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The Problem with Rapport in Interview-Based Studies

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Abstract
Rapport is an orienting principle in qualitative research. It is a capacious concept which, in practice, is deployed by researchers in a wide variety of ways. Despite its definitional ambiguity, in interview-based studies, researchers often link rapport to obtaining more open and honest – and thus high-quality – data. While rapport has been critiqued in the ethnographic tradition, these critiques have not extended to the particularities of interview-based studies. I offer two critiques of rapport as an orienting principle in interview-based studies. First, I question the assumption that rapport is an unmitigated methodological positive and consider instances when it may not be particularly useful or may even be detrimental to data collection. Second, I argue that the privileged position rapport occupies as an ideal-type of researcher-participant relationship risks foreclosing other types of researcher-participant relationships. The overemphasis on rapport may serve to harm data transparency and epistemic accountability. I argue for de-centering rapport as an orienting principle for interview-based studies.

Keywords Interviews · Qualitative Research · Rapport · Ethics · Reflexivity · Positionality

Introduction

Methodological books on interviewing typically suggest that generating rapport with participants is a useful ingredient for producing high quality data. These books usually have at least a section on rapport, and the question of how rapport may be facilitated or hindered is often woven throughout the book (Gerson and Damaske 2020; Lareau 2021). Methodological discussions of semi-structured interviews recognize a range of relationship and interactional possibilities (Brannen 1988; Lamont 2004; Laurens 2007; Li 2021; Sweet 2021; Tobias Neely 2022), but "rapport" between the

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researcher and the participant is frequently emphasized as important for obtaining high quality data (Adler and Adler 2001). Rapport thus occupies a place as an orienting principle – setting the expectations for what constitutes an ideal researcher-participant relationship – in interview-based research (Cousin 2010; Edin and Kefalas 2007; Gerson and Damaske 2020; Macfarlane 2022; Watkins-Hayes 2019). While in ethnographic research[1] there is a robust history of critiquing rapport (Duneier 2004; Fine 1993, 2019; Hanson and Richards 2019; Stacey 1988), this critical eye has not yet been extended to interview methods. Interviews are distinct from ethnography and are often deployed to yield different insights about the social world (Jerolmack and Khan 2014; Lamont and Swidler 2014; Pugh 2014; Vaisey 2014). But rapport also enjoys epistemic privilege in interview-based studies. Here, rapport is often seen as resulting in a researcher-participant relationship characterized by trust which then yields more “open," “honest,” and “frank,” responses (Edin and Kefalas 2007; Ford 2018; Rosen et al. 2021; Sargent et al. 2021; Small and Cook 2023).[2]

In this article, I critique this privileged position that rapport occupies in our methodological tool-kit in interview-based studies. First, I elaborate on how rapport is definitionally ambiguous and obfuscates the specifics of researcher-participant relationships. While definitions for rapport are offered in methodological textbooks, how rapport is deployed by researchers when describing their relationships with participants is varied in practice. This definitional ambiguity is important because it obscures understandings of a researcher’s relationship with participants, which is key for evaluating researchers’ knowledge claims.

Second, I address how rapport is generally viewed as a methodological positive in interview-based studies. I suggest that there are two key ways that rapport may be harmful for data collection: that in some contexts and for some topics rapport may hinder data collection; and that the privileged position of rapport in our methodological tool-kit serves to oversimplify and homogenize what may often be quite complex relationships between researcher and participant. The latter harms data transparency, because the researcher and the context are so crucial to data collection (Pugh and Mosseri 2023), and a researcher’s reflexivity about the research process, including their relationships with participants, is salient to their analytical claims.

To develop these arguments, I draw on my own study which focused on how dual-earner, professional middle-class families in the U.S. contend with a spouse’s unemployment. The bulk of my data were interviews, including over 100 interviews

[1] As a heuristic, I draw a distinction between ethnographic and interview methods for this article. In actuality, this is, of course, a blurry distinction. As others have pointed out, interviews often have an element of observations, and interview studies may sometimes have an ethnographic component which is central to an argument as in Hochschild (1989) and Cooper (2014). Likewise, ethnographies typically contain formal and informal interviews.

[2] Scholars generally conceptualize trust, at a baseline, as consisting of a relationship where a person is willing to make themselves vulnerable to another person. Levine (2013) discusses the social sources of trust. She points out that familiarity can facilitate trust, but cautions that there are additional factors, such as power differentials between the interacting parties and whether one party sees another as an agent of a trustworthy institution, which matter in shaping whether a relationship is characterized by trust. For more on trust, see Tyson (2024).

with 72 participants. I complemented these with "intensive family observations" (Lareau and Rao 2022) of four families.

The Unemployment Study

To examine the methodological warrant for rapport, I draw on my experience of collecting data in a primarily interview-based study of unemployment and heterosexual marriages that I conducted from 2013-2016 in the U.S. The inclusion criteria for unemployed individuals in the sample were to: be unemployed; be married to a spouse of the opposite gender who also participated in the labor force; be a U.S. citizen; have a college degree; and have at least one child under the age of 22. My aim was to capture dual-earner heterosexual families in the professional middle class experiencing unemployment. I recruited participants through a variety of means, including career coaches, university alumni networks, parent list-servers, and professional associations. All names of participants are pseudonyms. This study fits into sociological research which is often concerned with understanding some aspect of inequality and where semi-structured interviews are leveraged to dig deep and uncover the "sociological gold" (Pugh and Mosseri 2023) of "ambivalence" (Williams 2021) in human experiences and feelings which other methods are less well suited for doing.[3]

As an Indian woman who grew up outside the U.S., was not a U.S. citizen, was not in a heterosexual marriage, did not have children, and was not unemployed, I did not share the key attributes of my sample.[4] Most of my participants were white. There were thus lots of axes of social distance. Despite unemployment, most were quite affluent and had savings, pensions, and were homeowners in wealthy neighborhoods. In the U.S. context, where work is morally prized, they belonged, at the time of my study, to a stigmatized group (Sharone 2024).

