

understand the chosen topic. Pilot the questions by interviewing each other. Each student should have time to be both interviewer and interviewee. As interviewers, students take full, running notes of the interview. As interviewees, students reflect on the questions and make suggestions to reword, extend, or delete. After the interviews, reflect as a group both on the questions and the interviewing process. As homework, type up your interview transcript, filling in details where remembered. Hold on to these transcripts for a later exercise.

INDIVIDUAL EXERCISE

1. Create five to ten open-ended interview questions for your own research project. Pilot the questions with a classmate, asking her or him to pretend that she or he is one of your participants. Work together to reshape the questions. Then pilot the questions with someone who has had experiences similar to your research population or ask the questions of a research participant who is willing to collaborate with you on developing your questions. Reshape the questions again after reflecting upon what worked, what did not, and what new questions arose.

Chapter 5

The Personal Dimension: Rapport and Subjectivity

When I stayed away too long, they scolded and snubbed me. When I was not completely fair (and sometimes even when I was) in the distribution of attention, I paid dearly for it. (Myerhoff 1979, 27)

In qualitative inquiry, the nature of relationships depends on at least two factors: the quality of your interactions to support your research—or rapport—and the quality of your self-awareness of the potential effects of self on your research—or subjectivity.

The term *rapport* describes the character of effective field relationships. Just what that character is, however, is vague and sometimes confusing. The first half of this chapter attends to rapport, but it does not delineate steps for achieving rapport; there is no such list, although there are some apparent antecedents of rapport.¹ Rather, the discussion explicates some of the issues that complicate establishing and maintaining rapport.² The second half of the chapter focuses on how awareness of *subjectivity* contributes not only to more trustworthy research, but also to greater understanding of yourself and your psychological investment in your research.

Definitions of Rapport

The dictionary defines rapport as the “relation characterized by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity,” and notes that it refers to the “confidence of a subject in the operator as in hypnotism, psychotherapy, or mental testing with willingness to cooperate” (Webster’s 1986). Rapport is an attribute that is instrumental to a variety of professional relationships, from used-car salesperson to marriage counselor. Its function, however, varies with each relationship. For example, counselors establish rapport so that clients can feel sufficiently comfortable to disclose information;

their intent is to attain ends shaped by the clients' needs, as they and the clients ascertain them.

Researchers, to the contrary, traditionally establish rapport to attain ends shaped primarily by their own needs. In qualitative research, rapport is a distance-reducing, anxiety-quieting, trust-building mechanism that primarily serves the interest of the researcher. Spradley gently acknowledges rapport's acquisitive functions: "Rapport encourages informants to talk about their culture" (Spradley 1979, 78). Freilich is more pointed: "The researcher . . . 'engineers' people and situations to get the type of data required by the study" (Freilich 1977, 257). Rapport is a necessary but not sufficient condition for obtaining good data; researchers partake in the opportunities it enables by virtue of other skills.

Rapport is sometimes used interchangeably with *friendship* in the fieldwork literature. Although the line between the two is often hard to distinguish, they are not the same thing. A friend is "one that seeks the society or welfare of another whom he holds in affection, respect, or esteem or whose companionship and personality are pleasurable" (*Webster's* 1986). Friendship means mutual liking and affection and implies a sense of intimacy and mutual bonding. You trust your friends; even more, you like them and will do things for them that you would not do for others. A relationship characterized by rapport is marked by confidence and trust, but not necessarily by liking; friendship invariably is. "One can learn a great deal from people one dislikes or from people who dislike one" (Wax 1971, 373). You do not need to like or be liked by your others, although your work will be even more rewarding if mutual liking occurs. In research relationships, your ordinary need to be liked is overshadowed by the necessity of being accepted and trusted.

Authority over the relationship also distinguishes rapport from friendship. Friends are (or should be) equal actors in establishing and maintaining their relationship. The rapport relationship is more asymmetrical, usually with the researcher desiring and working to achieve rapport. Control, however, is never totally in the hands of the researcher. Rapport is a process of interactions with the researched (Mitchell 1993). It is something that is continually being negotiated between researcher and researched and can, at any time, be rejected by research participants. (The distinction between rapport and friendship is addressed in more detail later in this chapter).

Factors Bearing on Rapport

The literature and lore of fieldwork often portray consummate researchers as sensitive, patient, nonjudgmental, friendly, and inoffensive. They have a sense of humor and a high tolerance for ambiguity; and they learn the other's language, wear appropriate dress, and maintain confidentiality. These factors affecting rapport are personal characteristics that, to some degree, the researcher can manage.

You manage your appearance and behavior in rapport-building efforts in order to acquire continual access to information. Measor (1985) discussed the role of appearance and shared interests in her data collection in a British school. She found that how she looked mattered to both students and teachers and that this in itself

caused a problem because each group had a different notion of appropriateness. As a result, Measor sought a compromise that showed she was fashion conscious, but not too much so. About her overall presentation of self, Measor observed, "In a research relationship, one presents a particular front or a particular self. My own view is that it is important to come over as very sweet and trustworthy, but ultimately rather bland" (Measor 1985, 62).

In order to maintain access, you need to act continually in culturally appropriate ways. This may mean "getting mad" or "causing a disturbance," as Pettigrew (1981) discovered while working among Sikhs in the Punjab. When someone made a derogatory remark, she could not ignore it with a tolerant, indifferent attitude. In keeping with cultural rules, she had to display her opposition in order to maintain respect and rapport. Conversely, when Pettigrew witnessed the blatant sexist treatment of women, she could not object, or she would not have been allowed to stay.

