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Complexities in "Similarity" in Research Interviewing: A Case of Interviewing Urban Fathers

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Abstract

In this article we show how, whether the goal is reflecting or creating reality, research interviewers must pay closer attention to the particular trajectories of the interactional events in which they collect their data. We focus on two guidelines that research interviewers often use - the injunction to maximize similarities of social identity between interviewer and interviewee, and the injunction to share personal stories as a means of building rapport - and we show how following the same guideline in the same way can yield dramatically different results from one interview to the next. Data is drawn from research interviews conducted by young African American men with young African American men who have become fathers as teenagers. The empirical analysis shows that bids for similarity of identity within the research interviews are sometimes accepted and sometimes parried, depending on the particulars of the interactional event, thus illustrating the complexity of "similarity" of identity in research interviews.

Comments

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In this article we show how, whether the goal is reflecting or creating reality, research interviewers must pay closer attention to the particular trajectories of the interactional events in which they collect their data. We focus on two guidelines that research interviewers often use—the injunction to maximize similarities of social identity between interviewer and interviewee, and the injunction to share personal stories as a means of building rapport—and we show how following the same guideline in the same way can yield dramatically different results from one interview to the next. Data is drawn from research interviews conducted by young African American men with young African American men who have become fathers as teenagers. The empirical analysis shows that bids for similarity of identity within the research interviews are sometimes accepted and sometimes parried, depending on the particulars of the interactional event, thus illustrating the complexity of "similarity" of identity in research interviews.

In a research interview, similarity between interviewer and interviewee would seem to be methodologically beneficial. Like any interlocutors, interviewers and interviewees must share some presupposed categories of interpretation in order to communicate at all (Baker 1997), and interviewers who are similar with respect to gender, ethnicity, age and other dimensions more often share such categories with their interviewees. Such similarities might also help interviewers and interviewees overcome posturing, mistrust, or other interactional stances that can interfere with open communication.

Recently, however, some "native ethnographers" have pointed out that any interviewer is similar to his or her interviewees in some respects and dissimilar in others (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Narayan 1993). The course and outcome of any interview depends on how interviewer and inter-

view we draw on their similarities and dissimilarities in the particular event of interviewing itself. This article describes in detail how two "native" interviewers and their interviewees positioned themselves with respect to their similarities and differences. These cases show that, in addition to providing general guidelines about research interviewing (like the injunction to maximize similarity between interviewer and interviewee), we must acknowledge and explore how such guidelines yield divergent interactions in actual interviewing events.

Our analysis draws on a pilot study of urban fathers, which included individual interviews with fifteen subjects (Gadsden, Wortham & Turner 2003). We located the fathers through a father resource program, in which all of them were enrolled. The subjects for these interviews were all African American men living in a large urban area in the U.S. who became fathers as teenagers. The semi-structured interviews asked about their experiences with their own fathers and mothers, their experiences and feelings as a parent, and their relationship with the mother(s) of their children. Interviewers also left substantial space for the fathers to tell stories about their lives. The interviewers were relatively young African American men who were graduate students or university-based researchers. The article describes how similar interviewer/interviewee pairs, who followed similar interviewing guidelines, nevertheless enacted strikingly different interview events.

Research Interviewing

As the critique of social scientific authority has developed over the past few decades (cf. e.g., Clifford & Marcus 1986; Gergen 1973; Marcus & Fischer 1986; Stoeltje, Fox & Olbrys 1999), the research interview has been challenged as a methodological tool. Many have pointed out that the research interview does not provide a transparent window into social and psychological worlds (e.g., Briggs 1986; Holstein & Gubrium 1997; Roulston, Baker & Liljestrom 2001). Social scientists and laypersons often assume that interviewees "open up" and reveal their true experiences and feelings in interviews (Atkinson & Silverman 1997), but this is an idealization. Instead of being a transparent window onto the world, the critics argue, research interviews themselves filter and partly construct our conceptions of the world (Wright, Bauer, Clark, Morgan & Begishe 1993).

One of the critics' central points has been that research interviews themselves are sociohistorically located interactional events (Briggs 1986; Goodman 2001; Ortiz 2001; Stromberg 1990). As Holstein and Gubrium (1997) put it, research interviews involve both a "what"—the experiences or beliefs described by the interviewee—and a "how"—the interactional event in which that description happens. (We will henceforth refer to these two realms as the "denoted content" and the "interactional event"

respectively). Although social scientists often treat denoted content as unproblematic representations of reality, critics of the research interview have convincingly shown that the content denoted in a research interview is a joint accomplishment that requires work by all participants in the interactional event (Atkinson & Silverman 1997; Douglas 1985; Roulston, Baker & Liljestrom 2001). Furthermore, the interactional event of a research interview involves other types of struggle and coordination—like ascription of social identities to interviewer and interviewee (Baker 1997; Jacobs-Huey 2002) and bringing to bear larger power relations (Goodman 2001)—which go on concurrently with and can influence the production of denoted content.

The critics diverge in their recommendations about how to proceed. Some want to mitigate the influence of interactional processes on denoted content, by recognizing and controlling for them, and also to use interactional events themselves as data, such that research interviews can provide reliable information about a person or social context (e.g., Briggs 1986). Some want to acknowledge and use the creative character of research interview data (Holstein & Gubrium 1997; Douglas 1985), moving beyond the idea of gathering reliable data about a person or context to postmodern versions of social science as "reciprocal" (Lawless 1991). Others note that the goal of research interviews might be neither reflecting reality, nor creating new accounts of reality, but instead transforming an individual or a relationship through the interactional event itself (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Lather & Smithies 1997; Ortiz 2001).

In this article we show how, whether the goal is reflecting or creating reality, research interviewers must pay closer attention to the particular trajectories of the interactional events in which they collect their data. We focus on two guidelines that research interviewers often use—the injunction to maximize similarities of social identity between interviewer and interviewee, and the injunction to share personal stories as a means of building rapport—and we show how following the same guideline in the same way can yield dramatically different results from one interview to the next. We make this point by describing research interviews conducted with young African American men who have become fathers as teenagers. Besides illustrating the contextual complexities of research interviewing, the descriptions also give insight both into the lives of these young urban fathers and into the process of conducting an interview study.

The injunction to maximize similarities of social identity between interviewer and interviewee is often discussed under the rubric of "native ethnographers." Drawing on Gumperz (1982) and others, Briggs (1986) points out that non-native interviewers often miscommunicate with their interviewees because their different sociocultural backgrounds lead them to interpret the interactional event of interviewing in divergent ways. He recommends closer alignment of presuppositions about events

like interviews, which can be accomplished through experience and awareness on the part of the participants or by matching the background of interviewers and interviewees. Subsequent work on “native” ethnographers has complicated this recommendation somewhat, however. Shared background knowledge is important, but even native ethnographers are situated somewhat differently than their interviewees, and all interviewers must negotiate positionings with their interviewees in emergent interactional events (Jacobs-Huey 2002; Narayan 1993). This article illustrates such emergent and ultimately unpredictable positioning with respect to several interviews conducted by researchers who shared some important social identities with their interviewees.