I ultimately had a sample of 25 unemployed men and 23 unemployed women. I also conducted interviews with about half their spouses. I conducted interviews separately with spouses, and on different days. I additionally conducted follow-up interviews with 24 of the unemployed individuals and 11 spouses, separately, between

[3] Scholars have debated vigorously on how interview data should be treated, whether as simply what people say bearing little relationship to what they do (see: Jerolmack and Khan 2014 and see *Sociological Methods and Research*, volume 43, issue 2), discourses people mobilize (i.e. Luhr 2025), cultural performances (Lichterman 2017) that are replete with "honorable displays" (Pugh 2013) amongst some options. Pugh (2013) rejects the notion that interviews must be used in one way or another (i.e. as discourses or cultural performances), writing instead that even within one interview itself researchers "can access different levels of information about people's motivation, beliefs, meanings, feelings and practices." Scholars also point to the very ambivalence of human experience and feelings that interviews can fruitfully try to mine, and which elude other methods (Pugh and Mosseri 2023; Williams 2021). It is outside the scope of this article to do justice to this related and rich discussion, but these cited sources are useful for considering this issue.

[4] I was a graduate student in a context where graduate students were not unionized or otherwise recognized as workers. I did not see myself as either a worker or unemployed, nor do I think I was seen by others as such. I occupied, I suppose, a liminal space as a long-term student.

six months to a year after the initial interview. This sample provides a lens onto unemployment amongst a socio-economically privileged strata of U.S. workers.

I additionally conducted intensive family observations with four families: two of unemployed men and two of unemployed women. I visited each family daily for two to eight hours per visit for a two- or three-week period to get a deeper sense of how unemployment reverberated in their daily lives. With these four families I gained a more intimate insight into some aspects of their daily family life. These observations occurred after I had conducted initial, separate interviews with the husband and the wife, and prior to any subsequent follow-up interview. I conceptualized this study as a primarily interview-based study complemented with an ethnographic component.[5]

The design of this study was particularly well-suited for illuminating how my relationship with participants evolved over time. I had a range for how long and with what intensity I knew someone. I reached different degrees of (ephemeral) closeness with each participant. These variations in my relationships – including repeated interactions over time, which many researchers see as important in developing rapport – provided lessons to me on the evolving nature of researcher-participant relationship. I draw on some of these lessons to consider rapport in its different facets.

What is Rapport?

Researchers agree that how the interaction of an interview unfolds is critical for collecting detailed, high-quality data.[6] A good amount of methodological guidance for researchers focuses on how they can behave to ensure a productive interaction with the participant. Methodological advice ranges from using silence as an interactional strategy, considering how best to phrase interview questions (Jiménez and Orozco 2021), circling back to questions, asking clear questions, relying on probes and follow-ups (Lareau 2021), emphasizing that a researcher does not see themselves as subservient to a participant when interviewing the rich and powerful (Blair-Loy 2003; Laurens 2007; Ostrander 1993) and using compliments to ease interview interactions with socio-economically disadvantaged participants (Edin and Kefalas 2007). Many of these techniques are often framed as in service of developing a relationship characterized by rapport.[7]

[5] Please see Rao 2020 for additional methodological details.

[6] What constitutes "high-quality" interview data is an important issue in its own right and has received worthy consideration. For more on this and for a non-exhaustive list, see (Lareau and Rao 2016; Pugh 2014; Pugh and Mosseri 2023; Small and Calarco 2022; Williams 2021). For the purposes of this manuscript, I accept these commonly accepted criteria, and within this I prioritize detail and depth.

[7] Rapport is an orienting principle in qualitative research, but scholars have acknowledged and written about a wider range of interpersonal techniques that can be deployed by the researcher to ethically produce high quality data (Gerson and Damaske 2020; Lareau 2021; Lareau and Rao 2016; Small and Calarco 2022). Researchers are taught that being an "insider," "outsider," or strategically eliding this dichotomy altogether can be useful (Li 2021). In some cases, positioning oneself as naïve and an ingenue in relation to the participants can help participants share more details (Ellis 2023). There can be value to being a stranger to the participant (Brannen 1988; Lamont 2004; Tobias Neely 2022). In some cases, providing a therapeutic space can yield detailed interview data (Sweet 2021). In exceptional cases, being confrontational can do the same (Laurens 2007). Through this vast range of advice, researchers have highlighted how the researcher-participant relationship and interaction is crucial to eliciting high quality data.

Rapport is seen as an interpersonal tool that a researcher can deploy to nudge participants, including those who may be reluctant to speak volubly (Adler and Adler 2001). Indeed, recent books on interviewing emphasize the importance of establishing rapport for shaping how an interview proceeds (Gerson and Damaske 2020; Lareau 2021). One definition of rapport characterizes it as a "close and harmonious relationship that allows people to understand one another and communicate well" (Carr et al. 2020). Rapport can nonetheless be difficult to operationalize. In an effort to operationalize rapport, researchers have argued that it is built through repeated contact (or "exposure"), which leads to trust, and which then leads to honest disclosures. While these concepts – repeated contact, trust, and honesty – are distinct, in methodological discussions of rapport they are frequently thought of as bundled together (Oh et al. 2019; Rosen et al. 2021; Sargent et al. 2021; Small and Cook 2023).

Given the challenges of operationalising it, rapport is often treated capaciously by researchers, becoming a shorthand for a broad category of researcher-participant interactions. In some cases, more details can illuminate whether a researcher is emphasizing connection (Lareau 2021; Randles 2021), ease (Wingfield 2019), friendliness (Sargent et al. 2021), openness (O'Quinn et al. 2024) or trust (Rosen et al. 2021) amongst just some of the options that rapport can encompass. Some elements may be combined: researchers may emphasize warmth and trust, or friendliness and openness. Two salient aspects of rapport are that it is seen to strengthen over time and that it is viewed as important for overcoming social distance, which, in the context of these studies, is usually seen as obstructing strong data collection.

In her empathetic study of poor mothers, Randles (2021) emphasizes the element of connection, across social distance, in her deployment of rapport, noting:

> Disclosing that I had a child, especially one in the middle of toilet training, was a key source of rapport. Although our experiences of diapering were radically divergent due to class, race, and other socioeconomic differences, we were all parenting children still in the diaper phase. Despite being mostly an outsider to their social worlds, I connected with respondents over having a shared insider status as mothers of young children.

In another example, in her important study of black professionals, Adia Harvey Wingfield (2019) emphasizes the ease element of rapport:

> As a black, professional woman, I expect that racial and, in some cases gender solidarity likely made it relatively easy to establish a quick and easy rapport with respondents. I did not observe any clear ways that gender affected my interviews with men respondents, though it is of course possible that this shaped the ways they responded to interview questions.

Here, Wingfield emphasizes rapport deployed as ease and based on a shared social status that was salient to the study.