Your appearance, speech, and behavior must be acceptable to your research participants. This may be hard to manage at first because you are habituated to acting in certain ways that reflect your personal sense of propriety, dignity, and integrity—and to taking offense when your strongly held values have been assailed. It is important to learn, however, that your strongly held values often are not appropriate guides for conducting your research. For example, teachers in the Christian day school that Peshkin (1986) and I studied were actively involved in rallies protesting the Equal Rights Amendment. As researchers concerned with rapport, we not only had to keep our thoughts on this topic to ourselves, but we also were restricted from partaking in any pro-ERA rallies that might be televised throughout the state. We could not be seen endorsing what was antithetical to core fundamental Christian belief. Thus, rapport can place limitations on the researcher's ordinary interactions and expressions.

Although the accommodations you make to be inoffensive in your research role do not ensure rapport, they do enhance the prospects of its establishment. Whitehead and Conaway's (1986) edited book *Self, Sex, and Gender in Cross-Cultural Fieldwork* contains many examples of ways in which researchers managed their behavior and appearance to build and maintain rapport. For Regina and Leon Oboler (1986), working with the Nandi in Kenya, developing rapport meant that they could not openly display affection for each other, a condition they met:

It pleased us when people would comment to us, with approval, that we acted just like Nandis because this implied that they viewed us as unlike the Europeans they had previously encountered. (43)

You consciously monitor your behavior so that people who are unaccustomed to the presence of researchers in their lives will be at ease in your presence. Your challenge is to fit in.

You do not, however, have to always agree with your research participants in order to fit in. Sometimes when researchers question participants' viewpoints, they receive information they would not obtain otherwise and are even more accepted into a group as a result of open dialogue. "Fieldworkers worry," state Kleinman and Copp (1993), "that participants will interpret disagreement as unfair criticism or

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rejection—and thus it will drive a wedge between them. But . . . saying what one thinks can be an *engaging* experience and thus constitute closeness rather than distance” (40). When to disagree and when to keep opinions to yourself is one of those issues that depend upon other factors such as your mode of inquiry, the nature of your topic, and the kind of relationships you have developed with your others.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, gender, age, and ethnicity—attributes over which the researcher has a lesser degree of control—can also make a difference in access to data. For example, Banks, a black anthropologist, may have had an advantage in developing rapport among Malaysians who were resentful of the British (Lawless, Sutlive, and Samora 1983). Characteristics such as color, age, gender, and nationality are not amenable to manipulation, but you do have other attributes that are and which you can emphasize in the effort to overcome disadvantages that might result from ascribed attributes.

Perhaps to some extent it is possible to counteract potential impacts of ascribed characteristics. By acting in ways that others did not expect women to act, Hunt (1984) modified the effect of gender in her study of city police. In addition, European and European American women doing cross-cultural research often comment upon ways in which they are allowed more androgynous behavior (or “honorary maleness”) than local women in their research sites. As Warren (1988) states, “Both whiteness and foreignness permit woman fieldworkers more cross-gender behavior than that allowed to native women” (21).

Appearing as if one is something that one is not can also extend some degree of control over personal attributes. For example, Robbins (Robbins, Anthony, and Curtis 1973) appeared to be a member of a proselytizing group known as “Jesus Freaks,” even though he was not. The use of an as-if posture rests on the researcher’s sense of what is ethical, not on the demands of rapport. Clearly, in research, as in other matters, what works is not necessarily good.

The ideal of rapport is developing sufficient trust for the conduct of a study. Sufficiency is largely contextual, depending on your goals; the personality, age, gender, and ethnicity of all participants; and the setting and time of the study (Glazer 1972; Gonzalez 1986; Spradley 1979). In the end, you will know when you have rapport, because you will see it in the willingness of others to allow access to those parts of their lives of interest to you.

Developing and Maintaining Rapport

When asked, “How do you know when you have rapport,” students in my qualitative research course replied:

- The way the interview goes shows rapport. When the interviewee keeps looking at her watch, you know you have not achieved good rapport.
- Rapport comes when the interviewee gets something out of the interview. One person told me, “No one has asked me this before.” In good interview situations, people get to think about things that they have not put together before. They learn about themselves in the process. Another person told me, “I think I got more out of this than you did.” You feel good then.

The first student describes how being attuned to the nonverbal language of your others can inform you about your research relationship, although people do check the time for reasons other than boredom. The second student introduces the concept of reciprocity into the relationship. Rapport is more easily achieved if both parties get something out of the interaction. Often research participants will find being part of a study flattering; they will welcome the attention and enjoy the opportunity to reflect on matters of importance to them.

This willingness can be found where least expected. Andrea received a letter from one of her interviewees after their first meeting. The interviewee expressed sincere desire to get together again, sent information relevant to their discussion, apologized for being too enthusiastic, and complimented Andrea on the approach she was taking to investigating change in a small rural community. The interviewee was a developer with whom Andrea has postponed talking because she feared her ability to keep an open, interested, learner perspective. Ironically, she found herself fascinated both by what he had to say and by his clear, logical, sensitive way of expressing his point of view. Rapport, obviously, had been achieved.