The article also focuses on a somewhat less common injunction about building rapport—that research interviewers should take advantage of similarities between themselves and their interviewees by telling autobiographical stories that bring out those similarities. The empirical analysis shows how such bids for similarity of identity are sometimes accepted and sometimes parried, depending on the particulars of the interactional event. Overall, then, the article shows how “similarity” of identity, while not a bad idea, is more complex in practice than research interviewers generally acknowledge.

Cultural Background: Street, Home, and System

In order to understand the interactional positions adopted by interviewers and fathers in the interviews we are working with, we first need to understand the types of positions made available by the cultural context. As we have described elsewhere (Gadsden, Wortham & Wojcik 2001; Gadsden, Wortham & Turner 2003), and as described by others (e.g., Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1996), these urban African American men presuppose three particularly salient realms in most of their stories: the street, the home, and the system. We do not claim that these folk categories accurately portray actual behavior in all respects, just that the fathers consistently make these presuppositions in their narratives. Whether the fathers’ descriptions are accurate or not, the narrators and interviewers must deal with what the fathers say as they negotiate their relationships.

Almost all of the fathers in our study described *the street* as destructive, dangerous, and unproductive, but nevertheless appealing. Activities commonly associated with this realm included “hustlin’,” “hangin’ out,” and “partying,” together with drugs and alcohol. Several of the fathers associated the street with their youth—saying, for instance, “I was still playin’. I was still bein’ a boy.” A recurring theme was that life on the streets was free and unrestricted, with no responsibilities “holding one down.” This street life is seductive. As PR said, “The streets can suck you under. They can take you right under, man. You

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gotta be strong." EG echoes this: "The streets was a barrier [to responsible parenting]....I couldn't let the streets go. Just wanted to hang out all the time. Knowing he was there, you know, I wanted to hang out. I always said that I would get better as he grows, you know." The streets are also dangerous. As PR says, "I could easily wind up dead or...anything!"

Several of the fathers characterized their transition from the street to the home as "slowing down." BR, for instance, said: "Reality didn't hit me until I seen him being born that I was gonna be a father, so I had to slow down some of the things I was doing for before, running the streets....I had to realize that there was no more partying. It's a responsibility really to slow down." Street life is "fast" and involves concern primarily for oneself, while domestic life is "slow" and involves responsibilities for others.

Almost all the fathers also represented their mother's *home*, and their children's primary home, as stable, protected and nurturing. The domestic realm is an environment characterized by togetherness—families spending quality time during meals and outings, talking with each other, teaching and learning. A large proportion of time in the domestic realm is dedicated to child care, with parents cooking, cleaning, feeding, and playing with their children. LJ, for instance, says:

the role of a father... I tell you what, a father is someone that's, that's understanding, (1.0) a teacher, a provider. and it may sound kinda funny but, I happen to have that motherly instinct or mother with what you might call it, as well. because like I said, I keep Lakriesha six days. six on, and six off. and alot a things that her mother can't do because she's not there, I have to do. so I have to nurture her as well, and do her hair (hh), you know (1.0) everything. (1.0) I have to do this. I know that I have to be there for my baby. I definitely try my best to teach her, so when she grows, she grows to be a smart little woman. I have to set boundaries. I'm tryin to set em right now so in the long run she won't be crazy, wild, out there, you know.

The urban fathers in this study characterized the home as starkly different from the streets. For example, whereas the street life is characterized by the desire to circumvent responsibility and the law, in the home fathers relinquish selfish ways in favor of sacrificing for their children. Fathers spoke of putting their children first, as their "number one priority" at home. This sort of responsible, settled behavior at home is opposed to typical street behavior. EG compared the two realms this way:

responsibility (1.0) that's the number one thing to me. responsibility because, it's like I watch some of these fathers out there that just hang on the street all day, they'll be wishing they could see their child, but me, on

the other hand, that's my number one priority, you know, so. that's my responsibility is to deal with him and make sure he's all right before I go have my fun. that's the number one thing.

This father's response describes three key aspects associated with the home: responsibility, selflessness, and sacrifice. While the street life is unbounded by external controls, home life entails subordination to rules of discipline. Narrators spoke of following "the rules of the house" in their own childhood homes as well as in their interactions with their own children.

Many narrators represented *the system* as biased and heartless. As they go about their business in society, the fathers consistently face racism.

Interviewer: what about any challenges in terms of society, society norms, or racism?

PR: no that's every day, man. sometimes I feel that I should be in a higher position. say, like, at my job, than what I am, but I might not be because of my color. people don't believe that or whatever, but it goes on. I mean, it's here. it's real. and um, as far as society, I mean it's like the policemen they stop any black (1.0) you know, if you've got two or three black males in the car, you get pulled over, regardless. you gonna need lawyers, I mean, they're gonna pull you over, just for being black. they gonna question you find out where you goin', what you doin', where you been. yeah, that's a challenge. try to avoid the police, you know. (hh)

The fathers emphasize their problems with the court system in particular, an institution that they experience too often. For instance, one said:

dealing with the court systems is like being public enemy number one. you know, it's like sometimes they don't care to know the situation. it's just automatically. sometimes I just think fathers get a bad rap in court. I know I been to court one time (1.0) my child support was in arrears. I was working. instead of just having me maybe pay five more dollars a week, they wanted me to do community service. which, I was working at the time so I didn't do the community service. they locked me up and charged me a thousand dollars for that. (1.0) my son's mother was trying to tell them, even she was trying to be on my side and say hey, he's paying his support, he's been, but they didn't want to hear it. just locked me up, you know.

This father characterizes the court system as heartless and unproductive. They stereotype him, despite the fact that he has started to pay child support, as "public enemy number one." They also act in capricious and unproductive ways. Despite the fact that the system should want him to work and provide child support, they impose community service and

lock him up, in ways that jeopardize his ability to do both. So the system is authoritarian, inhumane, unjust and ultimately self-defeating. Furthermore, when a father tries to explain or contribute to the proceedings, the courts will not even listen. According to CJ,

they don't even wanna hear you say anything once you get in the courtroom. and the prosecutors oh (1.0) they something else. they something else. and the judges are just as bad. it's almost like it's (1.0) well, I know they on teams because they work for the city or state or whatever. but it's just, the point of them not letting you say anything is what gets you. they don't even let you give an opinion or try to help come up with a solution. it's like, okay, yeah. this is your kid, but this is how we want you to take care of your kid, and you do it this way or you do time for it.