Whichever elements of rapport authors emphasize for their own study, there is frequently an explicit assertion that having rapport means more honesty from participants. In a compelling study drawing on interviews as well as participant observation of co-working spaces (Sargent et al. 2021), the authors deploy rapport in a manner akin to friendliness, noting:

> Regarding our positionality (to the interviewees and other coworking members we interacted with), each researcher was a highly educated white woman in her late 20s or early 30s. In some ways, our education, race, gender, and ages may have helped us appear "approachable" […] and enabled us to establish trust and rapport with people who shared similar statuses. On the other hand, for others with whom we did not share overlapping statuses (such as racial minorities or men), this may have impeded frank discussions about race or gender.

In this case, rapport is bundled with friendliness and trust and positioned alongside shared status characteristics (such as race and gender) to encourage readers to have confidence in the authors' analytical claims about race and gender.

In their illuminating study on racial discrimination in housing, the authors link rapport and trust, writing that they did some "…significant work building interpersonal rapport" in order to "produce[…] remarkably candid responses about race from most respondents" (Rosen et al. 2021). In being bundled with trust, rapport is positioned as crucial for obtaining, in the words of the authors above, "frank" and "candid" responses from participants.

This very plasticity of how rapport is variously deployed by researchers presents a methodological challenge. In these few examples, rapport stands in for varied relationships with participants. These are each distinct; for example, having ease with someone is not necessarily equal to trusting them.

Rapport is additionally frequently assumed to be facilitated through a shared social status that is relevant to the study at hand. And as a corollary, there is a commonsense understanding that the absence of such shared status will hinder rapport and therefore also impede participants' honesty. As an illustrative example, in an insightful study where she interviewed young men in their late teens and early twenties who had experienced "unwanted sex" with women, Jessie Ford (2018) describes that she felt her own status characteristics, specifically her age and gender, did not immediately facilitate rapport. She then sought to actively develop this:

> Given that I am a white woman in my early thirties, I spent the first ten to fifteen minutes of interviews trying to build rapport. This involved reassuring the men that interviews were completely confidential, asking questions about their social life, laughing with them if they said something humorous, and generally trying to make them comfortable. I found that most men were eager to talk about their experiences and that my difference in age and gender was not a barrier to frank, open discussions.

This example suggests that shared social status facilitates rapport, which is then implicitly seen as resulting in more open and honest answers. The lack of a shared social status may need to be overcome to facilitate rapport, to ensure that interview responses are more open and honest.

Discussions of rapport thus typically take some efforts to show how researchers developed it, often with some success, and authors may view any potential lack of rapport as requiring explanation. A lack of rapport does not appear to be value-neutral when it comes to claims of high-quality data. While authors deploy rapport as a stand-in for a variety of relationship types, they are nonetheless united in bundling it with trust and with participant's honesty.

Does Rapport Mean More "Honest" Responses?

In interview studies, rapport is assumed to deepen the longer time a researcher spends with participants (Weiss 1994). The idea here is that the longer a researcher is in contact with a participant, the more trust a participant develops toward the researcher, and with more trust, the more honest a participant is with the researcher. Thus, worried by the possibility that participants may engage in some level of deception, researchers also point to how rapport can minimize this (Oh et al. 2019; Small and Cook 2023; Weiss 1994). Small and Cook (2023) write that "Over time, rapport increases, as does truthfulness, and trustworthiness." They add that, "If the researcher and interviewee have not yet established sufficient rapport, the interviewee may choose not to share something sensitive if they believe the interviewer may disapprove." Describing a longitudinal study of young adulthood drawing on interviews, Oh et al. (2019) write that "reports may become more "honest" over time, as interviewers and respondents build rapport." In a landmark study of low-income women's reasons for prioritizing motherhood, Kathy Edin and Maria Kefalas (2007) reference how the passage of time helped them develop rapport, and thus obtain more frank data:

> To enhance rapport, we talked at least twice with each of the 162 mothers in the study. Sometimes respondents shared openly the first time we met with them, but often the first interview was just a warm-up for a second, where the mother was willing to share her experiences and views more freely. We sometimes interviewed mothers who were especially shy or recalcitrant a third time.

These excerpts indicate that rapport is important as a methodological tool because it leads to more honest responses from participants.

But is it reasonable to assume that more "exposure" (Small and Calarco 2022) to participants, more time, necessarily deepens rapport, and alongside it trust, thus leading to more honest responses? Social relationships can take varied pathways over time: they can sour; they can go cold and be revived. How relationships progress, alter, or are truncated through the passage of time has been well covered by ethnographers, who often cast a critical look at their own methodological practice (Contreras 2019; Lareau 2011; Rios 2017; Stacey 1988; Stuart 2016). People who had initially let ethnographers into their lives can sever ties as they learn more about the research. Lareau (2011, 319) recounts how the Williams' family in her book *Unequal Childhoods* wished to cut off contact with her after they read her book, writing that "Ms. Williams asked me not to contact them and, especially, not to contact Alexander in the future," (Alexander is the focal 10-year-old child from this family featured in *Unequal Childhoods*).

Similar processes may also be at play in studies where the bulk of the data is interview-based. In my unemployment study, I interviewed William and his wife Shannon (separately) several times over the course of a few years, starting with William when he was unemployed. They were also one of the four families with whom I conducted intensive family observations. At the time of my study, William was in his early 40s and had been married to Shannon for about five years. They had a four-year old son, Alex. At my first interview with William, he had been unemployed for about a year. I asked both William and Shannon detailed questions about their finances, because I was trying to understand what William's job loss meant for them financially. Even though researchers have noted that obtaining data on income and wealth is tricky, I found that both of them easily provided these details.[8] Here is a relevant excerpt from my first interview with William, which was my first time meeting him:

> Q: What was the salary and benefits you had at the job?
> A: I was paid about 60, not bad. A lot of it was commission based. So, there were corporate metrics and if you adhered to X, Y, and Z metrics you'd get bonus. And so, bonus usually $1500 to $2000 dollars a month and the base salary was about 40. And the benefits were standard, I guess. They weren't that great. They were at the low end of benefits, it was you know HMOs that we had to deal with, and you had to get your doctor approved and you couldn't change your doctor and go see anyone you wanted. Kind of a hassle.
> Q: So, you're saying there were medical benefits?
> A: There were.
> Q: So was your family on your plan, or?
> A: No. I was on my wife's plan.
> Q: Your son as well?
> A: Yeah.
> Q: And were there any other benefits? Housing or education or pension or anything like that?
> A: They had a 401(k) but it was a mess. It was terrible. You put into it and they said 'Thanks.' They matched, I think, like a quarter of a percent, half a percent or something like that. It wasn't very good.