Generally, people will talk more willingly about personal or sensitive issues once they know you. In most cases, this means being perceived as someone who is willing to invest the time truly to understand them. Sometimes it simply means giving the person time to learn that you are an all-right sort of person. Dick tells of doing an interview with a teacher aspiring to be a principal. Dick had a single, one-and-one-half hour interview scheduled and felt dismayed going into it. “These people,” he said beforehand, “will never tell a stranger all this information.” But the interviewee was someone who talked easily, and Dick responded appropriately with “umms” and “uh huhs.” After 45 minutes, during which Dick thought he was getting good information, the interviewee asked, “Now that I know you, can we go back to one of the earlier questions?” Dick was delighted that he had been able to develop rapport sufficient for the interviewee to reveal deeper layers of information comfortably. He also learned that many layers of data existed and that, even though his single-session interviews might give him enough data for his purposes, he was getting “thinner” data than he could through multiple interviews.

Although contact over a long period of time does not assure the development of rapport, time may prove to be a determining condition once you have attended to other matters. If you are around long enough, you can verify that the self you have been projecting is an enduring self: You have said that you will maintain anonymity of respondents and you always do, and you have said that you have not come to find fault and you never do. Time allows you to substantiate that you will keep the promises you made when you were negotiating access and that you will remain the person you have been showing yourself to be.

Juefei Wang (1995), an educational researcher from China who has been living in Vermont, reflected on the role of time in the development of rapport in U.S. and China. He indicates that rapport building may look very different in diverse cultures. After a short introduction to a study, most Vermont respondents were willing to talk openly with Wang. Most Vermonters were also willing to participate in his research, but some would simply decline with a “No thank you, I’m not

interested," or refuse to answer certain questions saying, "I don't know." He contrasts the U. S. response to that in China:

Among the people I have interviewed in China, probably over a hundred altogether, I have never had the case of fast-paced trust building. Even with young, open people, it takes me longer to build the trust. I have to find a way to make the interviewees believe that I am one of them. They talk about their families; I ask questions about their parents, wives, husbands, and children, and tell them about mine. They complain about their low pay; I tell them my pay is not high either. This is the process to build trust. It takes much longer, yet it can be long-lasting.

In China, I have never had any refusal for cooperation. The frank American way of saying "I don't know" would not be acceptable by most Chinese. . . . They would always try to save face for me by not refusing me, yet they can always find a way not to give me anything valuable or anything at all. (2)

Wang describes how it took him over a week in China to get personal information from a school principal that, in the United States, he would have received in less time. He states:

Modesty is still a virtue of the nation. This fact makes it very difficult when a researcher tries to find out about the interviewee's roles in an organization. The interviewee talks about other's contributions without talking about him or herself. (3)

Part of your role as researcher is to learn the culturally appropriate ways to develop rapport. When you do not obtain the kind of information you seek, it may be because you have not made the necessary cultural bridges in your own expectations and behavior.

Developing and maintaining rapport with children and adolescents also adds extra dimensions to the research process. The role (supervisor, leader, observer, friend) the researcher takes in relationship to children affects not only the kind of information gathered but also the nature of rapport needed. Fine and Sandstrom (1988) distinguish researcher relationships with children on the dimensions of (1) extent of positive contact between child and adult and (2) extent to which the adult has direct authority over the child (14). In particular, they explore what it means for an adult to be a "friend" with a child.

Rebecca, in her dissertation research with adolescent girls and the role of friendship in their lives, finds herself in a "friendly" role with the girls. The contact with them is highly positive. She arrives at their homes with art supplies, drives them to ice cream shops, and engages them in talk that has led to their requests for personal advice from Rebecca. Although responsible for the girls when with them, she does not have authority over them. Her evolving connection to the girls, however, has led her to realize that she will not simply say "good-bye" when her data collection is through. Rebecca plans to maintain contact with each girl as long as the girl desires.

Whether with adults or children, rapport, like access, is something to be continually negotiated. Negotiating rapport means conscious attunement to the emerging needs of a relationship. An interviewee may become distrustful and uneasy after several sessions of interviewing. Pick up on these reactions and find ways to be more reassuring and to build trust (this may mean revealing more of yourself or your research thoughts). Alternately, you may find that you have to withdraw from certain research relationships. Many fieldworkers advise awareness and avoidance of a society's "marginals"—frequently the very ones who, because of their fringe status, are most open to rapport and friendship with researchers. According to Mitchell (1993, 15–16), the "naïve-sympathetic novice" researcher going into new territory is sometimes perceived as prey, available for exploitation, by marginal others. In addition, it does not reassure your research participants if you are identified with someone whom they see as undesirable.

Developing and maintaining rapport obviously involves more than consideration of one individual at a time; it calls for awareness of social interactions among participants. Researchers enter into social systems in ways that demonstrate that participants are valued, that is, that the worth of their time and attention and association is appreciated. Thus, if you are not equitable in the time you allot to participants, you may risk bruising feelings or eroding relationships, as Myerhoff (1979) observed in the opening quotation to this chapter.

You may need to remain uninvolved in the politics of your site, but this does not free you from needing to understand the political landscape and the pitfalls into which you might tumble. Maintaining rapport is associated with becoming informed about your setting's social and political structure so that you can shape your conduct with the sure-footedness that such knowledge affords. It is no small matter to be aware of the formal and informal loci of power, of the issues that irritate, and of the history that continues to shape current behavior. All of this is part of rapport—both developing it and keeping it—for it is the knowledge that helps you fit in.

SAFETY VALVES

"Once we feel connected to the people we study, we think we must consistently feel good about them" (Kleinman and Copp 1993, 28). Always feeling good about your participants, however, may not be the case. Given the stress of fieldwork, maintaining rapport sometimes requires safety valves. Immersed in a life that is not your normal one, which, accordingly, abnormally constrains you, you periodically need to get away to be with people from your own subculture and talk to those who have similar beliefs and ideas. You may need to blow off steam or simply disappear for a few days so that you do not destroy the rapport that has been developed.