Identifying Participants in Interviews

The fathers draw on the three realms of street, home and system in order to characterize spaces (e.g., the street corner vs. the living room), activities (e.g., hanging out vs. caring for children) and people (e.g., the drug dealer vs. the responsible father). As Baker (1997) and others have shown, interviewers and interviewees always implicitly or explicitly identify themselves and each other, using socially available categories of identity. Because the three realms of street, home and system are salient for them, and because their stories make these three realms salient in the interviewing situation, we can use these realms to characterize some salient roles available to interviewers and fathers during the interactional event of interviewing itself.

Table 1 (see page 8) represents nine possible relationships between interviewer and subject, given that each of them could adopt an identity of speaking as someone from the street, the home, or the system. The realms of street, home, and system, of course, each contain more than one inhabitable identity—these are coarse categories. And there are other categories of identity available to the interviewers and fathers. But the table nonetheless captures something important about the relational dynamics of most interviews in our sample. The shaded cells in this table are the ones that actually occur in our data. The cells with italicized text not only do not occur in our data, but are also unlikely to occur, given the constraints of the interviewers' and the fathers' social situations.

The fathers and the interviewers did not know each other before their interviews, although in some cases they had seen each other in focus groups that took place earlier. The interviewers knew that the fathers were young African American men who had become fathers as teenagers and who lived in relatively poor urban neighborhoods. The fathers knew that the interviewers were relatively young, highly educated African American professionals who worked for a national research center.

Given their different social positions at the beginning of the inter-

Table 1
Possible Interactional Positions for Interviewer and Subject

Inter- viewee	Interviewer		
	<i>Street</i>	<i>Home</i>	<i>System</i>
<i>Street</i>	<p>Interviewer and interviewee both act as if they are from the street, by bragging about exploits, demanding respect or challenging the other</p> <p>1</p>	<p>Interviewer positions himself as deeply involved in domestic activities, in contrast to the interviewee who is looking out for himself while living on the street</p> <p>2</p>	<p>Interviewer acts as a representative of the system, judging or interrogating a morally suspect interviewee who lives on the street</p> <p>3</p>
<i>Home</i>	<p><i>Interviewer acts like a man living on the street, while positioning the interviewee as someone primarily involved in work and domestic activities</i></p> <p>4</p>	<p>Interviewer and interviewee both position themselves as primarily involved in domestic life by, e.g., sharing their experiences with partners or with parenting</p> <p>5</p>	<p>Interviewer acts as a representative of the system, listening to and perhaps favorably judging the interviewee who is primarily involved in domestic activities</p> <p>6</p>
<i>System</i>	<p><i>Interviewee acts like a representative of the system, negatively judging the interviewer who acts like a wise guy from the street</i></p> <p>7</p>	<p><i>Interviewee acts like a representative of the system, positively evaluating the interviewer's involvement in domestic activities</i></p> <p>8</p>	<p><i>Interviewer and interviewee act like representatives of the system, perhaps jointly judging or evaluating others' street behavior and domestic involvement</i></p> <p>9</p>

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views, one might predict that the interview relationship would start in cell 3—with the fathers getting positioned as representatives of the street and interviewers positioned as representatives of the system. In fact, almost all of the interviews do start this way. Because the interview protocol begins with questions about the father's out-of-wedlock children and their socioeconomic status, fathers almost always start their interviews by giving information that identifies them as poor, inner city African American men who have become nonresidential, noncustodial fathers as teenagers and who have often been involved in illegal activity. Almost all the fathers also quickly try to establish that they are no longer leading a street life, and that they are working to provide support and personally care for their children. That is, the fathers generally try to move the relationship from cell 3 to cell 6.

Most interviewers allow fathers to make this switch, acknowledging the fathers' claims about parenting by inquiring further about their domestic lives with their children. Because the interview protocol switches from questions about marital and socioeconomic status to questions about activities with their children, it is easy for interviewers and fathers to shift fathers' interactional position from a man on the "street" to a man at "home." In some cases, the interviewer also switches his own position—moving away from being a representative of the system toward being someone who is himself trying to participate in the domestic realm just like the subject. When this happens, it shifts the interview relationship from cell 6 to cell 5. The first extended case analyzed below follows this pattern, which is the most common trajectory for the interactional events in our data, moving from cell 3 to cell 6 to cell 5, and then back to cell 6 at the end.

Any actual interview will involve the participants making bids to adopt one identity or another, and responses to these bids by the other participant (Roulston, Baker & Liljestron 2001). In order for either participant to establish an identity (for the purposes of the interactional event taking place in the interview), his attempts at self-identification must be ratified by the other participant. One must signal that he is speaking as a certain sort of person—as someone who lives on the street, or as someone who has given up street life and become a committed father—and then the other must acknowledge that he accepts this representation of identity. Both participants give off signals about their identity, and about their acceptance or rejection of the other's identity-claims, continuously throughout the interview. Over time, certain identities will become solidified (Wortham 2001). It requires detailed analysis, as illustrated below, to uncover what identities were adopted and ratified in a particular case.

Interviewing well involves managing this ongoing play of identity. Interviewers want to establish enough rapport for the subject to speak relatively freely. This usually involves reducing the hierarchy or distance

between interviewer and subject. In the possibilities included in Table 1, it often requires that the interviewer move the relationship toward cell 5, where both interviewer and subject identify themselves as men participating in the domestic realm. But successful interviewing rarely involves just one type of relationship. The identities and relationships adopted by participants change over the course of the interview, as the interviewer works to establish his credibility, build a relationship, offer advice, and other stances that may become appropriate. The successful interviewer manages multiple identities and relationships over the course of an interview. Any guidelines that we offer to research interviewers must include the recognition that particular interactional events unfold in context-specific ways.

Methods

This paper reports findings from a pilot research study, in which we asked fifteen urban fathers from Indianapolis to tell us about their experiences with their children. All the fathers had become parents while still teenagers. They all came from low-income inner-city communities. And all of them were participating in programs at a father resource center, where they could talk to other young urban fathers and get advice from more experienced staff. The fifteen subjects were selected from sixty fathers who participated in earlier focus groups, based on their willingness, their articulateness, and the apparent richness of their stories.

All interviewers were African American males themselves, but, unlike the fathers, they were middle-class professionals. The semi-structured interview protocol included questions about barriers to employment and questions about interaction with their children. Over the course of these interviews, fathers had a chance to tell stories about their own childhoods, their relationships with their parents, their relationships with the mother(s) of their children, their activities with their children, and their goals both for themselves and their children. Further details about the sample and an overview of the narratives can be found in Gadsden, Wortham and Turner (2003).

For this paper, we selected three interviews that seemed to have interesting and complex interactional positioning going on between interviewers and subjects. We have analyzed these interviews using techniques drawn from Bakhtin (1935/1981) and Wortham (2001; Wortham & Locher 1996). We focus in particular on the "voices" that narrators assign to important characters in their narratives. That is, we systematically searched the data for linguistic cues that identify different characters as belonging to or speaking with the "voice" of recognizable social type. Calling someone a "wolf," for instance, in the context of urban environments, may voice that person as predatory and associated with the life of the streets.