I noted the sense of ease that I certainly felt and which I also attributed to William in my interview memo, written immediately after this interview: "William is gregarious, and warned me that he would be very honest with me through the conversation, which I was of course delighted to hear. Our interview was punctuated with laughter and well-humoured sarcasm (the latter from William, and the former from me)." I specifically referenced rapport, noting "Our rapport was very good, and the interview closed with some discussion of my life…" I found Shannon to be open about my questions on their finances as well:

[8] For more on financial disclosure and comfort in interview research, see (Sherman 2017; Zaloom 2019).

> Q: Can you tell me, can you give me a broad-stroke picture of your financial information in terms of you know the assets that you guys have, houses or cars or whatever, any savings that you guys have, or any debts that you have, just so I have you know a broad-stroke picture of--
> A: We don't really have any debt. We just sold our house in [state] so we're trying to find a house here. So right now, we have all the money from the house sale.
> Q: How much is that?
> A: We have $60,000. To buy a new house. And that's with all our, I mean that's everything we have. We have a couple of thousand dollars in savings. Our credit cards are like $2000, and Will has a student loan still, probably $3000. I mean that's really it. We don't have a lot of debt. Our cars are paid for.
> Q: OK. And what is your income like for the year, for instance?
> A: 80,000.
> Q: 80,000. And what was Will's income. So, what is the kind of loss, if you will—
> A: He made about 45. […]. I mean if we weren't getting unemployment, we would struggle, we would have to do more to cut back or something. But with him, with Alex only being in daycare part time. I mean it's, I would say we're about where we were before, with Alex going to day care part time.

In my interview memo about Shannon, while I did not use the language of rapport, I indicated that it was not a defining feature of our interview interaction: "She was not especially warm, but she was very receptive to hearing my questions and answering them. She was not afraid to answer negatively, for instance about the problems in the marriage." In this example while I felt rapport, in the sense of ease and comfort, with William but less so with Shannon, I did not think the lack of rapport precluded Shannon from sharing financial details.

This relative comfort in answering financial questions is unexpected in social science research. I asked detailed questions about finances, which can be jarring for those from the professional middle class (as this sample was), who tend to view money as a sacred and private topic (Zelizer 2005). I was aware that income data can be challenging to obtain and so in a brief ten-minute phone call prior to the interview, I would walk participants through the broad topics I was planning on addressing during the interview. On finances I generally explained, "I know this is very private, and my only aim is to make sure I fully understand what job loss has meant for you and your family. So, I ask these questions to have as full a picture as I can." In the interview itself, if participants questioned my probing about their income and wealth, I would talk through how I could make them more comfortable with sharing this information. For some, it included assuring them that their data would only feed into a demographic table describing the sample. In a rare case it meant refraining from using any numbers when describing their family in written outputs, but rather using more generic description that they were comfortable with, like "upper middle class."

Obtaining relatively detailed financial information was not, I think, primarily an aspect of rapport, or any trust, that participants may have felt toward me. It was likely related to their decision to participate in the study at all and an awareness that these questions were part of the study. Foregrounding my role as a professional stranger – a researcher – through this phone call prior to the first interview with each participant may have facilitated this aspect of the data collection for the first interview. Being a stranger who wanders into (and often quickly out of) people's lives may have some methodological advantages vis-à-vis allowing for intimacy and distance to commingle.[9] It is often easier to talk to strangers about sensitive and private issues precisely because strangers' responses do not carry the power to be hurtful (Brannen 1988; Lamont 2004; Small 2017). Lamont (2004, 165) explains the value of being a stranger in one-off interactions on the basis of which confidences can take place, "the fact that the participant knows that she or he will never see the stranger can […] provide reassurance that the interview is not the beginning of a relationship, but a micro-episode unnaturally isolated from everyday life." These scholars highlight that confidences to strangers are possible because one is not vulnerable to the stranger's judgment; in other words, this does not need to be a relationship characterized by trust.

People may confide in strangers because the strangers happen to be present at a critical moment – not all confidences are strategically planned. Strangers in whom people confide about sensitive issues could be viewed as "disposable ties" that are formed quickly and deeply, but are brittle and usually terminated quickly too (Desmond 2012). Yet, these ties provide practical and emotional support during the brief time they exist. Confiding extremely private things may be possible precisely because of the short-term nature of the contact. People may also avoid confiding in "strong ties" on some matters because these relationships can be complicated (Small et al. 2024). Confiding in a near and dear one about morally or ethically questionable events may incur a negative response that could damage the relationship. The centrality of rapport, when conceptualized as a bundle of exposure, trust, and honesty, for obtaining valuable insights may thus be overstated as a methodological tool.

I found that this ease and openness with sharing their financial details had shifted for William as well as for how comfortable I felt asking what are culturally seen as intrusive questions after I had spent more time with him and his family. After interviewing both William and Shannon, I spent three weeks conducting intensive family observations with them. I went to the Smiths' home almost daily, usually staying for anywhere between two and eight hours per visit and completed over 60 hours of observations. I spent time with them in their home, attended a birthday party for Alex, went to the zoo and restaurants with them. By all (capaciously defined and implicit) definitions of "rapport" – I had established that with the Smiths. After all, they had let me into their lives (albeit for a short

[9] In some ways, I could be seen as a "stranger" in terms of the interplay of intimacy and distance which Simmel (1950) highlighted. In Simmel's terms, for most of the participants in the study, I would be a stranger in what he describes as the ways of the past: a "wanderer who comes today and goes tomorrow." I also depart from Simmel in thinking of my fluid position as providing me with a unique "objectivity."

period of time), and that too at a somewhat vulnerable time when they were dealing with unemployment. My "exposure" to them was more than to most others in this sample.

