# Ethics in Qualitative Research

# 'DOING RAPPORT' AND THE ETHICS OF 'FAKING FRIENDSHIP'

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> … the irony I now perceive is that [the feminist] ethnographic method exposes subjects to far greater danger and exploitation than do more positivist, abstract, and "masculinist" research methods. The greater the intimacy, the apparent mutuality of the researcher/re-searched relationship, the greater is the danger. (from 'Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?' Stacey, 1988: 21)

# Introduction

This chapter centres on discussion of some of the ethical, feminist, emotional, and methodological issues associated with how rapport is gained, maintained, and 'used' in qualitative interviews. Our interest in rapport was stimulated by our own research,[1] where we found that in order to persuade some of our women interviewees[2] to talk freely, we needed consciously to exercise our interviewing skills in '*doing* rapport' with — or rather *to* — them. Uncomfortably, we came to realize that even feminist interviewing could sometimes be viewed as a kind of *job* where, at the heart of our outwardly friendly interviews, lay the instrumental purpose of persuading interviewees to provide us with data for our research, and also (hopefully) for our future careers.

Our discomfort in our research interviews has broader analogies and deeper roots. For example, there are strong parallels between 'doing rapport' and the kinds of 'emotion work' that women, in particular, perform in their relationships by simulating empathy to make others feel good (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild has argued that the spread of jobs where women are paid to simulate empathy represents the 'commercialisation' of human feeling, and those who do such work run the risk of feeling, and indeed actually *becoming*, 'phoney' and 'inauthentic' (Hochschild, 1983). Seen in this light, feelings of 'insincerity' which we sometimes experience as interviewers can be linked

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to the pressures of commercialisation in the 'job' of qualitative interviewing; even within feminist research.

**[p. 108 ↓ ]**

An obvious starting point for a discussion of ethical issues associated with rapport is the early seminal article by Ann Oakley, which has played a large part in opening up feminist discussion of this 'commonly used but ill-defined term' (Oakley, 1981: 35). Oakley criticized the model of 'rapport' advocated in methods textbooks for being instrumental, hierarchical and non-reciprocal, qualities she characterized as would-be 'professional' and 'scientific', and basically masculine. By aiming to suppress the role of gender and individual personality in interview relationships, this model failed to engage with major feminist and ethical issues. As an alternative, Oakley advanced the now familiar argument that feminist researchers and their women subjects participate as 'insiders' in the same culture, where the 'minimal' social distance between them offers the basis for an emotionally empathetic, egalitarian and reciprocal rapport. However, she warned that the closer rapport that permits the feminist researcher to gain a deeper understanding of women's intimate lives and feelings also brings greater ethical problems:

> 'Frequently researchers … establish rapport not as scientists but as human beings; yet they proceed to use this humanistically-gained knowledge for scientific ends, usually without the informants' knowledge' (Sjoberg and Nett, 1968: 215—16). These ethical dilemmas are greatest where there is least social distance between the interviewer and interviewee. Where both share the same gender socialisation and critical life experiences, social distance can be minimal … (from 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', Oakley, 1981: 55)

Somewhat ironically, Oakley has recently criticized feminist proponents of qualitative methodology, on the grounds that their eagerness to claim 'preferentially to own the qualitative method' has become part of their own 'professionalising agenda' within academia (Oakley, 1998: 716). However, we would suggest that this criticism distracts attention from two important but rather different trends, the first of which has taken place

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largely outside feminism. We believe that the expansion of 'consumer research' and various other interviewing jobs both in commerce and government, has highlighted the value of research methods which persuade interviewees to disclose their more private and 'genuine' thoughts. As a result of which, the ability to 'do rapport' by 'faking friendship' in relatively less-structured[3] qualitative interviews has become a set of 'professional' and 'marketable skills', and generally with a training sanitised of any concern with broader ethical issues. In order to tap into wider debates, we would suggest that the skills of 'doing rapport' have become commodified, with little discussion of the function of rapport in 'agenda setting' and 'the management of consent' in the interview situation — terms used by **[p. 109 ↓ ]** Lukes to describe the hidden use of power in relationships (Komter, 1989; Lukes, 1974).