Fieldwork accounts do not always address this need, but field notes or journals do. Malinowski's (1967) diary while among the Trobriand Islanders is a well-known example. It became the place for him to vent his feelings and make statements that would not have endeared him to his host community. You won't earn a merit badge if you persist in unbroken duty to the obligations of your study. Immersion is valued, but it can be overdone. Sustaining the needed degree of rapport depends on

your capacity to continue making careful, considered judgments. Taking breaks promotes your ability to mindfully make the multitude of daily decisions needed in your work. Gaining distance by whatever means—trips, reading, strongly worded personal journals—is advised.

Rapport and Friendship

When a distinction between rapport and friendship is made in qualitative literature, the overwhelming tendency in the past was to warn against forming friendships because of the hazards of sample bias and loss of objectivity. These hazards were linked to overidentification, also called *over-rapport* and *going native* (Gold 1969; Miller 1952; Shaffir, Stebbins, and Turowetz 1980; Van Maanen 1983).

Qualitative researchers have written about how friendship biases data selection and decreases objectivity primarily in three different ways (Gans 1982; Hammersley and Atkinson 1983; Pelto and Pelto 1978; Zigarmi and Zigarmi 1978). In the first situation, data bias can result from a somewhat unconscious subjective selection process. Researchers are tempted to talk primarily with people they like or find politically sympathetic. If they follow such impulses, Gans suggests that “the pleasure of participant observation [would] increase significantly, but the sampling of people and situations . . . may become badly distorted” (Gans 1982, 52). Or it may be that researchers talk to a variety of people, but overidentify with one group. They then hear what this group has to tell them, but less fully what other groups tell them. Therefore, they may censor their own questioning process to avoid alienating those with whom they are overidentifying. They also may be tempted to give such friends confidential information that would help them.

In the second situation, researchers are consciously aware of their best data sources, but they are denied access to some of them because of their friendship with others. “Every firm social relationship with a particular individual or group carries with it the possibility of closed doors and social rebuffs from competing segments of the community” (Pelto and Pelto 1978, 184). In the Caribbean, I attempted to maintain access simultaneously to alienated young adults, to unalienated young adults, to government officials, and to estate owners. I found myself frequently explaining to those of the unalienated group my time with the more alienated. Achieving a politically neutral presence is, however, easier in some settings than in others.

In the third situation, research participants overidentify with the researchers. In doing so, they may begin to act in ways that they perceive the researchers want them to act or in ways that impress them. Van Maanen (1983) cites the example of police he studied who used overly aggressive patrol tactics in an effort to increase their worth in the eyes of the observer. Gold (1969) suggests that the informant who becomes too identified with the fieldworker may even become an observer much like the researcher. In sum, friendship can affect the behavior of researchers or their others, with potentially detrimental consequences for complete data collection and analysis.

It appears, therefore, that you should establish rapport but avoid friendships in the research setting or, at least, as Zigarmi and Zigarmi (1978) suggest, with re-

search participants. Most prescriptions are easier to say than to follow. Many researchers do form friendships during fieldwork, most frequently with those who play the special role of key informant (West 1980). In other cases, the nature of the research requires getting to know a small number of people well. Friendship often develops in the process. Hansen’s work is illustrative:

That I did not remain fully detached from the flow of Danish life might be seen as a failure in my role as objective analyst. Yet to understand the subtle dynamics of Danish behavior required as detailed a knowledge of the individual Danes as I had the capacity to acquire. Access to this information was made possible by friendship, and once established that relationship imposed standards of behavior at least as compelling (to me) as the rules of my discipline. (Hansen 1976, 131–132).

The work of Hansen and many others over the last twenty years challenges the traditional concern for detachment and objectivity. As a researcher, you need to examine the assumptions underlying your relationships with your research others. If “objectivity” is important, then friendship is a problem. Friendship entangles in that it conveys the impression that one has chosen sides, taken a stand, decided on preferences. Each such impression risks shutting down data sources or biasing the data collection process. From another perspective, however, friendship may be a goal that rapport helps to achieve. Friendship may assist you and research participants to develop new understandings in a negotiated fashion.

Research friendships flourish more easily in critical and feminist research where researchers adopt an ethic of advocacy on behalf of research participants. Such researchers have been instrumental in disputing the presumed necessary distancing of more traditional research: “Traditionalists tended to eschew ‘politics,’ to avoid ‘total immersion,’ and to be wary of ‘going native,’ all of which, in contrast, are elements of feminist methods” (Punch 1994, 86). Nonetheless, feminist researchers, in particular, puzzle over the meaning of relationship with their research others. As Behar (1993) states,

Feminist ethnographers have found themselves caught inside webs of betrayal they themselves have spun; with stark clarity, they realize that they are seeking out intimacy and friendship with subjects on whose backs, ultimately, the books will be written upon which their productivity as scholars in the academic market place will be assessed. (297)

Friendship and intimacy is messy, emotional, and vital. No matter how much you try to practice “relational ethics” (Flinders 1992) with research others, no matter how much your friendships go beyond the research site and time, feelings of exploitation or betrayal may bubble up from time to time in either researcher or other. Yet, friendships in themselves do not always last forever, nor are they always without pain. Marleen Pugach (correspondence, 1995) writes of a research relationship that reminds us that our humanness is what is important.

