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Probing Behaviour in Open Interviews

A Field Experiment on the Effects of Probing Tactics on Quality and Content of the Received Information

This research is focussed on the tactic the interviewer uses while probing. A probing tactic is an interviewer stance towards the answers of the respondent and the reaction following from this stance. In this research three different probing tactics are distinguished: the accommodating, the encouraging and the challenging.

A field experiment was held to determine whether these probing tactics have an effect on the quality and content of the received information. In order to tackle any possible topic-dependency of the effects of the probing tactics, the interviews that were held contained three different topics of social categorisation: 'Amsterdammers', friends and 'allochthons'.

The results of this study are remarkable in the light of what is known about effects of interviewer behaviour in closed interviews and what is often supposed in literature on open interviewing.

Gerben Moerman (1976) graduated in Sociology of Non-Western Societies from Leiden University in 1999. He conducted the present study at the Interuniversity Graduate School of Psychometrics and Sociometrics (IOPS) and the Faculty of Social Sciences at the VU University. He is currently employed as a lecturer at the department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam.

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