Our analyses identified all instances in a transcript of certain discursive cues that often presuppose things about speakers' or characters' identities. Metapragmatic verbs, or verbs of speaking, for instance, often presuppose something about the identity of the speaker being quoted (Volosinov 1929/1973). When we say that someone "whined," for instance, we presuppose something different about his or her voice than if we say he or she "said" something. After identifying all instances of several types of cues, we looked for systematic patterns of cues that collectively presupposed a particular voice. Saying only once that someone "whined," without any further cues, likely presupposes little about the person's identity. But saying a few times that he "whined" and "wheeled," and calling him a "brat," more likely presupposes something about this person's voice. The emergence of a voice depends on such a pattern of cues, and on the ratification of such a pattern by subsequent speakers (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974). Evidence for the emergence of a particular voice comes from subsequent cues that presuppose the same identity that had been (potentially) signaled by earlier ones. Discourse analysis is ultimately a hermeneutic method, claiming that a set of cues establishes a particular identity for someone. We maintained methodological discipline by systematically listing all instances of potentially relevant cues and by examining whether the proposed interpretation accounted for many of these cues.

After identifying salient voices in the narratives, we looked for clues to the interviewer and interviewee's own positions with respect to those voices. For instance, is the speaker sympathetic to the street life of that "wolf," or not? Such clues tell us something about the positions adopted by both fathers and interviewers. By tracing clues to interviewers' and interviewees' positions with respect to salient voices, over the course of the interview, we developed accounts of the identities they are adopting. Then we looked for clues about how the two participants respond to each other's evaluation of voices – e.g., after the interviewee expressed sympathy for or camaraderie with that "wolf," did the interviewer do the same? Wortham (2001) provides an extensive guide to these methodological techniques.

One Young Urban Father's Story

Overview of PR's Life

PR's father lived with his mother for the first two years of PR's life. Then his father left, to return to the streets, where he had several other children with different women. PR's mother worked hard to support her children, and her home was safe and nurturing. She is a "sweet person" who would "try to help anybody." As an adolescent, however, PR was "hard headed" and his mother "let him loose." He pursued a life of

drugs and partying on the street. At age 19, his first daughter was born. He continued to live a street life, selling drugs. At age 20, he was arrested and incarcerated for three years. At age 24, his son was born, to a different woman. At age 25, he decided to change. He enrolled in the father resource program, and he began a relationship with a third woman, who has a daughter of her own. At the time of the interview, PR is 26 and he is engaged to be married to his girlfriend. He has a good job, and he sees his two biological children regularly for supervised visitation. He also cares for his girlfriend's daughter at home, as if she were his own.

Interactional Dynamics in the Interview

As in most of the interviews in our sample, the interviewer starts off by identifying himself with the professional world and by taking control of the interview. This interviewer regularly refers to himself as "we," as part of the team from a research center that has been retained by the city and the father resource center. For instance, at the very beginning of the interview he says: "and we just wanted to get your frank and honest insights about your relationship with your child....we have just about 28 questions here, so we're going to get started" (lines 1-7). In addition to identifying himself as part of the professional research team, the interviewer also presupposes that PR will cooperate and answer his questions (by saying "we're going to get started").

In responding to the first questions in the interview, PR gives information that establishes him as a young African American man who has fathered two children with two different mothers and who has been involved with the court system. At this point, then, both PR and the interviewer know that he may fit the stereotype of a young black man living on the street. He and the interviewer may be enacting the relationship represented in cell 3 of Table 1 above, with the interviewer a representative of the system and PR a representative of the street.

PR behaves in two ways that might indicate that this is in fact the type of relationship he has with the interviewer. First, he gives short answers to the interviewer's questions--apparently telling the truth, but not volunteering much information. After the first 140 lines of the interview (the whole interview is 1004 lines long), the interviewer has uttered substantially more words than PR, because the interviewer has to work hard to get relatively short answers to his questions. Second, PR occasionally challenges the interviewer's authority early in the interview, as in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: okay, um, how would you describe your relationship with your children?

PR: a father children relationship.

45 **Interviewer:** (hh) and could you elaborate on that a little

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bit?

Early in the interview, then, both the interviewer and PR seem to be acting as if PR is a representative of the streets submitting (not too happily) to an interview with a representative of the system.

The Beginnings of Rapport. A few minutes into the interview, after getting some basic information, the interviewer starts to be a bit less formal. For instance, he laughs when asking a question about daily routines:

- Interviewer:** okay, um, why don't you, just run me through a sort of typical day with, let's start with your fiancée's daughter. what is a typical day like from the time you get up to the time you go to bed? (hh)
- 120 **PR:** well, it depends if I'm off, well even if I'm not off work, that little girl will come in there and wake me up, so that I have to get up. (hh) maybe I have to go in there and cook something

The interviewer's laugh need not have meant anything. In fact, he also laughed earlier at line 45. But this time PR himself laughs in response. And this time PR starts to tell a story about his daily life in a more informal way—the first more extended, narrative answer that he has given. This might mean that PR and the interviewer are having a more friendly conversation. As analysts, we can only tell whether this is in fact the beginning of a different type of relationship by examining evidence from later in the conversation that indicates how the participants interpreted this exchange (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson 1974; Wortham 2001).

The interviewer goes on immediately to say other things that presuppose he and PR are in fact having a less formal, more friendly conversation.

- Interviewer:** okay, what about like in the evening, when you all come back, do you all have dinner together?
- 140 **PR:** no, see I work nights. I work from two thirty til eleven. so when I'm home, she's sleeping, so.
- Interviewer:** so, tell me a little bit about, for example, when your daughter comes to wake you up and then you have to cook breakfast, like do the two of you have a chance to talk?
- 145 **PR:** yeah.
- Interviewer:** so, what are you talking about? (hh)
- PR:** anything. I mean, the little girl is so. aw, man. it seem like she is very intelligent. like, this morning. this morning. her tooth fell out last night. and ...
- 150

Note, first, the interviewer's use of "you all" in his first question. This is the interviewer's first use of a dialect other than standard English—up to this point he has spoken in a relatively formal way, using terms like "the biological father," "the court mandates," etc. Here he switches to a form often used by speakers of African American Vernacular English. In addition to being less formal, the interviewer may be indicating his solidarity with PR as a fellow speaker of AAVE. In his second question, the interviewer also uses a less formal prompt, when he says "tell me a little bit about...". And then he laughs after his third question. None of these small cues necessarily establishes a friendlier relationship between PR and the interviewer. But, taken together, they could presuppose a friendlier relationship. Their actual implications for the relationship depend on how PR responds.

In fact, PR responds by opening up a bit, so that the interviewer's earlier utterances do seem to be establishing a friendlier relationship. PR goes on to tell his second story of the interview, and he describes how much he cares for his fiancée's daughter.

