exactly correspond with any response option. Annie has interpreted it as corresponding in meaning to option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. As with most of the interaction over this question in other interviews, Annie has no option but to use her judgment to interpret the answer of the respondent and reformat it in terms of a response option in order to obtain a response. What respondents say and the way these answers are formatted into response options is not often equivalent. Perhaps it a reasonable interpretation in Melinda's case; nevertheless, Melinda is not given an opportunity to confirm Annie's interpretation.

The second option circled for Melinda was (10) *Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child*. Annie suggests this option to Melinda, referring to 'one of them'. Annie seems to be referring to the list of response options and using the options themselves to probe for further reasons. As shown by other interviews, probing with the words of a response option in a formulation is an effective and economical way for the interviewer to encourage the respondent to format the answer so that the option can be circled without delay (Heritage and Watson 1979). Melinda's interview is another example of the way in which this probing is arbitrary and suggestive, however. Not all response options are offered equally. The tendency of respondents to acquiesce also cannot be discounted (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:121–127; Molenaar and Smit 1996).

It is already obvious from segments of interviews cited so far in this chapter that, although the question is asked in a fairly similar way for each respondent, the way in which probing occurs is not standard. The validity of the research instrument is called into question, as, according to guidelines for standardised interviewing, interviewers should present all respondents with the same stimuli and probe in a neutral way (de Vaus 1995:115–6; Fowler and Mangione 1990:138; Frey and Oishi 1995:2; Gorden 1969:214–20; Houtkoop-Steenstra 1995:91–2, 2000:2; Keats 2000:64ff; Macro International Inc. 1997:14; Stewart and Cash 1991:Chapter 6).

Lyn's response is not formatted in terms of any of the response options on the questionnaire. The interaction between Lyn and Annie is shown below:

Segment 12 Lyn   (04; 04, 05, 13)

```
96.    Int:   •hh now what determined the timing of your first child.
97.    (7.0)
98.    Lyn:   a:h i thi:nk (.) i just >wanted to have a child.<
99.    Int:   so you just decided that you felt (.) right about it (.) at the
100.          ti:me, like ([°°              °°)=
101.   Lyn:                 [well hhh
102.   Int:   =(°°            °°)
103.   Lyn:   the pregnancy was accidental, but °um° but yeah (.) (°i wanted
104.          to have a child°)
105.   Int:   (°°okay°°) ↑um now do you mind me asking was it a failure of
106.          contraceptive (behaviour?) (°°      3.0                  °°)
107.   Lyn:   um hhh i wouldn't say it was a failure of- of contraceptives¿ i
108.          (2.5) <i-i hhhad a (.) miscarriage> before i had Lewis. and
109.          that pregnancy was completely (.) unplanned.
110.   Int:   ri:ght.
111.   Lyn:   a:nd (.) in the period after the miscarriage, (1.0)
112.          >immediately after the miscarriage< (0.3) >°you know°<
113.          contraception was interrupted. a:nd (.) i- i sh- i should have
114.          wai:ted longer than i did, but (.) for some reason i just fell
115.          pregnant very easily °afterwards.°
116.   Int:   (°°right.°°) (3.0) °oka:y¿° ↑u:::m now i'm going to read out
117.          ((next question))
```

[MMPh#2:96–117]

Annie first reformulates Lyn's answer as a yes–no question using the words of response option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*: 'so you just decided that you felt (.) right about it (.) at the ti:me, like ...' Lyn's answer to this formulation was not 'yes' or 'no' but 'well', an indication that she does not readily agree with Annie's

formulation, but is actively considering, deliberating or sizing up the question.[19] Lyn goes on to say that although the pregnancy was accidental, she wanted to have a child, repeating her first answer to the question. This highlights a difficulty with the ambiguity of concepts contained in the question; a respondent might not feel 'right' about becoming pregnant but might feel 'right' about continuing the pregnancy to term. Again, timing can be unplanned even if a birth is planned. This is not reflected in the response options.

Lyn's concession to Annie's formulation—'so you just de<u>cid</u>ed that you felt (.) <u>right</u> about it (.) at the ti:me, like (°°   °°).'—is in line with research that shows respondents are reluctant to disagree with interviewers and will often acquiesce or compromise on their responses in the interests of maintaining a harmonious relationship (Brown and Levinson 1987; Heritage and Watson 1979; Houtkoop-Steenstra 1996; Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki 1997; Molenaar and Smit 1996). Lyn's answer poses a problem for Annie because it still does not fit any of the responses on the interview schedule.

Much of the detail and complexity of Lyn's answer is lost in the coded responses for this question. Annie circled (04), (05), (13) and (14),[20] and wrote in the margin, 'had a miscarriage & then in the next ~~period~~ cycle had a failed contraceptive method & got pregnant c. L.' The way in which Lyn talks about her experience is clumsily formatted into these response options. She explicitly states: 'um hhh i wouldn't say it was a failure of- of contra<u>cep</u>tives¿' (one of the options recorded by Annie). The way in which she talks about her experience does not fit the way the responses are conceptualised and categorised on the interview schedule. Annie does not prolong the interaction by asking further questions. Her responses are minimal, 'right.' with falling intonation (lines 110, 116); this seems to indicate that she is making connections with

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[19] This is Schourup's (2001) interpretation of 'well'.

[20] (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*; (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*; (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*; (14) *Feeling financially secure*.

what Lyn said earlier (Gardner 1999). The impression Annie's response gives is that this is too difficult to deal with further and that she has enough information without responding to the complexity of Lyn's reasons.

The most complex interaction in terms of the numbers of turns Annie and the respondent take to negotiate an answer occurs in the interview with Dale (Segment 13). This interview brings together many of the interactional features occurring for this question illustrated in the examples above (Segments 1–12):

Segment 13 Dale   (10, 08; 10, 13, 14)

```
77.    Int:    °oka:y° so ↑what will determine when or if you have um t! (0.6)
78.            °a child° >oh hold on no< [what determined the timing of your=
79.    Dale:                            [no
80.    Int:    = first child=°that's the first question°
81.    Dale:   ↑u:::m (1.3) o:h. (1.0) probly:: age factor i'd say¿
82.    Int:    your- your age? [(you mean)] so u:m (.) was that a:h=
83.    Dale:                   [yeah yeah ]
84.    Int:    =that you felt (.) that you were getting (.) to the point at
85.            which you wanted to make a decision before you got too old?
86.    Dale:   yes. you know, like i didn't want to be too old to enjoy her
87.            hah hah hah
88.    Int:    yeah.
89.    Dale:   ↑yeah.
90.    Int:    (so °°                          °°) ((baby noises)) and (.)
91.            were there also considerations about u:m wanting a child as
92.            soon as possible after you were married? (            )
93.    Dale:   ↑a::h ↑oh ↑no not really, we <sort of> (.) u:m (1.3) oh i guess
94.            probly a few friends (.) 'n family and that started having
95.            them, and we thought oh we: ·h we liked being around them so
96.            maybe it's about time we(h)e(h): [(.) ·hh] thought about=
97.    Int:                                     [right  ]
98.    Dale:   =having one of our own¿
99.    Int:    °okay° so felt able to (.) cope with the demands of a chi[ld?
100.   Dale:                                                            [yeah.
101.           yes i think so,
102.   Int:    and also:: u:m felt right about it=[that-] these are just=
103.   Dale:                                      [mm hm]
104.   Int:    =different options that (°                                 °)
105.           (u:m) ↑were finances a consideration at all? (           )
106.   Dale:   ↑u::m (1.3) ↑o:h (2.0) ↑no ↑not rea:lly, we're like um t! (0.6)
107.           well (.) i mean i'm- i'm on- (.) on maternity leave for twelve
108.           mo:nths, so we had to sort of make sure that we could afford
109.           tha:t¿ u::m
110.   Int:    before you deci[ded.
111.   Dale:                  [before we decided¿ so
112.   Int:    so financial security was [(a consideration)
113.   Dale:                             [yeah i'd say financial security
114.           yeah.
115.   (2.0)
116.   Int:    ↑u:m (.) a:nd ↑how many children ((next question))
```

[MMPh#8:77–116]

Annie circled three response options as a result of this interaction: (10) *Feeling able to cope with the demands of a child*, (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*, and (14) *Feeling financially secure*. Underneath the response options she wrote: 'age was a factor didn't want to be too old. Friends had kids & we liked hanging around them so we decided to have one too'. In the NLC interview less than two years before, the responses recorded for Dale were (10) and (8) as first and second reasons, respectively.