About six months after I completed my observations, I reached out to William and Shannon again, to interview them to see how they were getting on. Rapport, built earlier, and potentially still in place, did not make it easier this time around for me to understand how the Smiths had been faring. After an immersion into their family life, even if temporary, which carried an element of closeness, I was reinstating distance. This was via a more formal interaction which now consisted of an interview with William and included probing questions about his and his family's financial well-being. Within the contours of our relationship, a sit-down interview seemed to me to be best suited for getting financial details, which I felt were necessary for me to understand what unemployment meant for their family. Yet, I felt uneasy. The interview proceeded in a clipped manner:

> Q: Yeah. And I do want to ask, so since this period in January you guys haven't accrued any debts or anything, it sounds like you have actually paid off your student debts and so on.
> A: Well, we've taken on some credit card debt recently.
> Q: How much?
> A: Not much, just I think a couple of grand---
> Q: Yeah, for the house?
> A: Yeah, since we bought the house and it's all stuff for the house. Just stuff for the house. So that's it.
> Q: Do you guys feel good financially and all that, because I mean for a while you were working---
> A: Yeah, we're fine. We don't have to, I mean, yeah it's all right.
> Q: OK. Is there anything else about work and life since October that strikes you as---
> A: No, I don't think so. I think we're all set. Is that it?
> Q: Yeah, that is it.

Although the interview did proceed, it was not facilitated by this kind of rapport, which may be likely to develop in brief (albeit at times intense) bursts of contact as in a primarily interview-based study. I do not think William was dishonest, but he also appeared less forthcoming about finances than he had been at our initial interview. After this follow-up interview with William, I noted the following in my memo:

> Having an interview was somewhat awkward because I have been hanging around with Will and his family. While technically I had been "observing" them, the relationship was much more casual and friendly. So, a sit-down interview reinstated the formality. As such, at the beginning of the interview Will actually seemed kind of distant: responding without looking at me, literally turning his head away from me and so on.

The rapport – ease, friendliness, and comfort – I may have established did not function to smooth over questions that could be difficult; it exacerbated them. Comparing my experience of interviewing William the first time, before I had spent time with his family, to this interview, I additionally noted in my memo:

> I also felt a little uncomfortable pushing him on the issue of finances as I know him and his wife now. Asking someone you know about their finances is much more awkward than asking strangers. He too seemed to shy from the question, curling his mouth a bit, then almost pulling himself together as he answered my questions about any debt accrued (yes – some credit card debt) over the past few months. He placed his hands on the booth between us as he leaned forward and, furrowing his brows sternly, explained why that debt was all to fix their house and said they're not really worried about it.

Small and Cook (2023) explicitly identify rapport as getting stronger over time with more "exposure" to participants. This may not, however, always be the case as time may also shift to make some topics more charged. It is possible that because William had still not found full-time employment by the follow-up interview, discussing finances now had become more fraught for him.[10] He may have been concerned with saving face in front of me. I also sensed, as I noted in the memo, that he was eager for the interview to be over. I cannot say with certainty that it was because of the in-between nature of our relationship, where the very interplay of nearness and distance raised interactional uncertainties. Certainly, from my side as the researcher asking these questions this in-between context was critical in rendering these questions challenging. Because rapport is a characteristic of a relationship, how I felt too is germane to the idea of rapport as an unmitigatedly useful tool for interviews.

It is possible that our subsequent interview was less smooth because William was unwilling to risk making himself vulnerable to me by sharing any financial details or woes. I suspect this could have partially shaped this interview. I had tried to follow up with both William and Shannon after the above interview, about a year later. I was aware that William and Shannon had moved to another state by this time. William agreed to call me for another, brief interview. He never did. He eventually responded via text to me several weeks later, messaging that he was "embarrassed about our situation." In the text, he explained that after significant difficulties getting a job, as soon as he got one, Shannon asked him for a divorce. He noted that "everything [he] had worked toward" was "going to be all gone now." Throughout my research process William was, of course, considering how I might evaluate him and his family. And it seems that the stakes looked different for him as the research progressed than they may have at the very first interview.

[10] As Anteby (2024) has insightfully pointed out, participants' resistance, especially what they choose to be resistant about, can be informative about the field. For me, how participants talked about finances, including seeking to skip over these questions or truncate them, became an important starting point for one line of analysis. This was to consider what kinds of family narratives participants constructed about the necessity of finances (Rao 2022).

Rapport And Empathy in Studies with Social Distance

Rapport often becomes especially salient in studies with substantial social distance between the researcher and participant. In studies where social distance also means a more privileged researcher studying less privileged groups of people, rapport can be an ethical orientation, vested in what Fine (2019) has identified for ethnographic research as an intellectual goal of engaging with a community to "justify social critique."[11] Because a key goal for qualitative research is often to offer a contextualized and comprehensive understanding of participants, interviewers often see empathy as central to this endeavor.[12] Other scholars caution researchers to avoid mistaking superficial affability and politeness for a deep bond (Fujii 2017). Blee (1998), studying organized hate groups, argues that "mutual fear" rather than rapport characterized her interactional dynamic with her participants. In Blee's research, rapport based on mundane exchanges could have endangered her loved ones, and empathy for members of these groups would have been ethically problematic. Many researchers conducting interviews are not doing so with obviously reprehensible actors as Blee was. Nonetheless, even in more prosaic settings, and as an orienting principle, rapport may be reductive in how it allows researchers to imagine the range of relationship and interactional possibilities they may have with participants.

In studies with social distance between researcher and participant, especially when the researcher is much more privileged,[13] an implicit assertion is often that social distance needs to be overcome, and that rapport can facilitate this. In her study of mothers who interacted with Child Protective Services, Kelley Fong (2020) notes vis-à-vis her interviews that "trust and rapport" were essential as these mothers were routinely interviewed by authorities and thus were suspicious of interviews:

[11] It is beyond the scope of this article to delve into the debate frequently framed as sociology as science versus sociology as activism. For more on this issue please see: Krause (2021).

[12] For example, Small and Calarco select "cognitive empathy" as one of their five evaluative criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative research in *Qualitative Literacy* (2022). They define cognitive empathy as "the degree to which the researcher understands how those interviewed or observed view the world and themselves – from their perspective" (23).

[13] Axes of privilege, or what constitute a researcher's "positionality," may include, non-exhaustively, social, economic, racial or and citizenship dimensions. For more on this, see Hanson and Richards (2019) and Compton et al. (2018). Researchers have also cautioned against an excessive focus on the social categories a researcher and their participant occupy as a way of understanding the minutiae of interview interactions. For example, researchers point to the importance of maintaining an awareness that any interpretation of social life is necessarily partial and uncertain. Lichterman (2017) makes two important points in terms of positionality. One is that positionalities are not determinative – we may not always know which combination of our life experiences shape our interpretations of a situation. Additionally, demystifying power relations is a starting point, but interpretations of social life necessarily depend on the clues of communication that we pick up, on those which we place weight, and those which may elude us, leading to researchers' partial or erroneous interpretations. Drawing on her study of child protection in the U.S., Reich (2003) who conducted research while visibly pregnant explains how her embodiment allowed for different insights on how parenthood is constructed in the field. Her visible pregnancy allowed her, at times, to be included into an otherwise closed off group of professionals, a sense of connection and support with a mother, but also an accusation from a mother whose child was being taken from her and who expected a pregnant to-be mother to be in her corner. Also see (Cousin 2010; Macfarlane 2022; Robertson 2002).