The second trend has been within feminism (although not exclusively), where the earlier, relatively uncritical acceptance of feminist claims for a special rapport between women has been challenged by a much more sceptical debate concerning the limits and ethical problems of 'feminist' qualitative research methods (see Edwards and Mauthner, Chapter 1).

These broad trends will now be outlined and examples from our own research will be drawn upon to illustrate and explore some of the ethical dilemmas associated with the concept and practice of rapport. We hope to convey how ethical problems emerge, overlap, and change unpredictably during interviews, and also to indicate how our awareness of these ethical dilemmas has changed as our 'careers' have developed from interviewing on behalf of other researchers, to interviewing for 'our own' research.

# The commodification of rapport: 'agenda setting' and 'the management of consent'

We have suggested that there has been a trend towards the professionalisation, or more accurately, the commercialisation or 'commodification', of the skills of 'doing rapport' in less-structured qualitative interviews. We now explore in more detail what we mean, and how this trend differs from the 'would-be professionalism' criticised by Oakley. Nevertheless, both these trends are alike in their neglect of the broader ethical

issues integral to the inequalities of power in the interviewing process. Chief among these issues in relation to rapport is the 'management of consent'.

The most important difference in approach between the two models of rapport that we have discussed so far, is well summarized in the following description of what is involved:

> Rather than trying to expunge the personality of the interviewer and to standardise interviews, this [more personalised] approach demands that interviewers should *manage* their appearance, behaviour and self-presentation in such a way as to build rapport and trust with each individual respondent. [our emphasis] (O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994: 122—3)

There are close parallels here with Hochschild's discussion of the 'management of emotion' (Hochschild, 1983), as a passage from another methods text makes clear:

**[p. 110 ↓ ]**

> *Rapport is tantamount to trust* [our emphasis], and trust is the foundation for acquiring the fullest, most accurate disclosure a respondent is able to make … When you are warm and caring, you promote rapport, you make yourself appealing to talk to, and, not least, you communicate to your respondents, 'I see you as a human being with interests, experience, and needs beyond those I tap for my own purposes' … In an effective interview, both researcher and respondent feel good, rewarded and satisfied by the process and the outcomes. The warm and caring researcher is on the way to achieving such effectiveness. (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992: 79, 87, quoted in O'Connell Davidson and Layder, 1994: 123)

We would argue that, in equating the process of 'doing rapport' with trust, and failing to question the insincerity of 'faking friendship', this passage exhibits a disturbing ethical naivety.

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In order to achieve good rapport, however, interviewers are sometimes advised to adopt a special kind of naivety (Kvale, 1992), or what Glaser and Strauss (1967) characterise as a pretence awareness, where they convey overall ignorance about what interviewees say, whilst at the same time promoting rapport by giving the occasional knowing glance. Interviewers also learn that they should consciously dress and present themselves in a way that sends the correct messages to the interviewee. That is, they must seat themselves not too far away but not too near; maintain a pleasant, encouraging half-smile and a lively (but not too lively) interest. They should keep eye contact, speak in a friendly tone, never challenge, and avoid inappropriate expressions of surprise or disapproval; and practice the art of the encouraging but 'non-directive "um"'. If this is 'friendship', then it is a very detached form of it.

The development of techniques for 'doing rapport' has been reinforced by the adoption of counselling skills and language into the repertoire of the qualitative interviewer: 'Rogers's writings on therapeutic interviews have been a source of inspiration for the development of qualitative interviewing for research purposes' (Kvale, 1992: 24). Writings about counselling stress the need to minimize social distance and establish rapport and trust, by projecting an air of genuineness and empathy with the client. Counselling interviewers are trained to listen to 'what is said between the lines' as well as to the 'explicit description of meanings … The interviewer may seek to formulate the "implicit message", "send it back" to the subject, and obtain an immediate confirmation or disconfirmation of the interviewer's interpretation of what the interviewee is saying …' (Kvale, 1992: 32). Apart from this process of 'reflection', training in counselling discusses the use of pauses and how to be comfortable with (the 'sound' of) silences.