Annie's first task is to ascertain which variant of the question to ask. As mentioned before, this was made more difficult without the prompts provided by the CATI system. Dale's 'no' (line 79) mirrors Annie's and seems to indicate that Dale, too, hears this as an inappropriate question for her. She thinks for some time before coming out with her answer: '↑u:::m (1.3) o:h. (1.0) probly:: age factor i'd say¿'. This answer is not one of the responses that Annie has before her.[21] She reformulates Dale's answer but in different terms again from any of the response options. Thus, she is no closer to a response after two attempts, but her reformulation is met with approval from Dale, followed by laughter: 'yes. you know, like i didn't want to be too old to enjoy her hah hah hah.'

No material from Dale's previous response on age suggests a logical next topic or question to ask as far as the allowable response options are concerned (lines 86–7). Annie asks a yes–no question framed in terms of response option (06), providing Dale with a candidate answer: 'and (.) were there also considerations about u:m wanting a child as soon as possible after you were married?' (line 90). She converts the response option material into a yes–no question that can be asked as a seemingly natural part of the conversation, rather than sounding like one of a list of possible responses in front of her.[22] Looking at the list of response options, the choice of (06) as the first candidate

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[21] The fact that 'age' comes up quite frequently as a first answer suggests that it could usefully be included in the list of response options. However, its appearance as a first answer may not be transparent to the survey designer if the interviewer then goes on to record two allowable responses.

[22] Heritage and Watson (1979:152) Molenaar and Smit (1996) and Houtkoop-Steenstra (2000:Chapter 4) note this phenomenon. It seems that interviewers often abandon the rules of standardised survey

answer seems arbitrary. If Annie were looking for a new topic to provide a second reason, having not succeeded with 'age' as a reason allowed on the questionnaire, she could have asked about any of a number of others on the list: (02), (07)–(09), or (11)–(14). If she were working systematically down the list, she might have been expected to ask about response option (02) in this way.

The WOC interviewer is given wording for prompting for a second reason (*Any other reason?*), and in a standardised survey interview it might be expected that she would use this wording. However, this arbitrary use of specific response options reframed as yes–no questions is noted in previous research as being a very common strategy for interviewers faced with field-coded questions (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:Ch.6; Smit 1995; Smit *et al.* 1997). Interviewers are caught between the demands of maintaining a normal conversation, not revealing to the respondent that the options for answering this question are limited in any way, and yet obtaining allowable responses to the question to record on the questionnaire. If the respondent were to be allowed to continue to choose her own topic throughout the interaction on a field-coded question such as this, the interaction might proceed for a very long time before an allowable response came up naturally in the conversation. Asking a yes–no question is a pragmatic way for the interviewer to deal with these irreconcilable demands, but, as noted by Fowler and Mangione (1990:40–1), a probe that can be answered by 'yes' or 'no' is directive.

In any case, Dale rejects Annie's candidate answer as a possible reason (line 93). She then gives her own reason: 'we <sort of> (.) u:m (1.3) oh i <u>guess</u> probly a few friends (.) 'n <u>family</u> and that started having them, and we thought oh we: ·h we liked being <u>around</u> them so maybe it's about time we(h)e(h): (.) ·hh thought about having one of our <u>own</u>¿' Annie uses a formulation here, phrased as a yes–no question in the words of response option (10): '°okay° so felt <u>able</u> to (.) cope with the demands of a child?'

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interviewing and follow the principles of ordinary conversation to manage the interaction. Respondents sometimes become confused when interviewers adhere strictly to standardised interviewing procedures and appear to be incompetent conversationalists (Houtkoop-Steenstra 2000:69–85).

The omission of 'you', as would be expected in addressing someone in conversational interaction underlines that this comes from the response option. Dale's answer 'yeah. yes i think so,' is not convincing agreement; the final rising intonation leaves it unfinished. Annie moves on without a pause to give another formulation candidate answer using some of the words of response option (13) (line 102). This time she openly acknowledges that there are options for the responses, but the use of 'just' minimises what follows:[23]

Segment 14 Dale   (10, 08; 10, 13, 14)

```
102.   Int:   and also:: u:m felt right about it=[that- these are just=
103.   Dale:                                     [mm hm
104.   Int:   =different options that (°                             °)
105.          (u:m) ↑were finances a consideration at all? (         )
```

[MMPh#8:102–5]

Dale responds to Annie's statement (no longer a question) with an acknowledgement token, 'mm hm'. Annie seems to have taken this as agreement, as she circled (13) on the questionnaire. Even though she already seems to have two reasons, she asks another yes–no question, this time using 'finances' as a topic, also the topic of response option (14). The way Annie asks this question sounds very much like the kind of question someone would casually ask in conversation (Molenaar and Smit 1996). Dale replies that finances were not really a consideration, but comes around to agreeing that financial security was a consideration (lines 113): 'yeah i'd say financial security yeah.' This agreement is convincing because 'yeah' is repeated with falling (final) intonation. What prompted Dale to see 'finances' and 'financial security' as different would not be evident without further information. Had Annie not reformulated the question from 'finances' to 'financial security', she might not have circled (14) *Feeling financially secure* as a response option. It is unclear what would have happened had Annie asked instead about another of the response options not already covered, such as (2) *Convincing my partner that it's a good idea*, (7) *Being established in my career*, (09)

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[23] 'Just' is a contextualisation cue, providing an interpretive framework for what follows (Gumperz 1982; Schiffrin 1987). It appears to downgrade or minimise the following talk.

Having enough money to buy a house, (11) *My relationship with my partner being well established*, or (12) *After having enjoyed myself before settling down*? Maybe one of these options would have been circled instead. Again, the onlooker is left with the feeling that the process of confirming that particular response option was a result of the interactional processes occurring between Annie and Dale rather than a direct response to the question. This may go some way to explaining the response option (08) *My partner being established in their career* recorded for Dale's second response in the NLC Wave 1 interview. A different interviewer may also have probed differently.

Throughout this interaction Annie is clearly suggestive in her approach to probing and putting up candidate answers. Left to her own devices, would Dale have come up with the same reasons, and would she have circled the same response options? Would she have used the same words as the response options to describe her experience? If Dale told her experience in her own words and her own way, it may be that none of the options recorded for the two survey interviews would figure in her story.

The interaction between Dale and Annie is the longest for this question; however, the issues raised about how the response options are negotiated are common to most of the interviews. These interviews with the women born after 1950 have shown the use of formulation, yes–no questions phrased in terms of response options, arbitrary selection of particular response options as candidate answers, and apparently arbitrary interpretation of the respondents' answers in terms of the allowable response options for this question. How the interaction occurred between the interviewer and the second group of women, those born in or before 1950, is explored below.

WOC respondents born in or before 1950

The responses to Q167 of WOC respondents born in or before 1950 demonstrate a number of features that distinguish them from the responses of the women born after 1950. Table 4 shows the year of birth, year of marriage, and age at first birth for these women.