> To build trust and rapport, I drew on extensive experience interviewing similarly situated mothers, emphasizing that they were the experts and I wanted to learn from them. Investigators tended to ask focused questions during visits and took detailed written notes of mothers' responses, redirecting mothers when, in investigators' views, their responses strayed too far afield. In contrast, I asked more ended questions, took no written notes, and gave mothers space to tell their stories.

In a context of social distance – as between Fong and the mothers she interviews – where the starting point of the group being interviewed is distrust of the researcher, trying to overcome some aspects of this social distance makes sense.

My experience suggests that in some cases, using rapport to overcome social distance may not be necessary to collect sensitive and high-quality data. My interview with Nate Gura illuminates how rapport exemplified by shared commonality may not always be necessary for interview-based studies. Nate was a white, C-suite level, unemployed man who grew up in a working-class neighborhood in the coastal U.S. He was married with four children. I had no clear touchpoint for rapport with Nate based on emphasizing some shared commonality, which researchers often see as enabling rapport, aside from living in a somewhat proximate geographical area. Nate himself described me as a stranger. Nate's social distance from me, however, did not mean that the interview was halting or that he was overly reluctant to share his experiences. Below is an excerpt from my interview with Nate, where I asked him about intimacy with his wife. In trying to understand what unemployment meant for this couple, I wanted to get a sense of how it shaped the dynamics between them, including desire.

> Q: You said things are normal now, you guys are sleeping in the same bed. And I want to talk about…your intimacy.
> A: Went from *here* to *here* [raises hand from mid-chest level to above his head]…There's no other way to put it. I mean it was – my god she knows I begged for it… And today it happened naturally. She feels the itch… I never would say no anyway, you know what I mean… But it's, you know if I really had a need that was, horndog or whatever, you know she'd do it. I mean she's great. It, when I'm sober [Nate identifies as an alcoholic and for him his unemployment and alcoholism are conjoined] and doing the right things and participating in life, you know she's a very giving person. When I'm not then it's not that she's holding something back you know, it's a level of disgust and disappointment. I get that.
> Q: How is it now?
> A: Oh yeah. We had a great morning [guffaws]. It was wonderful!

Obtaining data on these especially intimate aspects of life such as sex and money is generally viewed as methodologically sensitive (Adler and Adler 2001). In this short excerpt, Nate told me about his sex life quite easily. I did not have to probe for it or circle back to this question (common techniques used by researchers). The answer to why Nate did so could lie in his motivation for participating in my study in the first place. At the end of our interview, Nate told me "I'm helping somebody,

[it] makes me feel good. It does. Makes me feel good, it's like I did something for somebody. I did something for a stranger, didn't ask for anything in return." My attention during the interview, and even that I had identified unemployment as a topic worthy of study, may have provided a sense of legitimacy at a time when participants often questioned what they were contributing to their families, professions, and communities. If Nate's motivations were to be helpful that may have shaped the interview interaction as he may have felt that it was important to answer questions as thoroughly as possible, including about his sex life.

Nate provided details whilst seeing me as a relative stranger. As someone who was not a key, or even peripheral, part of Nate's life, I was a low-stakes person to discuss this with. It is, of course, also possible that Nate got some titillation out of telling me – a woman much younger than himself – about his sex life. It could even have been a way of enacting a masculine prowess at a time when that may have been threatened (Bittman et al. 2003; Schneider 2012; Schneider et al. 2016). In practice, researchers and participants have a range of interactional and relationship possibilities. Only in some of these is rapport central to the interaction and researcher-participant relationship.

Some research also suggests that in studies where spatial distance obscures the social proximity of researchers and participants, researchers have gained unforeseen insights. In an article drawing on three studies examining how remote interviewing can sometimes be useful, O'Quinn et al. (2024) explain that online interviewing meant that participants often did not have access to visual cues from researchers that are unavoidable during in-person interviews. For example, a pregnant author who was interviewing women about their experiences with abortion reflected on how a participant who expressed discomfort at being around pregnant women likely disclosed this because she was unable to discern that the author was pregnant. Another author, conducting a study of women's experiences of polyamorous relationships, described her relief that her participant could not see her during the interview because of her expressive response to what she viewed as excessively controlling relationship behavior that this participant had experienced. This author worried that seeing her facial expression would have been disruptive for the interview and perhaps made the participant uneasy. Because remote modalities enable more concealment – for both researchers and participants – this may be useful for some types of data collection.

In contrast to authors who argue that spending more time with people builds rapport, which allows for disclosure, these examples indicate that disclosures may sometimes be enabled because of social and spatial distance, real or perceived. The centrality of establishing rapport may render these other ways of constructing (brief) relationships with participants less appropriate.

Harm to Data Transparency

An idealization of rapport in interview studies may flatten the potential range of desirable researcher-participant relationships and thus impede methodological transparency. Transparency about the researcher-participant relationship is crucial for epistemic accountability (Davis and Khonach 2020; Reich 2021). While rapport itself is ambiguously and capaciously defined, one undeniable element is that rapport pertains to a *relationship*. The researcher and participant *both* need to mutually feel this ostensible sense of closeness and harmony encapsulated in the earlier definition. The dominance of rapport as an orienting principle assumes that a researcher will, of course, like the participant (Fine 1993). But a researcher may very well *not* like a participant.

Both researchers and participants bring a range of motivations to the interview relationship and interaction that is not captured by rapport. Studies of unlikeable people illuminate the importance of exchange in interviews. Interviews are often an unspoken social contract where the researcher asks questions and the participant provides responses (Adler and Adler 2001).[14] This exchange need not be facilitated primarily, or even substantially, by rapport (in its encompassing and positive associations) in at least some cases. Participants may want someone with whom to talk (Brannen 1988), those on the margins of accepted ideas may want someone to record their lives and thoughts (Blee 1998), or they may be awed by engaging with a scholar associated with a reputed university (Lamont 2004).[15] Researchers, too, may be intellectually, morally, ethically invested in a particular social phenomenon. They may also be thinking of their own professional progress and disciplinary standing. The methodological emphasis on rapport occludes the multiplicity of motivations – for both researchers and participants – for participating in the interview interaction at all. Rapport implicitly conceptualizes researchers as well-meaning and has little to say about the motivations participants bring to the interview.