Last March first I drove north, ate my last green chile cheeseburger at the Owl Bar, spent a few hours in Albuquerque, and headed east, away from the mountains and toward my other home in Wisconsin. Today, my former landlady called to tell me, a year

to the day after I left, that a good friend of mine had died four days ago. She knew that my reading about this in the local paper would have been too much of a shock—and she called to ease the pain . . . and to catch up, to remind me that her son had had his first birthday last week (the birth I waited for so I could finally leave for home . . .). The shock is enormous—I am not ready for Carmen to be gone. She was the one who would not let me tape record our conversations, but she shared the most phenomenal stories about the community, the old “Hispanic” community from up on the river. . . .

She told me, before I met her face to face, that living “out of town” would be fine for the kids, that she had raised one in the city and one in the country. That comment gave me the confidence to rent our wonderful house amidst the yucca, mesquite, road-runners and rattlesnakes. I don’t think she knew that. We used to meet for breakfast or lunch at my favorite hole-in-the wall Mexican restaurant, the one run by the couple from Mexico City, whose nephew I used to interview from the bilingual program. I’m sure I never was able to get down enough of her real words; our meetings crossed the line between research and friendship, and I wasn’t always able to write as fast as I needed to. . . .

We talked last in November, just before her son’s wedding. I sent a Christmas card, I never found out if she read the copy of *Animal Dreams* I sent as a thank-you gift for having us all there in August. This is not research relationship. I went to Havens to learn enough to tell a story, but the real story is that you can’t separate yourself from the people who welcomed you for all those months. What do I say about Lisa, who called to tell me that Carmen had died? This is not a research obligation, born out of my need to know about life on the border. And it’s not a function of the hackneyed truism about “human as instrument of research.” That is a term of obligation, of distance, of voyeurism. I want Carmen to be there because I liked her so much, because her vitality kept you up when you thought you might not be able to do any more. . . . I am left with the uncomfortable feeling that spending time in a place you want to study is a real liability if you’re inclined to build real relationships. It’s not a case of collaborative research for the purpose of action . . . It’s a case of pure friendship, not cultivated over long years, but with instant depth because you recognize that you were meant to be friends even if the study had never happened; it was simply the occasion for a friendship that already should have been.

Bringing qualitative research into what is already your home territory releases you from this potential liability; you keep your friends, your social context, and you tiptoe only a little distance from where you always have been. Intensive fieldwork in a new location pushes the question. It is not an issue of power relationships that I’m trying to understand here. Instead, it echoes the things I’ve been wondering about for months: can you do ethnography without making wonderful, lifelong friends? Would you want to? Does “making friends” automatically put you into the feminist camp of qualitative researchers? Carmen helped me, to be sure, and it is only if I write well that I can properly acknowledge her contributions. But what I really wish is that she would still be there, on the ranch, telling me that whenever I return to Havens, my room there is ready. No one told me about this part of it.

Marleen’s reflections demonstrate how research relationships can transcend the public realm into the private. Her story moves us to consider how we want to ex-

perience the multiple kinds of relationships that might enter into research. She suggests that we interact with openness, honesty, and respect; not with the masks that rapport can provide or with the walls of professional distancing. In effect, Marleen urges us to remain reflexive, but to be fully authentic in interactions and to honor the consequences of acting with genuineness. She also prompts us to be fully conscious of our emotions, a part of subjective awareness to which I now turn.

Subjective Lenses

“We cross borders, but we don’t erase them; we take our borders with us.” (Behar 1993, 320)

Subjectivity has long been considered something to keep out of one’s research, something to, at the least, control against through a variety of methods to establish validity. It has had a negative connotation in the research world and has not traditionally been a topic for discussion in a research proposal or project.

In “Virtuous Subjectivity: In the Participant-Observer’s I’s,” however, Peshkin (1988b) challenged the notion of subjectivity as something negative, as others (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Oleson 1994; Wolcott 1995) also have done. Qualitative researchers, recognizing that subjectivity is always a part of research from deciding on the research topic to selecting frames of interpretation, began to claim the term. They discuss how subjectivity, once recognized, can be monitored for more trustworthy research and how subjectivity, in itself, can contribute to research.

Part of being attuned to your subjective lenses is being attuned to your emotions. Your emotions help you to identify when your subjectivity is being engaged. Instead of trying to suppress your feelings, you use them to inquire into your perspectives and interpretations and to shape new questions through re-examining your assumptions. “Ignoring or suppressing feelings are emotion work strategies that divert our attention from the cues that ultimately help us understand those we study” (Kleinman and Copp 1993, 33). For example, Tsing (1993) reports how she learned from her emotions, which flared when a research participant suggested that she did not work:

Once Ma Salam’s mother tried to flatter me by saying that I didn’t work (*bagawi*) but only “traveled” (*bajalan*). My first thought was to take offense and argue for my industriousness; in the United States, to do no work is to be worthless. But I soon realized my mistake: for Meratus to “work” is to do repetitive caretaking activity, while to “travel” is a process of personal and material enrichment. (68)

It is when you feel angry, irritable, gleeful, excited, or sad that you can be sure that your subjectivity is at work. The goal is to explore such feelings to learn what they are telling you about who you are in relationship to what you are learning and to what you may be keeping yourself from learning.

The way to become aware of which subjectivities, of all the subjectivities that make up your autobiography, are being engaged in your research is to keep note. Watch for when they creep into your consciousness, be alert for how they take over

the questions you ask, and write about them, continuing to look for them as your research progresses. Some hint of which subjectivities might be called into play during your research can be foreshadowed by reflecting on how your research is autobiographical. When I ask students to do this, I stress that I don't want their life story, but I want to know how their research topic intersects with their life. Why are their research questions, of all the research questions they could ask, of interest to them?