Table 4   **Year of birth, year of first marriage and age at first birth, WOC**
respondents born in or before 1950

Respondent	Year of birth	Year first married	Age at first birth
Beverly	1949	na	na
Chrissy	1950	1970	na
Debra	1950	1972	22
Helen	1950	1971	22
Joanne	1947	1968	23
Kerry	1942	1966	25
Lindy	1946	1968	29
Liz	1946	1972	33
Merilyn	1948	1967	20
Nadia	1943	1965	23

Note: na not applicable

Source: NLC 1997

The Office of the Status of Women (1999:119) summarises the demographic experience of the 1950 cohort, the cohort to which the older WOC women mostly belong:

> A woman born in 1950 was likely to marry very young. The majority of these women were married by 21, but the proportion of their contemporaries who did not marry was beginning to increase. The trend toward increasingly universal marriage halted with women born in the early 1950s.
>
> One in ten of her contemporaries would remain childless, and around one in ten (9%) would have only one child. She has a relatively small number of children (average number of births, at 2.3, is the same as the very low rate recorded for the 1905 birth cohort) and had her first child at around 24 years and her last at 29.

Even though only eight WOC respondents were born in or before 1950, their responses to Q167 seem to indicate that their first pregnancies were either accidental or that determining the timing was not an issue. Since modern methods of contraception, such as the pill and IUD, were not readily available in Australia until the early 1960s (Young and Ware 1978:4), the WOC women who were of reproductive age in the early 1960s may have had less knowledge of contraception than did women born later. They may also have had less access to modern and more effective contraception compared to younger women in the survey.

The 1971 *Melbourne Survey* (Caldwell *et al.* 1976) conducted semi-structured interviews with various groups of women. The newly married women interviewed were all married after the beginning of 1971, making them a little younger as a cohort than the WOC women born in or before 1950. Some of these interviews were carried out in Sydney (Campbell 1976) and Canberra (Cosford, Neill, Grocott, Caldwell *et al.* 1976), where some WOC respondents also lived. The semi-structured interviews document the marked attitudinal and behavioural changes that had occurred in the lives of many Australian women since the early 1960s as a result of a variety of forces. These forces included availability of the pill and IUD, abortion, and increasingly extended education for girls (Cosford *et al.* 1976:107). The most dramatic changes were changes within marriage, with 'a rapidly increasing agreement that children should not be born in the earlier years of marriage' (Cosford *et al.* 1976:112). The WOC women married by 1972 had presumably experienced some of these changes. However, most of the societal changes in marriage and delaying the first birth seem to have occurred just after this older group was married.

Richards' (1978) respondents in Hawthorn, Melbourne, did not consider alternatives to having children: 'Parenthood, like marriage, was taken for granted' (Richards 1978:87). Being 'ready' and the 'right time' were also notions expressed by these respondents (Richards 1978:106, 126). Richards (1978:126) notes:

> The two decisions—marrying and having the first child—were made, apparently, in much the same way. Since you were going to do both, the only important question was when.

The younger and older couples Richards interviewed also displayed a difference in attitude (Richards 1978:132).

Demographers have long sought a theory of fertility to account for variations and change in fertility (Carter 1995; McDaniel 1996:83). Carter (1995:55) argues that 'social science accounts of fertility change remain caught between the two poles they define'; that is, the two concepts of agency, one passive and one active, dominate the way that fertility change is conceptualised. However, as Carter (1995:84) concludes, it must be

recognised that fertility change is a great deal more complex and hard to pin down. Locating decisions—if, in fact they are 'decisions'—in the way people behave, the 'flows of conduct involved in fertility' (Carter 1995:84) and understanding how these 'decisions' come about is a challenging task.

Fisher's (2000) study of birth control practice between about 1925 and 1950 among British women and couples challenges Coale's (1973:65) claim that for sustained decline in marital fertility to occur fertility must be within the calculus of conscious choice; that is, women and couples can only consciously choose to have fewer children if they perceive it to be a matter of choice. Fisher's interviews on determining the timing of births and family size show that 'a dichotomous portrayal in which past societies are presented as passive and fatalistic in their approach to family size while post-transitional societies are seen as inhabited by newly calculating individuals' is not appropriate. Rather, 'contraceptive decisions should not be conceived along polarized lines as either rational or irrational, discussed or unmentioned, calculated or random.' The tenor of Fisher's British interviews is similar to the way in which the WOC women answered questions on what determined the timing of their first births. Fisher's (2000:304) concept of 'non-decision' fits well with the way many of the WOC women talked about these issues—not that they chose not to make a decision, but that they did not perceive that there was a decision to be made.

Four women, Kerry, Liz, Lindy and Nadia, were aged over 50 at the time of NLC Wave 1 in 1996–7 and were thus in their early to mid-teens in the early 1960s. Four women, Merilyn, Debra, Joanne and Helen, were born in the following five-year period. They would have been in their early teens in the early 1960s. All eight women were married between 1965 and 1972. The responses of these women in general indicate that they did not expect to have much control over the timing of their first births. This section considers the interaction over Q167 between Annie and seven of these eight women: Kerry, Liz, Nadia, Merilyn, Debra, Joanne, and Helen (the tape of Lindy's interview is too patchy to be presented here).

The responses of these women fall into two groups: those whose first births were reported as accidental (Nadia, Kerry and Debra) and those for whom determining timing did not appear to be an issue at all (Helen, Merilyn, Liz, and Joanne). Nadia and Kerry used 'accident' and 'accidental' to describe the timing of their first births. Debra used the phrase 'young and silly'. The response options did not cater for Lindy, who had taken eight years to become pregnant with her first child.

The interview with Nadia was the most straightforward, taking the minimum number of turns of all the WOC interviews to complete this question. Nadia, aged 55 at the time of the WOC interview in 1998, was married in 1965 and had her first child in 1966 when she was 23 years of age. Her responses were the same for both NLC Wave 1 and WOC—an unusual occurrence:

Segment 15 Nadia   (04; 04)

```
81.    Int:      ↑UM (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
82.    (2.0)
83.    Nadia:    accident.
84.    Int:      °accident.° (1.0) was it a failure of contraceptives?
85.    (3.0)
86.    Nadia:    no. not really. just (carelessness) huh huh
87.    Int:      and (.) um (.) i'm going to read out some statements about
88.              children
```

<div align="center">[MMPh#21:81–88]</div>

Although two rather long pauses of two and three seconds occur after Annie's direct questions, Nadia then gives her answers directly, with no hesitation, false starts, or indications of problems. The pauses may indicate that the answer itself is problematic—in a social sense—rather than the question. Annie probes using the wording of response option (05) *Failure of contraception, family planning method* and receives a clear negative answer followed by laughter: 'no. not really. just (carelessness) huh huh'. The nature of Nadia's response 'accident.' seems to make it redundant for Annie to probe for further reasons apart from the (05) option. All response options other than (05) involve planning or pre-meditation of some kind and appear to be contradictory to the concept of 'accident', or do not apply to those respondents, like Nadia, who are asked variant (c) of the question. On the interview schedule Annie

circled (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. She does not prompt for a second reason. In other interviews, however, Annie has probed for further reasons when she has obtained one response. Only seeking one reason, then, is the main reason for the shortness of this interaction (as with the interview with Ricky, also a short interaction).