But motivations can be important to how an interview interaction unfolds. Blee recounts that her participants talked with her, including sharing details of ideologies she disagrees with, because to them she was a "a recorder of their lives and thoughts" (Blee 1998, 386). But people do not need to be so very problematic to be disliked by a researcher. Researchers may very well take a liking to some participants more than others, take a dislike to some participants, and have a range of responses in between these two ends of a continuum. The privileged position of rapport as a way of both understanding our relationship to participants and then using rapport to frame that relationship to readers risks flattening the universe of potential relationships a researcher may have with participants. Anteby (2024) for instance identifies types of resistance through which participants may approach researchers – hiding, shelving, forgetting, silencing and denying – which can illuminate aspects of what is analytically important in the field. Even in interview studies, rapport may serve to paper over complex dynamics and ways of relating to participants.

Qualitative research is often described as being valuable because of its ability to get at palpable details (Small and Calarco 2022), depth (Lareau and Rao 2016), luminosity (Katz 2001, 2002), and resonance (Pugh and Mosseri 2023) of

[14] Some scholars urge the idea of interviews as "co-production" of knowledge, but commonly, interviews are ultimately guided by the researcher's research agenda. For more see: (Brinkman and Kvale 2014).

[15] For more on studies where researchers do not like participants and where rapport may be unfeasible, see (Fujii 2017).

social life, which scholars have convincingly argued is vested in the complexity of a researcher's own relationships in the field, although not reducible to it (Duneier 2011). Framing a researcher's relationship with a multitude of participants as characterized by rapport, and homogenizing what are likely different interactions, may result in overlooking those very nuances, complexities, and contradictions that make qualitative research so rich.

At times, while the participant may feel there is a good rapport – as gauged by their loquaciousness and openness – the researcher may not. I interviewed Shira Koffman, an unemployed attorney. I found Shira to be talkative, so much so that she seemed to be taking over the reins of the interview from me. This discomfited me, because, while our interview carried on for hours, I felt that because Shira was so eager to provide details, I was receiving information about issues that were tangential or unrelated to what I was trying to understand about her experience.[16] After the interview with Shira, I wrote down the following in my memo:

> I was so frustrated during this interview. I felt like Shira talked in such a circular manner that I was afraid to ask follow-up questions for fear of a speech of another 15 minutes on inane details which, ultimately, would not answer my questions anyway. At several points in the interview, I had to bite my lower lip to prevent myself from crying out in frustration. Shira was so circular that instead of telling me about things as they are *right* now, she kept talking about how things were difficult when she was a new mom, 20 years back. That would have been fine, except most of the interview became about her work struggles *then* instead of her feelings now. Now, I understand that this is linked and that she feels her situation now is a product of decisions earlier, but I needed MORE detail on how things are now, and it was really challenging to get her to focus on that because she would circle around just SO much.

My interview memo shows how I did not feel this sense of rapport. We could interpret Shira's garrulousness as indicating a successful attempt by the researcher at having developed rapport.[17] Indeed, Shira followed up with me after the interview with an enthusiastic email. This example illustrates one of the shortfalls of an emphasis on rapport when it comes to interview methods: rapport (whether operationalized as one of its myriad avatars of ease, warmth, trust, friendliness, and so on) tends to assume that the researcher needs to put the participant at ease, the researcher needs to gain trust, and the researcher needs to be warm and empathetic.[18] But if

[16] I saw Shira's manner of talking as circular and as tangential to my research interests. There is important literature that encourages researchers to consider whether such moments might be analytically meaningful, for example by indicating resistance. But it is also important to consider that sometimes such a manner of speaking may not indicate resistance and rather is reflective of a participant's broader communication style. My own sense with Shira was that it was the latter. It is possible that there was something more analytically important or revealing occurring in this interview, but I don't have evidence to usefully conjecture what that might be. For more on resistance in the field, see (Anteby, 2024).

[17] Lareau (2021, 99) advises on how to guide overly talkative participants back to the areas of particular interest to the researcher.

[18] Hanson and Richards (2019) critique ethnographic fieldwork on privileging three "fixations" of solitary research, research characterised by: danger, intimacy with site; and intimacy with participants. They argue that these fixations assume an able, bodied, usually heterosexual, male researcher. The intimacy with participants appears to be close to rapport.

rapport is indeed a characteristic of the researcher-participant interaction then the researcher too needs to feel at ease and comfortable, and in some cases to even have trust in their participants (Santinele Martino et al. 2024). Critiques of ethnography show that this may not be how many researchers experience their relationships and interactions with participants (Hanson and Richards 2019). These forms of interactional dynamics can also be at play in interviews, but risk being obscured if rapport is prioritized as key to obtaining high-quality, detailed data.

Rapport, even with a single participant, may not quite do justice to the dynamics of a relationship. An example of this was my follow-up interview with Larry Bach. The Bachs were one of the families I observed. I had conducted individual interviews with Larry and his unemployed wife Darlene individually. After this, I had spent several weeks conducting intensive family observations with them, and subsequently also follow-up interviews. Given these multiple points of (prolonged) contact, I experienced myself as generally feeling closer to Darlene and Larry than to many others in my overall sample. But this had complicated implications. In my interview memo, accompanying my follow-up interview with Larry, I noted my discomfort: "Also, I want to note down that in the first half of the interview I was quite uncomfortable because I thought Larry was being quite contemptuous of Darlene, seeing her and her family as intellectual inferior." The below interview excerpt captures the reason for my discomfort, when Larry, describing Darlene's parents and siblings, says:

> They got their jobs when they were in their early twenties and they kept working at that very same job at the very same place for 50 years. Both of those jobs were entirely function-oriented jobs. Gas the bus, check the tires, do the oil, fix the bus. The bus is broken, fix the bus. It's not like you're making real decisions about how you're going to spend your time. So, she grew up and basically nobody in her family environment that she was growing up had jobs with heavy intellectual content. Even those that were doctors, they're not like psychiatrists or endocrinologists trying to ferret out some bizarre circumstance. They're all abdominal surgeons. Your gall bladder needs to be taken out. Go to an abdominal surgeon and they get paid. And they could be fixing a car. It's not like they're, I mean, they're quote, 'physicians,' but they're not real physicians.