The skills of doing rapport also supposedly include the ability to draw boundaries around the range of subject matter and to limit the **[p. 111 ↓ ]** emotional depth of the interview; this is the 'purpose' in the apparently informal 'conversation with a purpose'. Kvale, for example, employs a mining metaphor to distinguish between 'qualitative research' interviews whose aim is to gather knowledge, and 'therapeutic interviews' that attempt to change subjects' lives: 'knowledge is understood as buried metal and the interviewer is the miner … The interviewer researcher strips the surface of conscious experiences … the therapeutic interviewer mines the deeper unconscious layers' (1992: 3).

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This process of qualitative interviewing is generally seen as benign, leading the interviewee to valuable personal insights and enabling the researcher to contribute to a wider understanding of individual's lives and problems. Indeed this is the image of interviewing cherished by most qualitative researchers. However, the goals and potential outcomes of the interview are not the sole ethical issue to be considered. If interviewees are persuaded to participate in the interview by the researcher's show of empathy and the rapport achieved in conversation, how far can they be said to have given their 'informed consent' to make the disclosures that emerge during the interview?

It is clearly impossible for interviewees to give their *fully informed* consent at the outset of an essentially exploratory qualitative interview whose direction and potential revelations cannot be anticipated (Wise, 1987). Some researchers have suggested that consent requires an ongoing process of discussion, reflection, and re-negotiation of trust throughout the interview. However, as Kvale (1992: 115) has pointed out, this approach depends on unrealistic assumptions of equality and 'rationalism' in research relationships, particularly where the interviewee may not share the interviewer's goals. We would also suggest that such *continual* intervention would inhibit the development of rapport and give the interviewer too intrusive a 'voice' in the construction of the interview dialogue. Under commercial (or professional) pressure to obtain results, there is a danger that, rather than engage in such complex negotiations which might entail the risk of refusal, interviewers will find it more convenient to rely on their skills in 'doing rapport' to persuade interviewees to disclose the information they seek.

Unfortunately, the process of 'doing rapport' may lead the interviewer into some of the serious ethical and emotional difficulties that can develop unanticipated during the interview. For example, as Kvale warns, there is a danger that 'close personal rapport … may lead to the research interview moving into a quasi-therapeutic interview', and indeed 'some individuals may [deliberately] turn the interview into therapy', although Kvale also confidently claims: 'The interviewer feels when a topic is too emotional to pursue in the interview' (1992: 149, 155). However, in practice even skilled interviewers may find it difficult **[p. 112 ↓ ]** to draw neat boundaries around 'rapport', 'friendship' and 'intimacy', in order to avoid the depths of 'counselling' and 'therapy' (Birch and Miller, 2000). With deeper rapport, interviewees become more likely to explore their more intimate experiences and emotions. Yet they also become more likely to discover and disclose experiences and feelings which, upon reflection, they would have preferred

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to keep private from others (Finch, 1984; Oakley, 1981; Stacey, 1988), or not to acknowledge even to themselves. Indeed, by doing rapport 'too effectively' interviewers run the risk of breaching the interviewees' 'right *not* to know' their own innermost thoughts (Duncombe and Marsden, 1996; Larossa et al., 1981).

Ethical issues must inevitably arise where, increasingly, relatively unsuspecting interviewees are confronted by qualitative interviewers who are armed with a battery of skills in 'doing rapport' in interview relationships in order to achieve disclosure. In effect, by 'doing rapport' the interviewer 'sets the agenda' of the encounter and 'manages the consent' of the interviewee. This can work to close down or obscure any opportunities for the interviewee to challenge part or the whole of the interviewing process because this would appear a breach of the interviewer's ('faked') friendship. Under these circumstances, rapport is *not* 'tantamount to trust'. Instead, '*doing rapport*' becomes the ethically dubious substitute for more open negotiation of the interviewee's fully informed consent to participate in the interviewing process (see Birch and Miller, Chapter 5, and Miller and Bell, Chapter 3).