Kerry was born in 1942, married in 1966, and also aged 55 when interviewed in the WOC survey in 1998. She had her first child in 1967 when she was 25. In Kerry's interview the interaction took 15 turns:

Segment 16 Kerry   (04; 04, 06)

```
81.    Int:       ↑ah. ↑what determined the timing of your first child.
82.    Kerry:     !t (.) o::h. accidental¿ hhhhhh hah [hah hah
83.    Int:                                           [yes uhhh[m
84.    Kerry:                                                  [we were
85.               just married, °yeah°
86.    Int:       a:h <did you actually-> so it was just that you were
87.               just married [and    ] you wanted to have a child=
88.    Kerry:                  [°yeah°]
89.    Int:       =[     ] as soon after marriage [(           )
90.    Kerry:      [(well)]                       [as- ↑well- i- er- i
91.               would've (.) preferred not to have one straight away,
92.               but we didn't take ah- (.) ah- what would you say um- t!
93.    Int:       °precautions°=
94.    Kerry:     =well. yes.
95.    Int:       ahhhah
96.    Kerry:     hah hah hhh i was going to say complete precau(h)tions
97.               [i (                      )
98.    Int:       [oh =right. so it wasn't a case of (°            °)
99.    Kerry:     no. °no.°
100.   Int:       (                                      a:nd u:m)
101.              ((next question))
```

                                   [MMPh#24:81–101]

The outcome of this interaction was (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* and (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage* being circled on the form, despite Kerry's rejection of (06) as an option applying to her (lines 90–2). Her false starts, hesitation, and use of 'well' indicate that she cannot accept all three propositions in Annie's formulation. She accepts the first proposition, saying 'yeah' after 'so it was just that you were just married', but her 'well' coming after 'and you wanted to have a child' is a strong indication that she cannot readily agree with the second proposition. Her response to the third proposition, 'as soon after marriage' is 'as- ↑well- i- er- i would've

(.) pre<u>ferr</u>ed not to have one straight away, but we didn't take ah- (.) ah- what would you say um- t!'. This is again a dispreferred response, indicating that she cannot answer the question in the way in which it has been put. She also rejects Annie's 'precautions' as a completion of her answer, but what she then says to Annie is not completely audible on the tape. It appears that Annie was probably checking whether (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method* applied. NLC Wave 1 and WOC coincided in recording (04) as one response.

Debra was aged 47 at the time of the WOC survey in 1998. She was born in 1950, married in 1972, and had four children, the first born when she was 22 years old. The interaction on Q167 in her interview was characterised by extended laughter:

Segment 17 Debra   (04; 04, 05)

```
61.    Int:          a:::::nd (.) what determined the timing of your first
62.                  child.
63.    (1.3)
64.    Debra:        u::m::m young and silly,
65.    Int:          huh huh [huh
66.    Debra:                [huh huh huh huh huh [huh
67.    Int:                                       [(°°$            [        $°°
68.    Debra:                                                      [•hhhhh hah
69.                  hah [hah hah •hh
70.    Int:              [↑and ↑a:r (.) $does that mean (°it was°)
71.                  <un[planned$> or-
72.    Debra:           [i- i-
73.                  [i- i- it was very unplanned=it was five months=
74.    Int:          [hhhh
75.    Debra:        =after we were married.
76.    Int:          °oh i see. okay.=so >we'll say unplanned.°< was it a
77.                  failure of contraception or family planning method?
78.    (0.6)
79.    Debra:        um- ↑family planning.
80.    (2.3)
81.    Int:          a:::nd (4.0) t! t! (0.6) I'm going to ((next question))
```

<div align="center">[MMPh#27:61–81]</div>

Debra's response 'u::m::m young and silly,' with rising intonation, elicits laughter as a response from Annie. A quite long interchange of laughter follows, with an inaudible comment from Annie that brings further laughter from Debra. Pritchard (1993:66) noted in her study of the talk of rape victims that laughter was a way for these women to affiliate with each other:

Troubles-recipients used laughter as an affiliative device, expressing support, solidarity, empathy and affiliation with the troubles-teller. Collective laughter acts as an expression of intimacy, trust, relaxation, relief, and mutual understanding of the topics of mirth. As an affiliative device, laughter acts as an endorsement of the troubles-teller and the troubles-talk. Collective laughter bonds or affiliates the women together, acting as a vehicle of tension relief and catharsis of intense emotion.

The troubles-teller responds to this affiliative support by further self-disclosing...

Here, Debra is not talking about the trauma of rape, but the 'trouble' of an unplanned pregnancy that may have been personally traumatic. Laughter between respondent and interviewer seems to be an important feature of the interaction on Q167, particularly where the pregnancy was accidental.

As expected from the interaction with Debra, Annie circled response options (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* and (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method*. She also wrote 'young & silly' under the list of options. In probing for a second reason, Annie asks, '↑and ↑a:r (.) $does that mean (°it was°) <un[planned$> or-'. Throughout the interaction, 'it' refers to 'the timing of the first child'. Whether this is the timing of the pregnancy or the timing of the birth of this child is unclear. So we do not know from this interaction whether Debra's child was born five months after marriage or whether she became pregnant five months after marriage. NLC Wave 1 information shows that she was married in January 1972, and her first child was born in March 1973; thus, it seems that Debra took the question to mean the timing of becoming pregnant. The interpretation of the answers to this question might be clearer if the question had specified either 'timing of your first pregnancy' or 'timing of the birth of your first child'.

In the interview with Debra, Annie delivers her probe in the form of a double question, using the words of one of the response options for this question (lines 76–7). However, the question is ambiguous for the respondent. Rather than taking Annie's question as yes–no question, Debra takes it as an either/or question: 'Was it a failure of contraception or was it a failure of family planning (implying that contraception and family planning are different). This type of confusion also occurred in reverse with an

earlier question in the survey; some respondents interpreted Q20 *Are you married or in a relationship?* as a yes–no question, whereas it was designed to be an either/or question. In response option (05) for Q167 on the questionnaire, the two phrases 'contraception' and 'family planning method' are grouped together as one response, *Failure of contraception/family planning method*. That is, the survey designers saw them as alternatives. This wording potentially contains two separate questions: 'Was it a failure of contraception or was it a failure of family planning method?' rather than the one question intended by the researchers. After a slight pause, Debra opts for 'family planning'.

How did Debra perceive the difference between the two terms included in the questionnaire? Did other women also distinguish between the two terms? It may be that Debra saw contraception and family planning as two different things; family planning was condoned by the Catholic Church, for example, where contraception was not.[24] While the interruption to the interviews from such confusion is minor, resulting in only a short pause on Debra's part, it seems that the question is ambiguous and may be interpreted in different ways by different respondents. NLC Wave 1 information showed Debra's religion as 'Catholic'.

As with the women born after 1950, the first answers of the women born before 1950 did not exactly match any response option. The over-riding impression from the interaction with five of these eight women—Helen, Merilyn, Liz, Lindy and Joanne—is that determining the timing of their first births was not a consideration. Excerpts from these interviews follow.

When interviewed for the WOC survey in 1998, Liz, aged 51, had two children, aged 12 and 18. Liz was born in 1946, married in 1972 and had her first child at 33 in 1980.

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[24] Young and Ware (1978:9), reporting on the results of the 1977 *Melbourne Survey* state: 'Catholic women were more likely to use the church-approved method of rhythm, although a surprising number were using the pill, and, as might be expected, Catholic women were more opposed to abortion and sterilization.' For an outline of the attitude of the Catholic church to control of family size, refer also to Freedman, Whelpton and Campbell (1959:415–8).

What determined the timing of her first child remains unclear from the interaction, though Annie circled (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*, (13) *When I/we felt right about it* and (14) *Feeling financially secure*. Different responses were recorded for Liz in NLC Wave 1: (9) *Having enough money to buy a house* and (8) *My partner being established in their career*.