My discomfort arose at least in part because I also knew Darlene and liked her. Listening to what I interpreted as a denigrating description of Darlene's family by Larry, thus complicated how I thought about Larry. Qualitative research has been considered as aligned with a feminist methodology because it contextualizes people in their lives (Reich 2021; Stacey 1988). The very closeness that can accompany ethnographic immersion creates ethical conundrums, as noted by Stacey (1988): "The lives, loves, and tragedies that fieldwork informants share with a researcher are ultimately data, grist for the ethnographic mill, a mill that has a truly grinding power."

I was not immersed with these families in the way typical ethnographers are, for months or years. Nonetheless, my discomfort arose from the rapport I felt myself to have with Darlene. My response toward Larry were further complicated because of some things he revealed in his follow-up interview about his disappointment with how his life had turned out. Below is an interview excerpt, when Larry told me:

> I have absolutely no idea what I want to do when I grow up. I don't think I ever will know. I don't think it's ever possible for me to do anything that I would really want to do. I'm too old. That's the end of it. I had my chance in my twenties. For a variety of reasons, not all of which were my fault, some of them were my fault, but many of them were not my fault at all, I didn't get on the wagon when it was leaving and it's gone.

I noted in my interview memo, that despite my discomfort with his description of Darlene's family:

> Yet, I still feel warm towards him because I get a sense of a middle-aged reckoning with some major life disappointments – particularly his own career[…] It seems that his deceased dad looms large over him and Larry both looks up to him and is reviled by him.

My aim in sharing this backstage of the research process, of the interpretive work, is to show how my own responses to this participant – with whom I could in some ways be said to have developed rapport (in its definitional ambiguity) – were more nuanced than the notion of rapport fully allows me to capture. From what is valuable in qualitative research, surely it is important that these complexities of researcher-participant relationship not be quite as flattened as the ambiguous notion of rapport tends to do, with its descriptions of researcher and participant liking each other enough and getting along. In many interview encounters, there's simply more going on underneath the surface than rapport can reasonably capture.

Claiming rapport in interview studies matters because such statements may become performative statements rather than transparently providing the reader with information on the researcher-participant relationship (Cousin 2010; Macfarlane 2022; Robertson 2002).[19] This is a sort of ethical harm. Transparency about the researcher–participant relationship is part of "epistemic accountability," where the researcher tussles with how their own positionality shaped their relationship with the participant and the understanding about participants' lives they were able to develop (Davis and Khonach 2020; Reich 2021). An alternative to using rapport as a stand-in for describing researcher's relationships with their participants would be to unpack what was at stake and how relationships unfolded, to provide clear details on the methodological component of a study. Decentering rapport as an orienting principle may help us more critically consider whether rapport in the researcher–participant relationship is ethically always necessary, including for yielding high-quality interview data.

In interview studies, rapport has become an occupational illusion, functioning as a "partial truth" or even "self-deception" (Fine 1993). That a researcher *did* develop

[19] There is a vigorous debate about whether transparency in qualitative research also ought to mean naming people and sites and making one's interview transcripts and fieldnotes publicly available. It is outside the scope of this piece to delve into these aspects of transparency. For more, please see: (Jerolmack and Murphy 2019; Murphy et al. 2021; Pugh and Mosseri 2023; Reyes 2018).

rapport which led to more honest disclosures with most or all participants, even in one-off interviews of relatively short durations, is of course possible. My point is not that all methodological discussions of rapport ought to be treated with suspicion or even that rapport offers nothing useful as an interpersonal tool. Instead, I suggest that an emphasis on establishing rapport ignores that rapport in a researcher-participant relationship may not always be useful, nor even possible, even when "personal and political commitments" (Becker 1967) are so aligned. A methodological imperative to develop rapport may unnecessarily foreclose a wider range of researcher–participant relationship.

Discussion

Rapport can function as shorthand for characterizing an ideal-type of a researcher-participant relationship and interaction. Researchers often uphold rapport as crucial to gathering high-quality data. Although rapport is capaciously defined, and deployed in varied ways by researchers, it is linked to the notion of gathering more "open," "honest" and thus higher quality interview data. I have sought to cast a critical look at the privileged position that rapport occupies as an orienting principle in interview-based studies. I have two main critiques: that rapport may not always be particularly useful for data collection, and in some cases may be detrimental; and that the primacy of rapport may flatten the range of researcher-participant relationships that frequently unfold during the course of a project, and thus harm methodological transparency.

When a researcher's contact with a participant exceeds beyond a single interview, yet does not reach the stage of ethnographic immersion, and the researcher is potentially no longer a low-stakes stranger, then rapport may not always be uniformly beneficial for data collection. The notion of saving face may start mattering more to participants. In such cases, asking about financial issues, such as debt, bankruptcy and borrowing money, or relationship concerns such as infidelity or other sexual behavior and preferences may become more challenging for researchers.

Even if rapport, however conceived by the researcher, makes data collection at some point in the research process challenging, there may nonetheless still be other important reasons for establishing some form of rapport (Reich 2021). Researchers may think it is their ethical or moral responsibility to try and develop rapport as a way of mitigating the often unequal or even exploitative nature of some research (Stacey 1988). This may particularly be the case when social distance is salient, for instance when researchers are studying those from marginalized and vulnerable groups.

The dominance of rapport for characterizing researcher-participant relationships can sometimes, inadvertently, serve to occlude a more extensive range of researcher-participant relationships and interactions. The implicit expectation that data collection need to be characterized by rapport may perhaps discourage researchers from transparently discussing their own researcher-participant relationship and interaction. Researchers' immersion into their participants' lives can vary considerably

(Lamont and Swidler 2014). An overemphasis on developing rapport in interview studies risks shrouding researchers' methodological practices in mystery.

By critiquing the privileged position of rapport as an orienting principle in interview-based studies, am I somehow advocating for the researcher to prioritize being a disinterested observer (Fine 2019)? Not at all. My point here is simply to question the privileged position that rapport occupies as an orienting principle in interview-based studies. Centering rapport as an orienting principle for interview methods narrows the possibilities for researcher–participant relationships and interactions. It forecloses other types of interactional and relationship-building possibilities. My aim in this article has been to reckon with rapport in order to encourage scholars who work with interview methods to widen how we think about and collect interview data.

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