# The limitations of woman to woman rapport

As Hey (2000) points out, the literature on 'doing rapport' often conveys the curious impression that interviewers (and counsellors) are being trained to do through artifice what most women supposedly do 'naturally' and 'spontaneously' as a consequence of their gendered subordination and socialisation: for example, expressing empathy and tuning in to the moods of others (Miller, 1986); doing 'emotion work' to make others feel good (Hochschild, 1983); seeking communication through 'rapport talk' (Tannen, 1991); and listening to, and understanding, what remains unsaid 'between the lines' (Devault, 1990) (although see Duncombe and Marsden, 1998). However, this somewhat over-generalized picture is becoming increasingly challenged by a number of feminist researchers in differing ways. Significantly, rather than explore how to 'do rapport' by 'faking friendship', some researchers are focusing on the conditions and ethical problems where rapport does *not* occur because the social and emotional distance **[p. 113 ↓ ]** between researcher and interviewee proves too great (see Hey, 2000).

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This shift in emphasis can be seen as a result of wider feminist debates centred around the role of research (see Gillies and Alldred, Chapter 2). Initially, through disagreement about their goals and approaches, feminist researchers encountered dilemmas concerning the kinds of 'rapport' and 'openness' to be negotiated in the research relationship. Such dilemmas have worked to highlight the tensions between achieving an openness that enables women to speak 'in their real voices' (Ribbens, 1998: 17) and an 'openness to complete transformation … [that] lays the groundwork for friendship, shared struggle, and identity change' (Reinharz, 1992: 68). All qualitative interviewers inevitably play a part in the construction of the interview, yet it seems to us that the explicit goal of transformation impliesa more active analytical and interventionist role for the feminist researcher, whose voice may come to 'overlay' that of her subject. In fact, McRobbie (1982) doubts whether feminist researchers have either the capacity or the right to attempt to transform their subjects' lives.

Even in research with the more limited goal of understanding women's lives, differences of power arise almost inevitably from the researcher's ability to shape the interview 'dialogue' and to put together her version of the subject's lived reality, which, however, the subject herself may reject (Stacey, 1990; Wise, 1987). In addition, Wise (1987) and Phoenix (1994) have doubted whether shared womanhood can bridge differences of social class, ethnicity, sexual orientation and so on. Indeed, other feminists have pointed out that failures of empathy and rapport in the course of researching power may be evidence of important differences of perspective that need to be explored and defined rather than negotiated away (Cain, 1990; Smart, 1984).

Similar issues concerning rapport arise where researchers attempt to negotiate with interviewees the subsequent production of reports, data analysis and publication. Ideally, it is sometimes suggested, consent should be renegotiated at each stage (Kelly, 1988; Luff, 1999; Stacey, 1990). Yet some feminists argue that such negotiations are merely attempts to enlist interviewees' help in their own 'objectification' (Cain, 1990), since even the feminist (sociological) researcher must inevitably control the analysis (Ramazanoglu, 1989; see also Doucet and Mauthner, Chapter 7).

A consequence of these various differences between researchers and interviewees is that rapport in actual interviews may be less encompassing than the 'feminist ideal' outlined above. For example, when Luff interviewed potentially anti-feminist women

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from a powerful 'moral lobby', she sometimes experienced the expected lack of empathy, yet she was also surprised to feel what she described as **[p. 114 ↓ ]** 'moments of rapport' with women she expected to dislike (Luff, 1999). She stresses that feminist interviewers should reflect on both what is going on *but also how they feel about such moments*, as evidence of how aspects of women researchers' 'fractured' subjectivities and identities may sometimes mirror those of interviewees but, equally importantly, sometimes clash (Harding, 1987: 8). However, in describing her own feelings, Luff confesses:

> Listening to views, nodding or saying simple 'ums' or 'I see', to views
> that you strongly disagree with or, ordinarily, would strive to challenge,
> may be true to a methodology that aims to listen seriously to the views
> and experiences of others, but can feel personally very difficult and lead
> to questioning of the whole research agenda. (Luff, 1999: 698)

Luff worried that simulated friendliness might appear to support views irredeemably opposed to her own feminist beliefs. In practice, she found she could 'do rapport' (as we have called it) in relationships where she felt no empathy, but she guiltily suspected that her research was semi-covert. Her interviews with 'powerful' women offer a useful reminder that the balance of power is not always tilted mainly in the interviewer's favour. For example, after interviewing lone fathers, McKee and O'Brien (1983) have commented on men's tendency to take control, and how as women they had to assume a 'professional' asexual social distance in order to discourage unwanted male advances (McKee and O'Brien, 1983).