Segment 18 Liz   (09, 08; 04, 13, 14)

```
63.    Int:     yihhh ·hh↑um (.) now what determined the timing of your
64.             first child.
65.    (0.6)
66.    Liz:     ↓o::h (2.0) •hh >i dunno< hh seven year itch? hhhh
67.             oh[hh
68.    Int:       [seven year itch, hah [hah
69.    Liz:                             [no i don't think
70.             so=[ma ]rried seven years but we had- u:m (.) i became=
71.    Int:        [•hh]
72.    Liz:     =pregnant. •hhh i just think it was just one of those
73.             things that just sort of happened.
74.    Int:     ri:ght. hh so it just happened, but <you were> in a
75.             relationship. [(so everything/you felt it/the timing)]=
76.    Liz:                   [oh yeah                               ]
77.    Int:     =was right.
78.    Liz:     oh yes. yes. yes.
79.    Int:m    (                             ) d- well you know
80.             financial security come into i::t, or (being [able)
81.    Liz:                                                  [oh yes.
82.             financial security did come into it (           )
83.    Int:     and career as well=(was that) an is[sue
84.    Liz:                                        [not rea::lly=no. i've
85.             never been a career minded per[son
86.    Int:                                   [right. or your partner's
87.             career?
88.    Liz:     a::h (.) no. he's a carpenter=it's not (.) like a- an
89.             issue of career, no. it was financial security [(•hh    )
90.    Int:                                                    [(°right°)
91.             t! ↑um (.) now i'm going to read ((next question))
```

[MMPh#20:63–91]

After Liz's candidate answer joke about the pregnancy being the result of a seven-year itch, Liz retracts that answer and volunteers, 'no i don't think so=married seven years but we had- u:m (.) i became pregnant. ·hhh i just think it was just one of those things that just sort of happened.' Because 'it just happened' are some of the words in response option (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*, her answer at first seems a neat fit with option (04). However, the sense of 'unplanned'—the first part of (04)—does not fit what Liz says subsequently. The phrase 'married seven years but we had- u:m (.) i became pregnant' starts to tell a story that is not elaborated. Again, as in other interviews, Annie gives a formulation of Liz's answer (lines 74–6) that constitutes a

check of her understanding of what Liz has said and suggests another response framed in terms of response option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*. This is a formulation predicting a 'yes' response, which Liz gives. The formulation preserves part of what Liz said ('just happened'), deletes what Liz said before that, and transforms her answer into response option (13).[25] Prompting with reasons that are based on response options means that at least the answers obtained are likely to fit the options on the interview schedule, but leaves doubt as to whether the respondent would have chosen that option in those terms. If she had been asked *Any other reason?* would she have responded with response option (13)?

However, Liz emphatically agrees that the time was right, 'oh yes. yes. yes.' and states that 'it was fin̲ancial security.' The sequence—cause and effect—is not clear with option (13). Whether Liz felt right about it before or after she became pregnant is not clear; neither is it clear whether the response option can apply retrospectively; that is, in the case where the timing of the pregnancy was not 'determined'. The words of response option (13) *W̲h̲e̲n̲ I/we feel/felt right about it* imply a sequence of activity where feeling right occurs before the woman becomes pregnant or has her first child. For example, 'When I felt right about it, I became pregnant,' or 'When I felt right about it, I decided to stop using contraception.' To change the order of the sequence of activities, a word other than 'when' needs to be used; for example, 'I felt right about it, so I became pregnant.' Thus, response option (13) suggests a time frame and sequence that is at odds with the idea of something being 'unplanned'. This time frame and sequence is not expressed by Liz herself. The fact that (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* was her first option implies that her feeling right about it could only have occurred afterwards. She and Annie are constrained by the format and expectations of the interview in exploring the story more fully. Annie is placed in an impossible position in making judgments about whether the response options apply to Liz.

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[25] Heritage and Watson (1979:130) show this preservation, deletion and transformation nature of formulations to be a particularly useful way of preventing interaction from breaking down.

Helen and Merilyn gave answers that suggested that determining the timing of their first child was not a question for them. Both women, after quite long pauses, said that nothing determined the timing. Helen, born in 1950 and married in 1971, had the first of her four children in 1972 when she was 22. The interaction over this question took 19 turns:

Segment 19 Helen   (06, 04; 06)

```
144.  Int:      ↑now what determined the timing of your first child.
145.  Helen:    ↑u:m (1.6) nothin=we just got married and i fell
146.            pregnant a month ↑later.
147.  Int:      so: (.) it was that you wanted a child as [soon] as=
148.  Helen:                                             [ye:s]
149.  Int:      =possible after marriage?
150.  Helen:    ↑ye:s.
151.  Int:      (°um                              did it have
152.            anything to do with your partner being established in a
153.            career ([      ]                           =
154.  Helen:           [na no.]
155.  Int:      =               °) too (°                         °)
156.            it's really just that sort of thing of wanting (°a child
157.            as soon as [poss]ible after marriage    °)
158.  Helen:               [yes ]
159.  Helen:    yes
160.  Int:      (                                ) straight away
161.  Helen:    well as- oh well- see my husband's te- ah nine years
162.            older than me, [so-    ]
163.  Int:                     [ri:ght.] °right.°
164.  Helen:    yeah.
165.  Int:      so (you wanted to [       ] that makes sense [      ])
166.  Helen:                      [yeah   ]                  [yeah    ]
167.  Int:      ↑u:m ( ) now i'm going to read ((next question))
```

[MMPh#:144–167]

One response option (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage* was circled on the basis of this interaction. NLC Wave 1 recorded two responses for Helen, (06) and (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. Helen's answer 'nothin=we just got married and i fell pregnant a month ↑later.' fits the second part of response option (04) *...it just happened* but not the first part, *unplanned*. Helen's 'ye:s' at line 148 answers the first part of Annie's formulation 'so (.) it was that you wanted a child'. It does not relate to the issue of timing. It seems that planning was not an issue for her, rather than that the child was unplanned. Helen's response, '↑ye:s.' (line 150) is a definite response, with falling intonation, despite being lengthened.

The answer that 'nothing' determined the timing of the first child was Merilyn's answer also. Her interview suggests that controlling the timing was something not even considered. She was married in 1967, and her first child was born in 1968 when she was aged 20. She was 49 when interviewed in 1998. For her, marriage meant having children:

Segment 20 Merilyn (13; 06)

```
103.   Int:        what determined the timing of your first child.
104.   (2.6)
105.   Merilyn:    °o:h° nothing really,
106.   Int:        no? was it um- (1.0) you know ah- deliberately planned
107.               (accidental)
108.   Merilyn:    ↑oh we wer- we'd been- oh she was born just (.) twelve
109.               months after we were ↑married
110.   Int:        ri:ght. so it was- that [you ] wanted a child as soon=
111.   Merilyn:                            [yeah]
112.   Int:        =[as po]ssible after marria[ge
113.   Merilyn:     [↑yeah]                   [↑that was ↑it. there was-
114.               ↓yeah >we were gonna have< CHILdren.
115.   Int:        >yeah< [huh huh
116.   Merilyn:           [yep hh
117.   Int:        ah (.) were there any considerations about >°you know°<
118.               °having enough money to buy a hou:se, or feeling able to
119.               cope with the demands of a child°,
120.   Merilyn:    no
121.   Int:        it was really just that thing [(°you know°] that) you=
122.   Merilyn:                                  [↑yeah       ]
123.   Int:        =were married an[d so-
124.   Merilyn:                    [you were married, and i- you have
125.               ↑children.
126.   Int:        °yeah° (1.3) ↑ah now i'm going to ((next question))
```

[MMPh#13:103–126]

Like Helen, Merilyn's answer '°o:h° nothing really,' suggests that this was not an issue for her. The response option (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage* circled on Merilyn's interview schedule implies an active attitude to having children. Merilyn, however, is not saying that she wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage but that 'you were married, and i- you have ↑children.' Wanting did not come into it. This is also the impression of her words earlier in the interview (lines 113–4): '↑that was ↑it. there was- ↓yeah >we were gonna have< CHILdren.'

It might be more appropriate to say that, for Merilyn and Helen, marriage determined the timing of their first children. Annie, not Merilyn, introduces the idea that timing is deliberate when she first asks the question and then again when she implies that Merilyn wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage (lines 110, 112). This idea did not come from Merilyn herself, but she goes along with Annie's suggestions, as indicated by her answers in lines 113, 116, 122. It is by no means certain that Merilyn would have raised these issues if not prompted directively by Annie. In fact, the (06) response option could have become (01), (03), (08) or (13) if Annie had asked different questions at line 110. By probing with the words of one particular response option, Annie increases the likelihood of that option becoming the circled response.