Kristina, whose interview questions were discussed in Chapter 4, planned to interview women from Africa about their perspectives on women's legal rights around marriage, divorce, and property. She thought she had chosen her topic because she was preparing to move with her husband to East Africa for several years and wanted to use her thesis requirement as an opportunity to learn something about the lives of African women. As she considered how her topic was autobiographical, however, she realized that her choice had deeper roots:

My interest in women's rights began in ninth grade with a talk by a women's rights activist that I attended with my mother. The activist told her life story of being raised in the Mormon Church and her struggle to support the Equal Rights Amendment which eventually resulted in her excommunication from the Church of Latter Day Saints and her divorce. Until that evening, I had believed that discrimination against women was part of the past. I distinctly remember my mother saying to me, "You think that there aren't any more barriers for women, but you'll see." Her statement caught me off guard. I was a successful student; I was planning on going to a competitive college and pursuing a career in law or business. But I began to pay more attention to women's issues, especially those which highlighted inequalities between men and women.

My parents' divorce a year after this event dramatically shaped my ideas about women and marriage forever. They had been married for 20 years and while both of my parents struggled after the divorce, my father recovered much more quickly, both financially and emotionally. My mother had somehow "invested" more of herself in the marriage and at the end found herself "bankrupt" with fewer resources to help her start her life over. I think the unequal responsibilities between my parents (Mom being primarily responsible for me, my brother, and the house), as well as her limited work experience, made it more difficult for her to create a new life. Since this time I have been acutely aware of the increased burdens women generally carry in many family situations and I think this awareness has helped me to focus my interests on African women's legal rights around marriage, divorce, and property.

By understanding the ways in which her topic is autobiographical, Kristina can become more aware of her emotional investment in issues of marriage, divorce, property, and women's rights as she begins her interviews with African women.

During his ethnicity study, Peshkin³ began to reflect upon how different research situations engage different subjective lenses. When he did his study in Mansfield, a small Midwestern rural town, he became entranced by the sense of community there. He liked Mansfield and its people and he did not want them to lose their community feeling. His next school-community study was in the fundamentalist Christian setting of Bethany Baptist Church and Bethany Baptist Academy. While

there, he did not feel moved to admire their sense of community because other subjective lenses were on high alert. He writes:

I knew that I was annoyed by my personal (as opposed to research) experience at BBA. I soon became sharply aware that my annoyance was pervasively present, that I was writing out of pique and vexation. Accordingly, I was not celebrating community at Bethany, and community prevailed there no less robustly than it had at Mansfield. Why not? I was more than annoyed in Bethany; my ox had been gored. The consequence was that the story I was feeling drawn to tell had its origins in my personal sense of threat. I was not at Bethany as a cool, dispassionate observer (are there any?); I was there as a Jew whose otherness was dramatized directly and indirectly during eighteen months of fieldwork. (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, 103)

As Peshkin entered his next school-community study in urban Riverview where he planned to follow the play of ethnicity in school and community in order to learn how ethnicity operated in the lives of students and parents, he resolved to look for his subjectivity, noting the feeling and the circumstances. He incorporated his reflections into a set of six "Subjective I's." As in Mansfield, the "Community-Maintenance I" was present, but the Riverview research situation called forth "Subjective I's" that previous studies had not, such as what he terms his "Pedagogical-Meliorist I." About this "Subjective I," Peshkin states,

This . . . is a defensive self. It is directed toward students, generally minorities, whom I observed getting nowhere in their classrooms. They were being taught by teachers who had not learned enough, often did not care enough, to make a difference in their students' lives. Class time for both students and teachers was an occasion for little more than marking time until the bell released both from their meaningless engagement. This circumstance, regrettably common, disturbed me more than I had ever been disturbed by the ineffective teachers I had observed at other schools. The difference at Riverview High School was that the students in such classes were usually minorities, those who came to school with two strikes against them. I found myself doing what I never before had done as I sat in the back of classrooms: hatching schemes that would alter the classrooms I was watching, schemes that were calculated to reorient instruction and make a difference in the lives of the students. (Glesne and Peshkin 1992, 105)

Tracing your subjectivities, as Peshkin did during his Riverview study, shows points on a map of yourself. These points do not create a complete map because no research evokes all of your subjectivity. Some "Subjective I's" surely will appear again in other studies; just as surely, new "Subjective I's" will appear in other studies. And most likely, no two people doing the same study would map the same subjectivities, although many educators and social service professionals in my qualitative research classes identify a "Justice I" and a "Caring I" when reflecting upon the subjective lenses involved in their research. Lorrie provides an example:

I view my inquiry into how physical therapists work with elders with dementia through several lenses. First, and most connected to me, is the **personal lens**. The personal lens comes from my past, derived from the relationship I had with my maternal grandmother. Secondly, I view this topic through a **justice lens**. I have seen elders treated unfairly by health care providers; they don't receive the same quality of treatment as younger people, even when they have the same problems. I want to work toward achieving equal treatment of elders by understanding what they need for successful treatments. Thirdly, I am looking at this research through a **caring lens**. I have a strong interest in having the elders in our society treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. I want everyone in society to know what resources exist in our elderly community members.

To address the **personal lens**, I must return to my experience as a child. I can never remember a time when I wasn't drawn to older people. My parents were older when I was born—the age of my peers' grandparents. Essentially, I skipped a generation. Consequently, I found myself surrounded by elderly people on both sides of the family. The most influential person was my grandmother. My grandmother had multi-infarct dementia. She was treated very poorly by an underqualified and undereducated staff in one of the local facilities. After she died, I knew that I had to work specifically with elders; it was something that I could not ignore, a calling.