The above outlines the two trends we identified earlier: the 'commodification' of the skills of 'doing rapport', and feminist discussions of the limitations of what might be called the 'ideal feminist research relationship'. Luff's description in particular echoes our own ethical dilemmas as researchers, and we now explore our own research experiences in more detail.

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# Our own research experience of ethical problems with rapport

With hindsight, our own early attitudes to research were influenced by 'feminist' expectations that rapport would be easily achieved with women interviewees, but also (via graduate methodology training) by the 'professional' literature on 'doing rapport'. From both perspectives, rapport appeared ethically unproblematic and we pictured a 'good interview' as a reciprocal exchange, where our (genuine or simulated) expressions of empathy would ensure that interviewees would willingly make intimate disclosures. We were therefore unprepared for the disjunctures between these expectations and the ethical and emotional dilemmas that we experienced in practice — the feeling **[p. 115 ↓ ]** that we were intruding or even inflicting pain, or the way that pressures to collect data for our employers or our own research sometimes clashed with our sense of ethics.

Initially we were keen to establish ourselves as good interviewers, so although we often empathetically 'heard' our subjects' reluctance to be interviewed, we also felt (like salespersons) that to do our *jobs* properly we must deploy all the charm we could muster to get ourselves through the door so we could ask our questions. But once inside, to gain a 'good interview' we would have to work harder at doing rapport to get our interviewees to 'open up' more fully. However, we were unprepared to discover how widely many of these encounters could vary, or to experience the complexity of our personal reactions to doing rapport.

Hardly surprisingly, we found it more difficult to achieve rapport where we did not spontaneously feel empathy with our interviewees. For example, in an early study of Youth Training Schemes (YTS), Jean felt she established a 'genuine', if shallow, rapport with the YTS trainees and with the more conscientious employers who took training seriously, because she was 'on their side'. But with the more exploitative employers and trainers (who provided neither jobs nor training), she knew she was faking rapport to 'betray' them into revealing their double standards; and sometimes whilst smiling at them she also smiled to herself, thinking: 'What a revealing quote'. However, in analogous situations, Julie felt uncomfortable and personally compromised when she

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found that, in order to gain a 'good' interview, it seemed necessary to smile, nod, and appear to collude with views she strongly opposed.

In later research on household finances, Jean disagreed profoundly with the would-be 'scientific' detachment adopted by her employer and colleagues. Yet she discovered that establishing close rapport could bring disclosures that were outside the scope of the research and occasionally beyond her capacity to handle. For example, one aggrieved wife showed Jean the knife she said she planned to use to kill her husband, whom she described as a confidence trickster who had deceived her. Another wife confided that, despite an injunction against her pathologically violent husband, she still allowed him back into the house to sleep with her, unknown to her children, or to the police and social services who were trying to protect her and her family. 'Doing rapport' had gained Jean the confidences of 'friendship', yet she felt bound by the ethics of confidentiality not to call on others to intervene. More minor dilemmas arose where interviewees asked Jean to switch off the tape, inviting her collusion in concealing what they had to say from 'her boss' and 'the outside world', but setting Jean the temptation still to use the material.