Joanne was married in December 1968. She had four daughters. The first was born in 1970 when Joanne was 23. Her interaction with Annie over this question took 22 turns, the longest for the women born before 1950:

Segment 21 Joanne   (11; 13, 14)

```
122.  Int:      ↑ah ↑now (.) what determined the timing of your first child.
123. (1.3)
124.  Joanne:   desi(h)re, i guess, (.) yeah,=
125.  Int:      =what's that?
126.  Joanne:   desire,
127.  Int:      desi(h)(h)re?=
128.  Joanne:   =yeah=wanting- (.) to have a child¿ [dyou mean?
129.  Int:                                         [oh i see. (°        °)
130.  Joanne:   yeah,
131.  Int:      so this was- um- as soon as- like- as soon as possible after
132.            marriage, or [when you] felt (things were) right
133.  Joanne:                [↑oh no, ]
134.  Joanne:   no, was two yea-, it was after- •hhh after we was- knew what
135.            we were doing and had a certain amount of stability,
136.            financial
137.  Int:      sure.=
138.  Joanne:   =↑yep
139.  Int:      a:nd (.) obviously you felt right about it
140.            yoursel[ves as well.
141.  Joanne:          [ye:s, no problem, there,
142.  Int:      and ah (.) there was nothing to do with you- like feeling
143.            able to cope with the demands of a child, or (.) that you
144.            were established in your relationship, or (your career was
145.            esta[blished    )
146.  Joanne:      [i never even thought about=
147.  Int:      =no=
148.  Joanne:   =the career aspect. •hh i just thought (.) you had children
149.            and (.) you co(h)ped heh heh [heh
150.  Int:                                   [yea(h)heh heh he[h •hh
151.  Joanne:                                                 [•hh >never
152.            even entered my head you didn't co(h)pe< [heh heh heh •hh]
153.  Int:                                               [no:(h)hh       ]
154.            •hh ↑now i'm going to ((next question))
```

Joanne's first answer 'de<u>si(h)re</u>, i guess, (.) yeah,' is a surprise for Annie. She asks Joanne twice for confirmation. Joanne clarifies what she means: 'yeah=<u>wanting</u>- (.) to have a child¿' and Annie moves on to formulate what Joanne has said (lines 131–2). She combines two response options, apparently arbitrarily, (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* as a basis for this summary: 'so this was- um- as soon as- like- as soon as possible after marriage, or [when you] felt (things were) right.' Joanne's answer indicates that she is addressing the first of these two when she says '↑oh <u>no</u>, <u>no</u>, was two <u>yea</u>-, it was after- ·hhh <u>a</u>fter we was- knew what we were <u>do</u>ing and had a certain amount of <u>sta</u>bility, financial'. Annie circles (14) *Feeling financially secure* as a listed option, though whether 'a certain amount of <u>sta</u>bility, financial' is equivalent to 'feeling financially secure' and whether 'wanting to have a child' is the same as 'feeling right about it' is debatable. In any case, 'finance' clearly is one relevant dimension for Joanne.[26]

Annie puts up (13) again as another formulation (line 139): 'a:nd (.) <u>ob</u>viously you felt <u>right</u> about it yourselves as well.' Annie's use of '<u>ob</u>viously' in a statement designed for confirmation predicts that Joanne will agree, implying, 'isn't it obvious to you and me that this is the case?'. Joanne agrees: 'ye:s, no <u>prob</u>lem, there,' providing Annie with a second response.

Although two responses seem to have been obtained at this point, Annie goes on to check that none of the other options applied to Joanne, phrasing her question as a negative statement assuming a negative answer. Joanne's answer (lines 146–9) resembles Merilyn's in the way that she accepted having children and coping: 'i never even <u>thought</u> about the career aspect. ·hh i just <u>thought</u> (.) you had children and (.) you <u>co(h)ped</u> heh heh heh ·hh >never even entered my <u>head</u> you didn't <u>co(h)pe</u>< heh heh

---

[26] Financial security was an important issue for Australian women and couples of this age in considering when to marry (Caldwell *et al.* 1988a; Caldwell *et al.* 1976; Richards 1978).

heh ·hh'. To summarise Joanne's answers as response options (13) and (14) results in a considerable loss of information.

The above interactions with women born before 1950 suggest that Q167 and the listed response options on the interview schedule do not reflect their situation. However, given that the main purpose of asking the fertility questions in the NLC Survey was to assess the decisions of younger women and what those decisions might mean for the future, the impact of the insights on older women might appear to be irrelevant. The fact that these women seemed to view 'determining timing' in terms of failing in their efforts to avoid a pregnancy, or not as an issue at all, is no longer as important in policy terms. The inappropriateness of the question and response options for these women made Annie's task more problematic; in order to obtain two allowed response options, she needed to use strategies that directed the respondent to a response and that closed down the question–answer sequence as soon as possible. Otherwise, she would have had to rely on the respondent herself to offer an allowed response option—a risky strategy in terms of time and achieving any response option at all (Heritage and Watson 1979:153).

The responses recorded for these women in the WOC survey were different from those recorded for NLC Wave 1 in four of the eight cases (Table 4). In most WOC interviews the response options circled seemed to be a result of the locally managed interaction that occurred. A great deal of potentially useful information is missing or lost in the process of negotiating through the obstacles imposed by the question itself and the unique situations of the women. Given the way that the interviewer probed in the above segments of interaction, it is conceivable that different interviewers faced with the same task might produce different response options, depending on which response options are chosen as probes. The interview data suggests that the differences in recorded responses between the two surveys may be more a matter of varying interviewer behaviour than varying stories from the women, though without

transcription and analysis of the NLC Wave 1 interactions this interpretation cannot be confirmed.

Frequency of the combination of response options (04) and (05), and response options (13) and (15)

Table 2 showed that response options (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* and (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method* in combination were frequent and that (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* and (15) *Other (specify)* were popular options. An examination of the interaction in the WOC interviews shows that this might not be the result of chance. Options (04) and (05) are a logical combination. For example, when a respondent mentioned in her answer anything that showed that she felt she had no control over the timing of her first child, Annie circled (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* and used a directive probe in the form of a yes–no question to ask whether (05) *Failure of contraception/family planning method* was the reason for this. This response option, then, was not spontaneously produced by the respondents themselves. Since only two reasons were to be recorded, none of the other possible reasons then needed to be asked. Because of the ambiguity about conception, pregnancy or giving birth contained in the question, other options could have been relevant but were not given equal chance of expression. The options (04) and (05), together with options (01)–(03) and (06), apply to conception alone, whereas other options could apply to a decision about an already conceived pregnancy, to continue a pregnancy to term, for example. A woman may have decided not to have a termination after an unplanned pregnancy because her relationship with her partner was well established, or because she was financially secure, or because she or her partner were established in their careers.

In 12 of the 25 interviews option (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it* is circled, even when the respondent does not use these words to describe her situation. The interactions where this response option is circled give the impression that response option (13) is a convenient 'catch-all' category. Feeling 'right' could also cover feeling

'right' financially or emotionally, and feeling 'right' about enjoyment, a career or a relationship, the topics of response options (07)–(11). The content of option (13) is sufficiently broad as to cover reasons mentioned by respondents that do not fit the allowable options. For example, Melinda's and Annegret's reasons of being 'ready', also a fairly broad concept, became (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it.* In Lyn's and Noelle's cases, Annie asked whether this option applied to them; option (13) was circled even when their answers were in the form of dispreferred responses, that is, they could not agree, but Annie was not successful in obtaining a response that matched. In Lyn's and Noelle's cases, (13) seemed to be the way to interpret their answers about 'wanting' a child, an answer not reflected in any of the listed options on the interview schedule. Edith's interview gave no evidence of any material matching option (13). Karen was asked about two response options, including (13) in one yes–no probing question; to which did the 'yes' apply? Jenny's mention of 'it seemed the time was right' seems at first glance to be reasonably translated to this option.