- PR:** this
morning. her tooth fell out last night. and, so I put some
money under her pillow. and she woke me up at seven o'clock
this morning and showed me her little, and said look what I get.
I said where'd you get that from? she said
155 the tooth fairy gave it to me. I said when did your tooth
come out? she didn't know I knew her tooth came out,
because she was sleeping when I came home, so her mother
showed me her tooth. so she woke me up this morning, and
told me she had a little money and stuff, so and I hugged
160 her and kissed her and stuff. she went on to daycare. we
talk about everything. she's smart. she's so, she wants to
know everything.
Interviewer: sounds like she's very curious.
PR: curious. that's the word I'm looking for. she's very
165 curious. she asks me a question, I give her the best answer
I can.

By telling this story, one which makes clear his attachment to the child and his involvement in domestic life, PR ratifies the interviewer's earlier bids to establish a friendlier relationship. The interviewer follows up by providing the word, "curious," that captures what PR was trying to say—thus indicating that he is paying close attention and understanding PR's meaning. PR acknowledges the appropriateness of the interviewer's comment in his response.

At this point, then, the initial distance of their relationship has begun to disappear. Throughout the interview, they can always presuppose that

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PR is "street" and the interviewer represents the system. But a second type of interactional event is also emerging here. The interviewer has begun to move out of his position as distanced, professional expert, and PR has begun to move out of his position as a wary, resistant man of the street. By talking about his involvement with his children, PR seems to be moving from a "street" identity to a "domestic" one. This shifts the relationship from cell 3 to cell 6 (as described in Table 1 above). They have established some tentative commonality as both speakers of AAVE, they have begun to laugh with each other, and PR has started to tell more involved stories about his experiences as a father.

The interactional event here could still be a cell 6 relationship, with the interviewer a more friendly representative of the system. Or it could be that the interviewer's identity is shifting from that of a distanced expert to someone who, like PR, is concerned with domestic life. Each of these relationships (cells 5 and 6) occurs. Early in the interview, the interviewer is primarily a more friendly representative of the system, but evidence for a cell 5 relationship comes from excerpts like the following. Soon after the exchange quoted above, the interviewer starts to ask PR about the challenges he has faced in trying to be a good father. PR mentions getting and holding a good job and the need to maintain emotional stability. Then the interviewer responds:

Interviewer: what else because it sounds like you're hitting
on some important issues here? so this idea of keeping a
230 steady job because right, when it's just you if things aren't
going the way on the job, you can sometimes there's the
feeling of, hey, I don't need this. I can walk on. but now as
you're saying, and I feel the same way, like with a wife,
being married now, there's just, you feel more of a
235 responsibility as a provider now.
PR: right.

Not only does the interviewer offer an accurate understanding of PR's point here, but he also volunteers information about his own domestic life. Like PR, he feels responsibility because of his role as a provider for his family (like the other interviewers, he is married but does not yet have children). This establishes that PR and the interviewer have similar identities in at least this one respect. And this might be moving their relationship toward cell 5, with both of them identifying as men working to be good fathers and/or partners in the domestic realm.

It is important to note, however, that the interviewer still maintains his position as the one in charge of the interview. He continues to ask questions from the protocol, like "Let me ask you this, PR, in terms of your relationship with your children, has it changed over time?" (lines 183-185) and "what would you say is the role of the father" (lines 310-

311). And he continues to refer to “us,” the research team—e.g., “we’re going to transition now to ask you to help us understand, when I say ‘us’ that’s NCOFF, and those of us who do the research for NCOFF, if you could help us to understand your meaning of the role of father” (lines 269-273). At other times, however, the interviewer uses “we” to refer to himself and PR, as when he says “I know we talked about what’s the role of the father” (lines 329-330). So the interviewer presents himself as a member of two groups: together with other professionals, he is a member of the research team; and together with PR he is participating in a friendly discussion.

At the same time as he and PR are enacting a friendlier relationship, then—perhaps acting more like peers than like “scientist” and “subject”—the interviewer also maintains his position as the representative of a research organization who is in control of the interview. And PR continues to play the complementary role of cooperative research subject, as he answers the interviewer’s questions.

Breakthrough into Solidarity. The interviewer never completely abandons this more authoritative position. But for an extended segment in the middle of the interview, he comes to speak more often as a peer. During this segment, roughly from lines 360-580, the interviewer offers two more extended narratives of how his own experience is in some important respects like PR’s. Immediately before the following segment, the interviewer has been asking where PR learned his fathering skills. PR answers: from his mother. After discussing this, the interviewer asks whether PR learned anything from his father. PR answers no, that the only thing he learned from his father was how painful it was to have no father, so much so that PR has vowed not to put his own children through the same thing.

360 **Interviewer:** oh, well that’s interesting to see how, so it was actually his absence and watching your mother provide for you in his absence that you, and as you were a child, you could see what you wish you would have had.

PR: exactly.

365 **Interviewer:** and therefore, you want to take that wish list and sort of pass it on to your kids.

PR: exactly. I think that’s exactly the way I feel about it, too. that’s the only way that I can, that’s exactly what it is.

Interviewer: yeah, and I guess I could phrase that for you and connect with it, because that was sort of my experience. my father left when I was nine years old and it’s something that I can see, even though it happened many years ago, I can see it crystal clear to this day because I can remember playing with my mail truck and my father

375 coming down the stairs with his bags and I thought he was

- taking a trip. so, you know, you're nine years old, and I said, dad, where you goin'? (hh). and he was sayin', I have to go away for a while. and I said, when you comin' back? and he says, we'll talk about it. and after a while, it hit me
- 380 that he and my mother had separated because they had argued for a while and I can remember listening to their arguments. I'd be playing somewhere and I could hear them arguing. and, you know, it really upset me, just hoping that they could reconcile.
- 385 **PR:** right. that it would stop.
Interviewer: yeah, so then they left and it's traumatic because there's a whole transition period in terms of first, I blamed my mother. it was my mother's fault. then, she and I didn't get along for a while because I was blaming
- 390 her, plus she was the disciplinarian. like, when I would go visit my father-
- PR:** you could do whatever you wanted to do.
Interviewer: exactly. so, anyway, this isn't supposed to be a therapy session for me. [Interviewer and PR laugh
- 395 together] but, it's just sort of interesting this concept of the wishing that you would have and then you just sort of take all that and say, I'm determined that if I was to have a son, I would have to make my marriage work and I've gotta be there, no matter what. so. okay (hh)

Early in this segment, PR makes clear again that the interviewer has understood his meaning, saying "exactly" and "that's exactly the way I feel about it too." This reinforces the connection that the two men are building. Then the interviewer goes on to describe a traumatic experience of his own—his father leaving home—which is analogous in some ways to PR's. This is the second time that the interviewer has shared one of his own experiences with PR, but this time the narrative is much more extended and the subject matter is much more personal and painful.