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In Julie's first interview as a paid research officer, she too was confronted with ethical dilemmas resulting from the 'over effectiveness' of her attempts at doing rapport. Her interviewee was a man whose wife had recently left him after 22 years, and he immediately protested that he did not know why he had agreed to participate because he did not feel comfortable in talking about his feelings. Nevertheless, prompted by her training and the desire to establish herself as an interviewer, Julie tried all the harder to put him at his ease, smiling, empathizing, and stressing that participation was voluntary. Eventually, he was persuaded to reveal experiences from 20 years before that he had never even told his wife — the disclosure of which was emotionally upsetting and resulted in tears. Although Julie had alerted him to the fact that she was not a counsellor, she felt she had betrayed him into revealing more of his feelings than he would have wished, and more than she could handle (although after agreeing to further interviews, he felt he had been helped). Overall, Julie recognized that her reactions were a complex mixture of guilt and sympathy for her interviewee, and worries over the

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power her technique had given her, but nevertheless edged with a sense of satisfaction that she had gained a level of self-disclosure her employer would welcome.

As contract researchers, both Julie and Jean sometimes felt resentful and even possessive that the hard-won insights from their interviews might then be appropriated by their employers and misinterpreted, misused or even discarded. Julie, in particular, felt she knew which 'good quotes' her employer would take up, but regretted how much of the deeply emotional content the employer would then regard as outside the remit of 'her' research. Both Julie and Jean felt there was inevitably loss or distortion when someone else attempted to analyse data abstracted from the emotional context of the rapport through which it had been generated. (There are echoes here of debates concerning attempts to archive qualitative data for re-analysis; see Mauthner et al., 1998.)

The differences accruing to specific interviewer positions were emphasized for Julie when she realized how, as a paid research assistant, her sense of 'doing a job' had relieved her from taking full responsibility when interviewees were upset by what she regarded as 'her employer's' research. Once conducting her own research, however, she felt personally responsible, and consequently tended to steer interviewees away from potentially sensitive areas and to stop the interview at signs of distress, although she was then faced with the fact that her interviews might not achieve the degree of emotional disclosure that characterised the 'good interview'.

Ethical problems also arose in Jean's attempt to explore the 'interior' of marriage by probing the disagreements and 'secrets' that **[p. 117 ↓ ]** couples keep from the outside world, and sometimes from one another and even themselves. Fully informed consent could not be negotiated in advance, but Jean hoped that by maintaining good rapport, interviewees would feel comfortable enough to participate. However, she later recognized that by using rapport in this way, she was disguising rather than solving the ethical problems that remained integral to her research.

Such problems were less pressing where Jean found it more difficult to establish good rapport: some working-class husbands, in particular, were reluctant to discuss their emotions, and their wives in turn seemed to fear their husbands would condemn them for any disclosure of 'marital secrets'. After keeping a child in the room to

inhibit the development of rapport, one working-class mother concluded, almost triumphantly: 'There, I don't suppose you found out much, did you ' However, there was an illuminating moment of rapport in an otherwise sticky interview with another working-class woman, when she discovered that Jean (like herself) had suffered post-natal depression and she trusted Jean enough to become more open and vulnerable, although social distance returned when the discussion moved to other areas.

The value of shared experience in promoting rapport was more evident to Jean in interviews with liberal middle-class women whose tastes and lives seemed closer to her own. These interviews became enjoyable conversations, where intimate emotional disclosures came so easily that the boundaries between research and friendship seemed to blur. Yet Jean came to realize that again such 'over easy' rapport entailed pitfalls. For example, when interviewees said: 'You know what I mean', she tended to reply: 'I know', partly deliberately to build rapport but also intuitively because she felt she genuinely *did* know. Only on listening to the tapes later did she realize how 'reading between the lines' brought the risk that she might project her own understanding onto the interviewees' relationships.

Such 'over rapport' sometimes created more obvious ethical (and methodological and feminist) problems in joint interviews where couples who were nursing grievances against one another were still comfortable, or aggrieved, enough to argue in Jean's presence. Some wives invited Jean to ally herself with them in condemning their husbands, who naturally then became hostile and reluctant to participate. With such interviews Jean experienced very mixed feelings: satisfaction in capturing such revealing data on tape, yet (particularly on re-hearing the tapes) guilt that her presence might have fuelled conflicts she should have tried to smooth over or silence.