Tonia's case shows that for some respondents the concept of the 'right thing to do' and the 'right time' are not equivalent:

Segment 22 Tonia   (13, 09; 11, 13)

```
106.   Int:        •hh now (.) what determined the timing of your first
107.               child.
108.   Tonia:      •hh (.) u- u:m (2.0) t! o:h. i don't know actually¿ um:
109.               (2.5) t! [ah- it-] we just felt it was the right=
110.   Int:                 [ was it]
111.   Tonia:      =thing to do:
112.   Int:        thought it was the ri[ght time.
113.   Tonia:                           [hhh no i- hh [but yea:h. (.) [u:m-
114.   Int:                                          [yeah.           [yeah.
115.               so it was pla[nned.]
116.   Tonia:                   [•hhh ] yes. [yeah everyth-] yeah it was=
117.   Int:                                  [(            ]
118.   Tonia:      =planned.
119.   Int:        oka[y
120.   Tonia:         [°>we [planned it.<°]
121.   Int:               [•hh a:nd  (.)] in consideration of the- the
122.               planning, like (.) was it that you >sort of< were (.)
123.               established in the marriage, o:r
124.   Tonia:      yes.=
125.   Int:        =this was an extension of that
126.   Tonia:      yep
127.   Int:        °okay° •hh u::m a: nd >you know< were there financial
128.               considerations? or
129.   Tonia:      no. (0.6) no. it was more a- it was th- the state of the
130.               relationship. and (.) we were ready for (.) children,
131.               (0.3) yep.
```

```
132.   Int:        (°okay/right°) •hh ↑u:m (1.3) and now i'm going to read
133.               ((next question))
```

Annie circled (11) *My relationship with my partner being well-established* and (13*) When I/we feel/felt right about it*. Early in the interaction (line 108) Tonia says, '·hh (.) u- u:m (2.0) t! o:h. i don't know actually¿ um: (2.5) t! ah- it- we just felt it was the right thing to d<u>o</u>:' When Annie restates this as 'thought it was the right time.' Tonia rejects this reformulation in an ambivalent way: ' hhh no i- hh but yea:h. (.) u:m-.' She eventually accepts Annie's 'yeah. so it was planned.' Even after Tonia's restatement of her reasons in lines 129–31, response option (13) was circled.

When the framing of the question makes it difficult for Annie to pin a respondent down to any of the allowable options or when the respondent persists in not producing words that can be matched with any of the options on the list, option (13) is useful. Interaction in the interviews with the 12 women for whom this response was recorded illuminates the process by which the response was obtained.

The combination (04) *Unplanned, it just happened* and (13) *When I/we feel/felt right about it*—obtained for Edith, Karen, Liz and Lyn—appears to be contradictory (see discussion on Segment 18). It seems that the combination represents the situation where timing is neither planned nor unplanned: where women are neither trying to become pregnant nor trying to avoid pregnancy. However, an unplanned birth for these women seems not to be as potentially problematic as an accident. Lindy, who became pregnant after 'trying for (.) nine years or something', gave one word, 'miracle' in answer to Q167. Response option (13) was also an outcome of her interview, but it is difficult to see the connection between the two answers, given the cause and effect sequence of option (13). Without further clarification from the respondents, these response options cannot be assumed to reflect how they saw their own situations.

To summarise, each response option reflects a variety of different respondent realities. The combination (04) and (05) covers a number of widely different respondent

situations, some of which relate to contraceptive or family planning method failure. Concepts as disparate as 'accident', 'bad luck', 'fate', 'miracle', 'seven-year itch', 'carelessness', 'don't know', and 'young and silly' are covered by (04) *Unplanned, it just happened*. Those for whom (06) *Wanted a child as soon as possible after marriage* was recorded, Joanne, Merilyn and Helen, also report very different situations. The 'catch-all' category covered by response option (13) covers not only several of the other options in the list, but also concepts such as being 'ready' or wanting a child. In general, a single response option does not represent the same story. The prevalence of (15) *Other (specify)* also reflects the problems entailed in obtaining a match between the allowed response options and respondents' answers. The WOC women's first answers often appear as (15) *Other (specify)* responses. They do not match the listed responses and are therefore downgraded by being grouped together, especially since there are so many 'Other' responses.

Conclusion

Q167 is problematic since it calls on both interviewer and respondent to undertake a complex and awkward task of interpretation. First, the nature of the question itself poses a problem for some respondents. Does the phrase 'timing of your first child' mean conception, pregnancy, or giving birth? For those respondents asked Q167(b), *What determined the timing of this pregnancy?* the phrase is clearly defined as 'this pregnancy'. However, Q167(a) *What will determine when or if you have your first child?* and Q167(c) *What determined the timing of your first child?* can be interpreted differently by different respondents. Q167 contains more than one concept: whether it asks about determining the timing of a birth or a pregnancy needs to be clear. Some response options—(01), (03) to (05)—seem to relate specifically to the timing of becoming pregnant, whereas others—(02), and (06) to (14)—relate more generally to the ongoing situation of having a child rather than being childless. Whether a pregnancy then leads to a birth is another matter, possibly affected by different factors. To ask about these two kinds of timing at once can result in different understanding of the question for different respondents.

The interaction over Q167 and its response options brings up the issue of what constitutes 'planning' when it comes to the birth of a child? When is a child planned and when is it not? Q167 asks about reasons for *timing* not about what determined whether a woman had a child, in the sense of whether she planned to have a child. Planning could, however, cover timing also. These two issues become confused when response options relate to both these issues. Lyn's pregnancy was not premeditated at that *time* (an issue of timing) but this does not mean that the pregnancy was unplanned, that she planned not to have a child. Does 'planning' mean that a woman has to be consciously thinking, 'I want to have a child now'? In a general sense, women may not always consciously think, 'I want a child'. It may not always be a clear-cut issue.

To create a distinction between planned and unplanned births, then, may be a false dichotomy. 'Just ready' does not mean that the child is in fact 'planned' nor that the timing is determined. To what extent are women conscious of what determines timing? As demonstrated by the differences in the two groups of women, changes in attitudes to and prevalence of contraception and the place of children in their lives also may have some compounding effect on how consciously women consider determining the timing of their first birth. It seems that for some women marriage marks the moment when they are ready to have a child. For these women, any child born after marriage is not an accident, even if the timing is not planned. This notion is supported by interviews with women and couples on marriage and fertility change in Australia (Caldwell *et al.* 1988a; Caldwell *et al.* 1976; Richards 1978).

The interviews with the WOC respondents strongly support Fisher's (2000:304) finding for British couples that determining the timing of births was more complex than simply whether the birth was planned or unplanned, or whether contraception was used or not used. Fisher (2000:309) cautions also that it is easy to forget that, before many female-controlled methods of contraception were widely available, matters of timing of sexual intercourse and contraception were the responsibility of

the man. A question that assumes that older women know what determined the birth of their first child may not be the best question to ask to obtain information about timing and family size.

The wording of Q167 implies that a woman knows what determined the timing of her first child and that the timing of a child can be determined or controlled. So when some women at first answered 'nothing' or 'I don't know,' 'fate,' 'bad luck,' or 'miracle,' implying that control or determination was not an issue at all, the achieved response outcomes that suggest an element of determination lead to doubt about how the response was obtained. Clark and Schober (1992:27–9) suggest that respondents make the 'interpretability presumption', that 'each question means what it is obvious to me here now that it means'. One of the 'surprising' consequences of this is that respondents use tacit reasoning to presume that 'when the surveyer asks me a question, he assumes it is one I can answer, one I have valid opinions about. So it must be about an issue I *do* have an opinion on'. Converse and Presser (1986:35) suggest that a 'no opinion' or, in the case of Q167, a 'don't know' option should be included.