PR responds by starting to talk like the interviewer, echoing the interviewer's thoughts and feelings—saying, for instance, how the interviewer hoped that his parents' arguing would stop. The interviewer had himself echoed PR in this same way before, e.g., at lines 232-235. At the end of the segment PR fluently finishes one of the interviewer's sentences for him. And the interviewer responds with "exactly," just as PR did earlier in this segment when the interviewer had captured his own thoughts. The segment shows that the relationship between PR and the interviewer has become symmetrical at this point, with PR able to understand and respond empathically to the interviewer's experience and vice versa. At this moment they are enacting symmetrical roles, as sympathetic peers and confidants.

The interviewer does take back control of the interview at the end of the segment, saying “this isn’t supposed to be a therapy session for me,” and he shifts the topic back to PR’s experiences. He continues to ask the questions, and once he uses “we”—referring to the research team—when asking a question. But in responding to PR’s answers, the interviewer continues to give relatively elaborate glosses of and reactions to what PR says. PR continues to respond extensively, telling colorful stories. At one point he even feels comfortable enough to make fun of the interviewer’s academic terminology.

Interviewer: so, it’s not, I think I hear you saying, so you have your peers, people in your age group, and the people
450 that you know seem to think about fatherhood the same way you do in terms of as something, you should be responsible, be there, even though it sounds like, but their fathers haven’t been as responsible.

PR: right, right, exactly.

455 **Interviewer:** okay. so, let’s say, do you talk about fatherhood with any of the people your age?

PR: well, we don’t call it fatherhood. (hh) we talk about the things we do with our children.

Despite the fact that the interviewer is asking questions and PR is answering them, they continue to joke and laugh, to express understanding of the other and appreciation for the other’s attention.

Shortly after this segment, the interviewer volunteers more information about himself that establishes his similarity to PR. PR has been narrating his life on the street, before he “got a grip” and decided to change.

Interviewer: to me it’s just fascinating this whole idea of the streets and the party life because now, you grew up in
520 Chicago?

PR: mm hmm.

Interviewer: yeah, you grew up in Chicago. I came up in Baltimore. I grew up in Baltimore from the time I was born up through fifth grade. then, my mother sent me away
525 to military school, so it was like out in this suburban area. it was like a college campus. it was very strict. and even though I was taken out of that environment, it was still something about the lure of the streets as a young African American male. even though you were pulled out of it, it’s
530 still there. so, when we would come home during the summer, one of the goals was to show that we hadn’t lost contact (hh)

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- PR: let them know that you still got that street mentality.
Interviewer: mentality and it's just so interesting that in
535 our culture there's something about the streets and the one
thing that ties us together is at some point and those of us
that have sort of come out of it and aren't on drugs and
aren't dead have had to pull away from that [
PR: [environment,
540 exactly.
Interviewer: but, it's just so interesting how that lure is
there, though.
PR: right.
Interviewer: for everyone
545 **PR:** right, it's like a trap.
Interviewer: right, it's like a trap, right. and some people
get caught
PR: and some people
Interviewer: and some of us have experienced it and
550 pulled out in time to change.
PR: right, right. that makes a lot of sense.
Interviewer: so, okay, well, let's move now to...

Here the interviewer gives PR more information about his own life. He started out feeling the lure of the streets as a boy and an adolescent, and he even showed that he could handle himself on the streets, before he became an adult concerned with his domestic and work responsibilities. Thus the interviewer's life story matches PR's, in this move from the street to the domestic.

This explicit analogy again identifies the interviewer as more like a peer and their relationship as more friendly and less hierarchical. In addition to the analogy between the interviewer's story and PR's, he and PR interact collaboratively while telling it. Each of them finishes the other's sentences fluently in this segment. And they both say "exactly" or "right" several times to indicate how the other has accurately stated their point. At this point, then, the relationship seems to be solidly in cell 5. Both the interviewer and PR have struggled to move from posing and playing on the street to being a responsible provider in the domestic realm. They speak as friends, and provide support while discussing their similar experiences.

A Different Kind of Distance. Right after the last segment, however, the relationship between PR and the interviewer changes again. They have moved from a formal interview between a representative of the system and a representative of the street (cell 3), to a somewhat friendlier interview between a representative of the system and a young father struggling with his domestic responsibilities (cell 6), to a friendly, supportive conversation between peers who have both struggled with

moving from the street to the domestic realm (cell 5). At this point the relationship moves back to cell 6, but in a transformed way. Having established his commonality with PR, the interviewer returns to a more distanced position while continuing to elicit rich descriptions of denoted events from PR. He also positions himself as a mentor who can provide advice and encouragement.

At the very end of the last segment, the interviewer says "some of us have experienced it and pulled out in time to change," and PR responds "right, right. That makes a lot of sense." The interviewer's utterance raises a question that might be applied to PR himself: has PR pulled out of the street life in time to change? The interviewer pulled out at a much younger age than PR, and he now has a doctorate, a professional job and a wife. PR, on the other hand, has a criminal record, two children with two different women that he was not married to and does not live with, and a less certain future. PR's response seems to presuppose this difference between them. "That makes a lot of sense" is the sort of thing one often says to someone more experienced or higher status than oneself.

From this point on, the interviewer speaks less like a peer and more like a mentor, and PR responds as a less experienced person grateful for advice. The interviewer starts using "we" to refer to himself as part of the research team more frequently. And he says encouraging things like the following:

Interviewer: well, we're going to transition now to just ask
 665 you, and I've already started to do this, some work
 questions, but, you know, your background is very
 interesting and quite commendable that you've been able to
 able to overcome that period of incarceration and to turn
 your life around and try to move forward. so, you
 670 shouldn't underestimate that, in terms of, because that takes
 a lot, a lot of internal strength. so, I hope that you will
 continue to use that and press forward.

By calling PR's behavior "commendable," the interviewer speaks as someone empowered to make such a judgment. This presupposes a hierarchy between the two of them. But this distance does not result in wariness or reticence on PR's part. Because of the relationship they built earlier, he seems to accept the praise and the advice—as he does at line 551 when he says "that makes a lot of sense."

At the end of the interview, the distance between them does broaden a bit, even to the point where some tension develops between PR and the interviewer. PR claims that the system mistreats fathers in favor of mothers:

Interviewer: do you see the role of the mother different

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- from the role of the father?
- 840 **PR:** I kinda, yeah, think so, for women, for some reason,
it's like more, I don't know if it's the system, man, that's
got people thinking that the mother is, the child is more of
the mother's than the father's, you see what I'm saying?
and I don't know, because like if you ever get into a
845 argument with the child's mother, the child's mother gonna
say well, that's my child. no, that's our child! you know.
it's my child just as much as it is your child and I don't
know where they get that from, but it seems like that they
saying that the mother's saying that she has to do a little bit
850 more than the father does, for the children. I don't know,
man.
Interviewer: do you think that it may have something to do
with the fact that since they carried the child
PR: that may be true, too. nine months, ten months, eleven
855 months. that may be.
Interviewer: labor. I'm not justifying it. I'm just saying
that might be the source.
PR: that could be.