More subtly, Jean also began to worry that probing about love and intimacy might disturb relationships where couples (usually wives) had 'worked hard' emotionally to achieve a balance. For example, **[p. 118 ↓ ]** whenever Jean asked one wife about her husband's views, the wife began by saying, 'We think…' but then hesitated and switched to, 'Well, *I* think', until she reluctantly began to realize during the interview how little her husband ever disclosed to her. Similarly, in response to a question on displays of affection, she began by saying, 'Oh yes, we like to cuddle…', but then she corrected herself as she realized she was always the initiator, 'Well, *I* like to cuddle',

adding thoughtfully, 'I'd never thought of that before'. Although the interviews ended with Jean engaging in 'repair work' to re-affirm that such couple relationships were 'all right, really', she could not dispel the thought that some couples or individuals might be betrayed by the rapport that she had established into learning too much about the imbalances of affection and power in their relationships.

The fact that interviews restricted to one visit might leave interviewees with unresolved pain, was brought home to Jean when some time after one interview she encountered a woman who had cried bitterly about intimate events in her personal life. Yet although they came face to face and she started visibly, obviously recognizing Jean, the interviewee walked past without a nod, perhaps now feeling that she had revealed too much of herself and recognizing that Jean was not, after all, a 'friend'.

Indeed, for both of us, later chance encounters with former interview subjects provided illuminating insights into how far there had been a blurring of boundaries between the temporary 'faked friendship' that we had induced by doing rapport, and 'real' friendship characterised by emotional empathy and continuity over time. For example, in repeated interviews with one subject, Julie felt a lot of effort was required in order to 'do her job' and establish rapport. However she persevered over several months and eventually gained sufficient trust for the interviewee to disclose incidents and emotions that were extremely painful to her. Yet the disparity of this relationship (from Julie's perspective) was revealed soon after, when this participant rang Julie at home to suggest meeting up for coffee. Although Julie chatted politely and talked about how the woman was now feeling, she felt she did not 'have time' to meet; she had 'done her job' in relation to that particular piece of research, and she was now too busy cultivating new 'friends' on the next research project.

Jean had a similar experience when someone whom she did not immediately recognize rushed over and embraced her in the street, and began chatting in a most friendly way about Jean's family and job. It took Jean several minutes to realize who this was, and she was left feeling slightly affronted by the 'assumption of familiarity' that was evident. Jean remembered that the interview (two years earlier) had been difficult, with little real rapport or 'reward' so that, in an effort to put the interviewee at her ease, she had disclosed more about **[p. 119 ↓ ]** herself than usual. In effect, she had begun to engage in what was supposed to be the behaviour of a 'real' friend, although now, at a distance

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from the interview, it no longer seemed appropriate to make the effort of expressing a friendship she did not feel.

This kind of blurring of boundaries between real and faked friendship seems more likely to occur in research where the interviewing process involves repeated visits. For example, Julie interviewed one woman five times over a ten-month period after her husband and friends had abandoned her, and listened empathetically to experiences that they sometimes had in common. In the last interview, when Julie asked her what she had gained from the research, she replied, 'Well, apart from anything else, I've made a friend'. However, this claim only brought home to Julie the falseness of the situation where the interviewee did not recognize how Julie's 'faking of friendship' had been part of her job. Julie's strong personal discomfort was later compounded when she could not immediately recall the interviewee's name when they met in the street. This, and similar experiences, in which it becomes apparent that a 'role' is being played, highlights the falsity of interview 'friendships' and leads to reflection on how interviewees themselves may be projecting a 'self' that is specific to the situation.

These later encounters with former interviewees offer intriguing insights about our different individual understandings of the unspoken interview 'contract', that is, how much of 'ourselves' we were prepared to give by way of 'doing rapport', and what we expected our interviewees to give us in return. In some interviews, Jean felt uncomfortable because her participants could feel that her research on intimacy might be intrusive and potentially exploitative; yet at the same time she wondered how far her interviewees might be acting a part to conceal their 'real' selves, as she felt that she herself was doing. In contrast, Julie experienced almost the reverse reaction with some of her interviewees, feeling that they were 'intruding' upon her when they 'called her bluff' by trying to take up and pursue the rapport she had established in the interview as if it had been real rather than 'faked' friendship.