To ask what determined the timing of the respondent's first child is probably a question more suited to qualitative research methods (Berg 1989:19; Briggs 1986:14ff; McCracken 1988:9,16–17; Oakley 1981; Weiss 1994:2–11). The question might have been better phrased more as women with children might ask the question of each other: 'Why did you have your first child when you did?' or 'What made you have children?'. However, without altering the constraints of the structured interview and its response options, no question on such an issue is likely to yield accurate data. This issue might better have been asked as an open question in an in-depth face-to-face interview.[27]

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[27] Weiss (1994:13–4) comments on the difficulties in using the 'fixed question open response' solution in the hope that it will systematise collection of qualitative material and facilitate its quantitative treatment: 'Unfortunately, the fixed-question–open-response approach to data collection turns out to sacrifice as much in the quality of information as it gains in systematization. A very long response, just like a

Because the question is field-coded, the task of the participants is even more demanding, as the interview interaction on this question in the WOC Survey has shown. The 'state uncertainty' of some women is compounded by the 'task uncertainty' imposed by the question format (Schaeffer and Thomson 1992:38). The intention of the researcher in using a field-coded question may be to avoid influencing the woman's story before she gives an answer—a worthy motive for designing the question in such a way.[28] However, without the knowledge that the interviewer has a pre-determined list of options on the interview schedule, the respondent cannot easily co-operate in finding the most appropriate option for her situation. Foddy (1993:150) reports that respondents will attempt to answer what they can. The result is that the women's stories are influenced, as shown by the segments from the WOC interviews, such that the responses, obtained collaboratively, seem a random and arbitrary representation of the women's 'true state'. As Cicourel (1974:143) argued, 'With fixed choice questions, the issue of the language used by the respondent is never raised'.

The interaction on Q167 confirms that directive probing was a widespread problem with this question, confirming other research on interaction in survey interviews (Dijkstra and van der Zouwen 1982; Houtkoop-Steenstra 1995, 1996, 1997a, 2000; Houtkoop-Steenstra and Antaki 1997; Molenaar and Smit 1996; Schaeffer *et al.* 1993; Smit 1995; Smit *et al.* 1997). This was also a finding for Q166 of the WOC Survey, also a field-coded question. Houtkoop–Steenstra (2000:5) notes that field-coded questions are likely to be even more problematic for interviews than open questions; this is

shorter one, will have to be fitted into code categories, and interviewers, aware of this, tend to limit the length of respondents' answers'.

[28] Schwarz and Hippler (1987:177) found, in collecting data on behavioural frequencies, that 'both the question and the response alternatives should be considered together'. They believe that researchers may be well advised to use open answer format to obtain such data. Pre-coding the alternatives may introduce systematic bias, as respondents gauge what is expected or typical behaviour from response options. In their study pre-coding a response scale rather than an open-answer format affected respondents' examples only when the range of the response alternatives deviated from the range of respondents' behavioural reports (Schwarz and Hippler 1987:174).

because interviewers harm the validity of the final responses through the preference organisation of responses:

> The preference organisation of responses, which causes respondents to agree easily, or seem to agree, with incorrect suggestions and reformulations, results in research data which [whose?] validity is doubtful (Houtkoop-Steenstra 1996:221).

Where categories of response options are also unclear or overlapping, the problems for interviewer and respondent are compounded.

The analysis in this chapter confirms earlier research suggesting that field-coded questions are problematic (Fowler and Mangione 1990:88–9; Smit 1995). Molenaar and Smit (1996:118) and Heritage and Watson (1984a:144), among others, point out the problems involved in a non-acceptance by the respondent of an interviewer's suggestion. Respondents tend to acquiesce rather than express disagreement because of the politeness principle in conversation (Brown and Levinson 1987) and the principle of co-operation (Grice 1989).

Acquiescence is a particular problem with yes–no questions used in probing (Foddy 1993:144). Houtkoop-Steenstra (1997a:620) found that interviewers using a 'personal interview style' revised questions into yes–no questions to anticipate a 'no-problem answer', displaying an orientation to 'the delicate and face threatening formulation of the scripted formulation'. She observes: 'If survey methodology expects interviewers to read out non-directive formulated delicate questions and at the same time expects them to behave in a friendly and personal way, it may put interviewers in a double bind'. Smit's (1995) research on suggestive questions found that the formulation of the probe is usually left to 'the insight of the interviewer' and that interviewers often use phrases which are suggestive:

> Suggestive questioning is almost absent for fixed choice questions including the use of showcards. On the other hand, suggestive questioning occurs to such a degree with semi-open questions that it is advised not to use this question format in survey research (Smit 1995:115).

Another pointer leading to the conclusion that field-coded questions are problematic is the way in which the interviewer makes explicit that she has a list of options in front of her, although the question is designed so that the respondent does not know this. Making the options list explicit provides her with a way out of the maze of trying to achieve a response formatted in the terms of the response options without the response options being known to the respondent. In this case it would seem logical to ask the question in a different form where the options are obvious to the respondent. For example, *Which two of the following options best describe what determined the timing of your first child?* If the respondent makes the decision among a limited set of alternatives, some of the problems in the interaction might be avoided. It would not, however, solve the problem of adequately representing the realities of these women (Mazeland and ten Have 1998:1; Obermeyer 1997:815; Suchman and Jordan 1990a:237).

That Q167 was initially difficult for the women to answer can be seen from the many pauses, so-called 'empty' 'fillers', hesitations, and false starts that occur before they answer, indicating dispreferred responses. The interviewer also often pauses and hesitates. For the more straightforward factual questions in the WOC, on the other hand, such as Q20 *How many children have you ever had?* and Q154 *Are you married or in a relationship?* interactional features indicating difficulty in answering are exceptional. The difficulty in answering clearly arises partly from the ambiguity in Q167. On the other hand, it may be a more complex problem, relating to the nature of the timing of pregnancies and births.[29]

For the interviewer the question is also not simple. She has to decide which variant of the question to ask; to interpret what the respondent says in the light of the list of available response options; to match what is said to the response options; to re-formulate what is said if the answer does not fit; and to pick up cues from the

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[29] However, Oppenheim (1966:9) points out that questions in fact-finding and actuarial surveys are also not very well answered.

respondent's answer that might help in pursuing a second option. At the same time she is expected to maintain rapport with the respondent and keep an eye on the clock. The task of negotiation when a respondent's story does not match the options can be frustrating for both parties.

In both groups, those born before and after 1950, women had accidental births and few seemed to make conscious decisions about timing in the terms envisaged by the response options. A certain amount of irony exists in the fact that those who wanted children, such as Kristen and Lindy, did not always have them when they wanted; and many who had not necessarily planned to have a child at a particular time—Ricky, Karen, Coral, Sonya, Jess, Edith, Lyn, Nadia, Kerry, and Debra—became pregnant. Of the 24 women asked this question, only Annegret, Noelle, Jenny, and Dale seemed to consciously decide to have a child at a particular time or talk in terms of planning or an agreement with a partner; this is probably the result of the age bias in the WOC sample. Even when a decision was made, this did not necessarily result in the woman becoming pregnant. For others—Carol, Melinda, Lyn, Liz, Helen, Merilyn, Tonia, Andrea, Lindy, and Joanne—either the decision-making process was unclear from the interview, or determining timing was not an issue for them.

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Appendix: Transcription symbols[30]

.	a stopping fall in tone, not necessarily the end of a sentence
,	low rise/continuing intonation, not necessarily between clauses of sentences
?	rising inflection, not necessarily a question
¿	rising intonation, weaker than that indicated by a question mark
-	cut-off
=	connecting talk
> <	talk is faster than surrounding talk
< >	talk is slower than surrounding talk
° °	talk that is quieter than surrounding talk
̥ ̥	(subscript) unvoiced/whispered talk
YES	talk that is louder than surrounding talk
* *	creaky voice
# #	sympathetic talk
$ $	talk while laughing/smiling
↑↓	marked rising and falling shifts in pitch
(h)	plosive quality
:::	an extension of a sound or syllable
( )	transcription doubt
(( ))	analyst's comments
(1.0)	timed intervals
(.)	a short untimed pause
hh	audible aspirations
·hh	audible inhalations
so	emphasis

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[30] Abbreviated from Gardner (1994). Based on Atkinson and Heritage (1984), Jefferson (1984), Schegloff (unpublished paper), Sacks *et al.* (1974).

[ ]   overlapping utterances or actions