PR's comments about how the system favors mothers over fathers may have been a bid for the interviewer to commiserate with him. But the interviewer does not respond by siding with PR. Instead, he offers what might be an argument on the other side and thus refuses the opportunity to side with PR.

Soon afterward, on the same topic, PR complains about how his attempt to establish paternity was handled in the courts. "It's not normal for the man to go down and try to establish paternity and to try to be the father that he's supposed to be (hh) they didn't even know what to do, they didn't even have the right paperwork for me to fill out 'cause it's all for the woman. it's for the mother against the father" (lines 935-942). PR goes on about this for many lines, laughing and giving colorful anecdotes. But the interviewer does not say anything. Eventually, PR says "what was the question man?" and the interviewer responds with the formal interview protocol: "So, the question was, what kinds of changes or assistance would you need..." By this point, the solidarity that the interviewer and PR built has mostly dissipated. They are just interviewer and subject again (in cell 6), rushing to get through the rest of the protocol.

The relationship between interviewer and subject in this case undergoes several transformations over the course of the interview. At different points in the interview, PR and the interviewer draw on and frame their similarities and differences in various ways—sometimes positioning themselves as representatives of different social realms and

sometimes positioning themselves as peers. In providing guidelines for research interviewing, we need to attend to these sorts of complex, shifting relationships that get negotiated and transformed during interviews. We also need to avoid generalizing too far away from the particular context of a given interview. In the case of PR, it seems that the interviewer sharing his own analogous experiences was a good idea, and it seems that ethnic similarity between interviewer and subject was very important. But the next section describes two other interviews that illustrate how these patterns do not always hold.

Contrasting Cases

Same Strategy, Different Result

The same interviewer did several of the other interviews for this project. One of them illustrates how the same interviewer, in a similar context and using similar strategies, can develop a very different relationship with a subject. In this case, an interview with RB, the relationship between interviewer and subject starts out the same way as it did with PR. The interviewer takes control of the interview early on, and he regularly uses "we," referring to himself and the research team, to introduce his questions. As in PR's case, RB starts out answering questions that make him sound like a man who might be living a street life. So the interview starts out in cell 3, with a representative of the system interviewing a representative of the street. Like PR, RB quickly identifies himself as a concerned father and distances himself from the street—moving the relationship from cell 3 to cell 6.

As he did in the interview with PR, the interviewer tries to show empathy and build a more friendly relationship with RB. RB had a stepfather who married his mother when he was five, and who was a caring and supportive father to RB. When RB was 17, he and his mother discovered that the man was a bigamist. He had another wife, whom he had married before RB's mother, and another family. In the interview RB describes how he and his mother discovered this, and he is clearly upset as he narrates these events. The interviewer empathizes with RB, saying things like "it was really devastating when you found out," and showing an interest in RB's feelings.

While they are discussing RB's stepfather, the interviewer starts to talk something like a therapist. (Natasha is RB's current girlfriend.)

- 940 **Interviewer:** um, well, let's transition now out of this, perhaps, and I hope that at least maybe it does you some good to have someplace to talk about (hh) it.
- RB:** talk about it. it's easier to talk about it because Natasha, she knows my mom. you're hardly ever in a forum

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945 where you're asked the questions to prompt discussion. it's
more like, you say something, then I say something, then
you say something, then I say something. but, it feels good.
you don't know how much, what a weight it feels like is
being lifted just being able to talk about this stuff. because I
950 brew on it all the time, I think about him leaving us like it
was yesterday.

In response to this comment, the interviewer shares his own experience with a father who disappointed him—the same experience that he shared with PR.

RB: I never hated anybody that much. and the sad thing was that I loved him that much, that's why I hated him that much. I don't know. one day I'll forgive him, I know I will. but that may not be any time soon.

971 **Interviewer:** I mean I can understand the fresh vision of that occurring because my father left my home when I was nine years old and I can remember it as if it was yesterday. and it says something about the role of a father in a child's
975 life because I can see it as if it was yesterday. and for me, unlike for you, you're talking almost twenty-nine years ago, but it's crystal clear. I can see myself playing with my mail truck, and seeing my dad coming down the stairs with his suitcase, and I asked him, innocent child, dad, where you
980 going? I thought he was going on a vacation. he said, well, you know son. I have to go away. and I said, well, when you coming back? and he said, well, we'll talk about it. and then when it hit me that he was gone, it was devastating. like for me, fortunately, it happened at a time when, it
985 really changed my whole life, because then my mother ended up sending me to military school and I never really had that father figure. consequently I learned a lot from my peers, ended up making a lot of mistakes. but I was fortunate that by my sophomore year in college, I woke up
990 and decided it was time to buckle down.

RB: see that was the thing I didn't. I wish I could have buckled down then. I just, by that point, I just, I said, forget it. but like you said, crystal clear. I remember the last shirt he had on, the blue jeans with the work look on the
995 side, where he used to hang his hammer and stuff like that. too much. I knew my mom worked second and third shift, take him his lunch out there, and we would all just sit out there and break bread, you know, it was too good to be true

- and it was.
- 1000 **Interviewer:** yeah, and it was like, with my parents, it's like they lived in two different worlds. my mother lived in the west of the city, which was economically a lot better off, than the north. and so I would go to see him, and it was just different, because he liked to drink. he spent a lot of
- 1005 time in the bar, so you know, these kinds of things.
- RB:** and that's how it was the few times, like I said, five times, five conversations I had with my real pops, and he was like, he was so cool, he could barely talk [RB changes his voice to imitate his father. Interviewer laughs]. and it
- 1010 made me uncomfortable. I'm used to, talk to me, I'm not cool. I think, it's good to get it out. like I said, I feel a lot better. I feel I handled it extremely well, too. I gotta pat myself on the back because a lesser person would have crumbled. just like my mom, can you imagine just, you
- 1015 being married to this man for twenty years and then you wake up and you're not and he's gone? [snaps finger]
- Interviewer:** let's transition a bit to

When the interviewer shared this experience with PR, it affirmed their friendly, peer-like relationship. PR empathized with the interviewer, and they finished each other's sentences—developing interactional synchrony and camaraderie. Because they had endured similar pain in their childhoods, they could now talk to each other as black men working to contribute as husbands and fathers.

RB, however, responds differently to the interviewer's story. By telling the story about his father leaving, the interviewer steps out of his role as a scientist gathering data, and he steps out of the role of therapist that he seems to have adopted earlier in the conversation with RB. He could be more of a peer with RB, talking like an empathic friend. But RB does not ratify this (potential) friendly, peer-like relationship. Unlike PR, RB does not empathize with the interviewer. Furthermore, instead of picking up on the similarities between his experience and the interviewer's, he immediately picks up on the differences. His first response—"I wish that I could have buckled down then" (lines 991-992)—notes that, unlike the interviewer, he did not turn toward school and prosocial behavior after his stepfather left.