The basis of my personal interest in geriatrics stems from my relationship with my grandmother and my observations of the care she received at the most vulnerable point in her life. However, I also see the personal lens linked with the **justice lens**. I have always been an advocate for equal treatment. I have always been sensitive to people who are oppressed or underprivileged. And I have been acutely aware of my own privileged lifestyle. The injustices in our communities affect me deeply. I believe that the elderly, especially those without financial resources and without advocates, are the most vulnerable members of our society. In many ways they are more vulnerable than children because most children have strong advocates, parents. Elders have multiple needs; far too often, they are neglected or taken advantage of.

Finally, I see my **caring lens** connected to both the personal lens and justice lens. Having spent many hours with elderly individuals, I am well aware of what they have to offer. I value elders. I see them as wise, interesting people with rich experiences. Elders deserve to be treated with a special dignity.

As a physical therapist who has practiced in this area for 8 years, I will have to consider my subjectivity regarding my relationships with research participants. They will also be my colleagues, many of whom I have worked closely with at one time. They have an image of me and my interest in this topic; and I have images of them. To avoid making assumptions, I will need to listen carefully and probe thoroughly. To avoid misinterpretations, I intend to seek feedback on the actual transcripts from each participant.

Just as having knowledge of the participants makes "objectivity" challenging, it also has advantages. The background knowledge I have of many of the participants may assist me in probing more effectively. Furthermore, my knowledge of the profession will be helpful in asking better questions and being able to interpret data. Having the same professional training as the participants will allow for our time to be spent on rich details of their experiences rather than superficial discussion of the profession.

Monitoring and Using Subjectivity

As Loric indicates in the previous example, awareness of your subjectivities can guide you to strategies to monitor those perspectives that might, as you analyze and write up your data, shape, skew, distort, construe, and misconstrue what you make of what you see and hear. Try to see what you are not seeing, to detect what you are making less of than could be made, so that you can temper as necessary the press of subjectivity.

Mark describes how monitoring his subjectivity helped him to see in new ways. He was researching attitudes of officers in corrective facilities toward the schooling of their wards.

The most unexpected event during the research process was that I changed my mind. My original "Subjective I" and several field log entries identify my concern over my judgmental stance regarding officers. I recognized that I must be cognizant of this and had to be careful to place "no prior constraints on what the outcomes of the research will be" (Patton 1990, 41). In the field log, I reminded myself "that during this research I am not a reformer." What surprises me now is that I have come to respect more what the officers do in their day-to-day routines in the cellblocks. By their sharing their thoughts and experiences with me, I have been informed, and consequently reformed. In their own way, they are also involved in helping a rather difficult clientele overcome massive barriers and become better people. I am delighted.

Monitoring subjectivity is not synonymous with controlling for subjectivity, in the sense of trying to keep it out of your work. When you monitor your subjectivity, you increase your awareness of the ways it might distort, but you also increase your awareness of its virtuous capacity. You learn more about your own values, attitudes, beliefs, interests, and needs. You learn that your subjectivity is the basis for the story that you are able to tell. It is the strength on which you build. It makes you who you are as a person and as a researcher, equipping you with the perspectives and insights that shape all that you do as researcher, from the selection of topic clear through to the emphasis you make in your writing. Seen as virtuous, subjectivity is something to capitalize on rather than to exorcise.

Virtuous subjectivity should not be confused with subjectivism, however, which exalts personal feeling as "the ultimate criterion of the good and the right" (Webster's 1986). By means of your subjectivity, you construct a narrative, but it must be imaginable by others, and it must be verifiable by others. The worth of your narrative cannot rest on its goodness or rightness in some private sense. It cannot be illusion or fantasy that has no basis outside your mind.

Developing awareness of your subjectivity and monitoring when it is engaged is a productive undertaking. Although it is not possible to be complete in this mapping of self, you can learn enough that is consequential about the selves generated in a particular research situation to be able to make use of this knowledge and to be responsible in reporting those selves to the readers of your work. A reflective section on who you are as researcher and the lenses through which you view your work is now an expected part of qualitative research studies. How you pursue your

own subjectivity matters less than that you pursue it: the means can be as idiosyncratic as the special, personal twist that all researchers give to the standard methods that they adopt to conduct their research. Reading, reflecting, and talking about subjectivity are valuable, but they are no substitute for monitoring it in the process of research.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY

The old people were genuinely proud of me, generous, and affectionate, but at times their resentment spilled over. My presence was a continual reminder of many painful facts: that it should have been their own children there listening to their stories; that I had combined family and a career, opportunities that the women had longed for and never been allowed. (Myerhoff 1979, 26–27)

Intersubjectivity is a term used to highlight the fact that the subjectivities that help to shape research are not those of the researcher alone. Rather, particularly in inquiry where researcher and research participants interact over a period of time, the subjectivities of all players guide the research process and content. As Myerhoff indicates in the above quote, her observations and interviews with Jewish elders activated emotions within her participants that, in turn, shaped their behavior.

In another example, Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997) observed HIV/AIDS support groups and conducted interviews with women in the groups. Their work, which spanned several years, became important to many of the participants as the following quotations indicate:

I'm really excited about you guys writing this book and I want you to get it published right away. . . . Going through the interviews and hearing everyone's story, a lot of this stuff, we don't talk about in group, we don't talk about like how do you really feel about that stuff. (xxvii)

When are you guys going to publish? Some of us are on deadline, you know. (169)

Lather, Smithies, and the women living with HIV/AIDS formed relationships, laughed, cried, and re-examined their lives through the project. And the women's urgency to get their story told pushed Lather and Smithies to desktop publish an early version of their book, *Troubling the Angels*.