Another way of looking at these episodes is that they provide further illustrations of how interviewees may exercise power in their relationships with interviewers, not only through withholding the data that interviewers want, but by transgressing (or failing to recognize) the hidden 'rules' or 'cues' as to how interview relationships are 'supposed' to develop. In our interviews such 'transgressions' took the form of participants rejecting our faked offers of 'friendship', or alternatively taking up the offer too enthusiastically

as if it were genuine. Our contrasting personal responses to such 'transgressions', both as interviewers and *individuals*, highlight how the insights that **[p. 120 ↓ ]** we gain from research are influenced by both personal and social differences, and how ethical dilemmas permeate the whole experience of research interviewing.

# Conclusion

Our discussion of the ethical issues associated with rapport started with what we called the 'ideal feminist research relationship' where spontaneous and genuine rapport supposedly leads more naturally to reciprocal mutual disclosure. We have contrasted this ideal with research relationships where the interviewer is influenced by commercial pressures to 'do rapport' by 'faking friendship' in order to encourage the interviewee to open up. In practice, of course, all interviewing relationships, including women's interviews with women, are situated somewhere along a spectrum between the extremes of more genuine empathy and relationships with an element of 'faking'. However, interview relationships raise common ethical problems, to the extent that they encourage or persuade interviewees to explore and disclose experiences and emotions which — on reflection — they may have preferred to keep to themselves or even 'not to know'.

These ethical tensions are associated with the misuse of the interviewer's power of persuasion, exercised through the ideologies of shared 'womanhood' or alternatively shared 'friendship'. We have shown how claims for a special status for shared womanhood have been challenged even from within feminism. Feminist researchers must, therefore, inevitably face ethical dilemmas concerning the balance between the possibly adverse individual emotional consequences of their interviews for their interviewees, as against the more abstract gains to feminism and public education that may result from their research. We have also argued that in this 'ethical equation' we need to take into account the influence of professionalisation, as a specific instance of a more general trend towards the 'commercialisation' or 'commodification' of rapport.

It was our sense of alienation from the kinds of rapport that we felt we needed to establish in our interviews that led us to this exploration of the ethics of rapport. On further reflection, we became aware that some aspects of our graduate training,

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and the literature on the skills of qualitative interviewing, tapped into a more general trend towards seeing such skills in terms of their marketability, with a consequent neglect of their ethical implications. In short, the skills of 'doing rapport' are becoming 'commodified'.

We have suggested that the commodification of the skills of 'doing rapport' raises ethical questions concerning how far interviewers are **[p. 121 ↓ ]** able to 'set the agenda' for the interview and to 'manage the consent' of interviewees to participate in disclosing more or less private and intimate information. Our advice is that interviewers should continue to worry about these issues as they emerge in each piece of research and each individual interview. However, interviewers should remember that interviewees are not totally powerless, and that they can withhold their participation — as long as interviewers do not 'do rapport' too convincingly.

# Notes

1 Julie has interviewed husbands and wives (not couples) between separation and divorce, and has recently interviewed divorced mothers, divorced fathers and their new partners as part of her PhD on post-divorce parenting. Jean has researched Youth Training Schemes, and has more recently interviewed wives, husbands (and other kin), for studies of household finances, and of love and power in couple relationships.

2 We use the term 'interviewee' because we feel that 'subject' claims too much and 'respondent' claims too little participation in the research.

3 Confusion arises because the term 'qualitative' is now used indiscriminately to refer to fairly structured interviews intended for quantitative computer analysis, which have virtually nothing in common with flexible ('unstructured' or 'semi-structured') 'conversations with a purpose' that rely at most on topic guides. Whereas Oakley deplored attempts to depersonalise and structure relationships in what she argued should be personal and flexible research relationships, our concern is with the spread of a commercial and phoney 'personalisation' in the realm of more flexible methods.

Jean Duncombe and Julie Jessop

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