As research relationships develop, the negotiation of subjectivities is ongoing, with the potential for values, attitudes, and understandings of both researcher and participants to be changed through the research process. Similar to monitoring subjectivity, reflecting upon the interplay between researcher and researched is essential for understanding how research relationships influence fieldwork and interpretation (Busier, Clark, Esch, Glesne, Pigeon, and Tarule 1997). As Welch (1994, 41) states, "We create our own stories, but only as coauthors."

Thinking about the subjectivity of your others can also assist you in data interpretation. Ask yourself how those in the research site would react to your interpretations, to your phrasings? Is your interpretation paternalistic in ways? Does it ro-

manicize? Try to take on the role of a particular research participant and read your words thinking about their impact and meaning to you as someone who has been "researched."

Reading here about subjectivity and intersubjectivity is like reading about other aspects of the research process: It may represent the beginning of understanding, a necessary condition on the way to making your perspectives explicit and to grasping the place of subjectivity in your research. For this to occur, however, you have to engage in personal encounters with self and others throughout the research process. Aware that there is something to seek, to uncover, and to understand about yourself, you are ready to be informed through the research experience.

Rapport and Subjectivity

There is a connection between rapport and subjectivity: Your capacity and limitations for establishing rapport are affected positively and negatively by your subjectivity. Liking or not liking a person (or a place or event) presses you toward or away from that person, with the predictable consequence that you distort by under- or over-sampling. Being aware that you are so inclined suggests the need for moderation. Being aware that you are so disinclined suggests that you have an obstacle to overcome if you are successfully to pursue contact with people not to your taste. As observed earlier, friendship is not an essential condition for conducting research; being accepted and trusted is. Also essential is consciousness of your own subjectivity so that you can disabuse yourself of the fiction that, as the disembodied passive voice conveys, watching, listening, and reading are going on without a known human agent. Invariably, a sentient being does the watching, listening, and doing. It makes a difference who. The goal is to get as fully as possible in touch with the embodied self who performs the acts of research.

For more discussion on rapport, see Delamont 1992; Gans 1982; Glesne 1989; Gonzalez 1986; Kleinman and Copp 1993; and Mitchell 1993. Particularly useful references on subjectivity include Barone 1990b; Couch 1987; Eisner 1990; Jansen and Peshkin 1992; Krieger 1985; LeCompte 1987; Peshkin 1982b, 1988a, 1988c; Riley 1974. For sources that focus upon issues of intersubjectivity, particularly those that involve friendship relationships in the field, see Kulick and Willson 1995; Lewin and Leap 1996.

Exercises

1. Reflect upon the nature of the optimal research relationships in your study. What implications do such relationships have for developing and maintaining rapport?
2. Write a "Subjective I" section for your research project. In it answer the following questions:
 - In what ways is your research autobiographical?
 - Which "Subjective I's" are engaged by your research project?

- What can you do to make use of your subjectivity in your research project? How might it benefit your study?
- In what ways will you monitor subjectivity that might otherwise blind you to certain aspects of your research?

Notes

1. There are writers who presume to have nailed down the techniques for achieving rapport. From within the self-help literature, see Brooks (1989).
2. This section on rapport draws on "Rapport and friendship in ethnographic research" by Corrine Glesne, from *The International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1989, vol. 2, no. 1, pages 45–54, published by Taylor & Francis Group.
3. Peshkin's reflections on subjectivity that are presented here are taken from the first edition of *Becoming Qualitative Researchers* and draw from Peshkin 1982b, 1988a, and 1988b.

Chapter 6

But Is It Ethical? Learning to Do Right

As a group of students entered their second semester together in a qualitative research methods class, they reflected on the role trial and error had played in their best-learned lessons. Ernie wondered, "Can you even consider the possibility of learning research ethics through trial and error?" With increased awareness of ethical issues, they deliberated over perceived ethical dilemmas and wondered about the unintended consequences of their work.

This group of students realized that ethical considerations should accompany plans, thoughts, and discussions about each aspect of qualitative research. Ethics is not something that you can forget once you satisfy the demands of institutional review boards and other gatekeepers of research conduct. Nor is it "merely a matter of isolated choices in crucial situations" (Cassell and Jacobs 1987, 1). Rather, ethical considerations are inseparable from your everyday interactions with research participants and with your data.

Of course, ethical decisions are not peculiar to qualitative inquiry. Guidelines for ethical conduct grew out of medical and other types of intrusive research and led to an emphasis on informed consent, avoidance of harm, and confidentiality. Different epistemological systems, however, give rise to different ethical concerns (Lincoln 1990; Scott 1996). The emphasis on separation between researcher and researched in positivist research "prescribes a set of attitudes toward research subjects which fosters believing—on both sides—that researcher knows best" and that "researchers are in the best position to determine, within certain guidelines, what constitutes ethicality in social science research" (Lincoln 1990, 290). In interpretive approaches, however, the researcher interacts with participants in order to understand their social constructions. This orientation "thrusts upon the respondent two new roles: that of agency, self-determination, and participation in the analysis and reconstruction of the social world; and that of collaborator in both the processes and products of inquiries" (Lincoln 1990, 290). What constitutes ethicality becomes something to be negotiated and heavily contextual.

BECOMING QUALITATIVE RESEARCHERS

An Introduction

SECOND EDITION

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University of Vermont



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