After saying this, however, RB does note that, like the interviewer, he does remember "crystal clear" (line 992) the day his stepfather left. This was the parallel cited by the interviewer when beginning his story (at line 977). The interviewer takes RB's comment as an invitation to talk more about his own experience, and he goes on to describe his parents' neighborhoods and his father's drinking. RB, however, cuts him off and begins talking about himself again. He changes the topic to his biological father,

and he does not acknowledge the interviewer's description of his own experience. Then RB gives some meta-commentary on the interaction he and the interviewer have been having: "it's good to get it out" (line 1011), and "I feel a lot better" (lines 1011-1012). This positions himself as like a client, given the opportunity to talk about his feelings, and the interviewer as a therapist. If their relationship in the interview is like therapy, then the interviewer should not be sharing his own experiences as he did—he should be listening to RB's problems. RB, then, apparently wants their relationship to stay in cell 6, with the interviewer a professional helping RB work through his struggles in moving from the street to the domestic realm.

Despite the fact that the same interviewer is talking to another young urban father from Indianapolis, who is in many ways similar to PR, and despite the fact that he tells the same story about his own father as he did to PR, the interactional outcome is very different. Because RB responds differently to the interviewer's story, the interviewer's telling of the story becomes a different type of interactional move: from RB's perspective, it was a (perhaps) inappropriate interlude in what was supposed to be the interviewer's listening to RB's problems; and from the interviewer's perspective it was an abortive attempt at establishing a more friendly, peer-like rapport. RB, then, rejects the interviewer's attempt to highlight their similarities and focuses instead on their differences. He prefers a (hierarchical) therapy session to a sympathetic discussion between peers. Only by attending to the details of each interaction can we see the actual, diverse effects that attempts to establish interviewer/interviewee similarity and rapport can have.

A Different Strategy

This section briefly describes another interview from our corpus, done by a different interviewer. This interviewer uses a different strategy for conducting the interview, maintaining distance between himself and the subject throughout. But he also introduces his own experience at one point during the interview. Apparently because the interviewer has maintained greater distance in the relationship up to this point, his sharing of experience does not elicit the same results as in PR's case. The subject responds more like RB, and the relationship remains distanced.

This interviewee, SM, lived with both his parents for the first decade of his life. His father was "hard working," "intelligent" and "very strict." When SM was 10, his father died. From that point on he was raised by his mother. He himself fathered a child in his late teens. He does not live with his child's mother, but they are still romantically involved. He sees his daughter several times a week. He is currently unemployed and does odd jobs like cutting grass.

As in the other interviews, this interviewer begins by taking control of the interview--presupposing his right to ask personal questions by saying

things like "I want to begin by asking you..." (line 1). The interviewer also sometimes presupposes that SM has a "street" identity. When he learns that SM does not live with his daughter, for instance, the interviewer asks "is your visitation ordered by the courts?" (line 20). This presupposes that SM is involved with and to some extent controlled by the legal system. A bit later on in the interview, after SM describes how he dresses, bathes and feeds his daughter on his own, the interviewer reacts with apparent surprise at such domestic activities, saying "oh, OK" (line 56).

Just as PR did at the beginning of his interview, SM reacts to the interviewer's assertion of authority, his professional distance and his apparent belief that SM is a representative of the street by giving short, wary answers. More than many of the other subjects, SM seems to be saying what he thinks the interviewer wants to hear. At least twice he contradicts himself, going back on something he said—apparently because he has decided the interviewer was looking for a different answer. SM also hesitates and hedges on many of his answers, apparently looking for more information on what the interviewer wants to hear. Thus the relationship seems to waver between a cell 3 and a cell 6 relationship. The interviewer sometimes presupposes that SM is a representative of the street, although he also accepts many of SM's claims about being a good parent. SM presents himself as a concerned parent, but his evasive and pat answers may also sound like someone trying to project an identity he does not really act out in his life.

Unlike the interviewer in PR and RB's cases, this interviewer maintains a hierarchical distance between himself and the subject throughout the interview. At one point early in the interview, SM claims that his daughter is exceptional:

130 **SM:** it's just amazing to me how alert she is, because her being that age. I've heard a lot of older people say that babies aren't like that, when they had kids, and they were amazed at how alert she was. that's basically the biggest thing. it just amazes me every time, blows my mind to see her saying Dadda, and to be moving around so much and that's basically-

Interviewer: I think that we know more about children and how they develop now than we probably did-

135 **SM:** I think that's [1 unintelligible syllable]

Interviewer: you know, even ten years ago, that we just know more, and that now we ex-, and now that we recognize it - we used to think that when children were very, very young, that they didn't recognize and they didn't
140 know things, but I think we know now that they do, you know.

The interviewer here punctures SM's claim that his daughter is exceptional. All those people who think she is are relying on outdated information about child development, and the interviewer is expert enough to know the truth of the matter. By making his point this way, the interviewer both sets himself up as an expert and he makes SM seem prone to unreasonable fantasies about his daughter. This clearly maintains hierarchical distance between them.

The interviewer also maintains his status as an expert who knows more than SM by glossing SM's statements with more formal or educated terms. He does this several times, as in the following excerpts:

160 **SM:** and then she's around my girlfriend's family and they're pretty much all grown.. she doesn't have any siblings, small, brothers and sisters, so she's hearing all the conversation and seeing all the different movement and stuff adults have and it's taking effect on her. she's pickin' up.

Interviewer: so she's been stimulated more?

SM: yeah, she's been stimulated.

Interviewer: did you have any concerns about, when you talked about this great responsibility, did you have any concerns about being able to uphold those responsibilities?

200 **SM:** not really. I was just mainly just a little flighty, nervous, type =

Interviewer: anxious about it.

SM: = anxious. but it wasn't anything like that.

By providing higher register words for what SM is saying, the interviewer presupposes that he is more educated and can help SM express his thoughts. At one point the interviewer also praises SM for using a more educated way of talking about his daughter during the focus group discussion:

270 **Interviewer:** I heard you talk about your daughter's motor skills- that's- you might have picked that up from Dr. Baker. (hh) very good, very good.

SM: yeah.

Again, the interviewer presupposes that educated people like himself have better ways of articulating what is going on in SM's life, and that SM's goal should be to talk more like the interviewer. Comments like this maintain the hierarchy between interviewer and subject for most of the interview.

Against this background, at the end of the interview SM asks the interviewer for his own opinions on fatherhood. The interviewer responds by sharing some things about his own experience.

Interviewer: okay. anything else?

SM: I can't think of anything else.

645 **Interviewer:** do you have any questions you want to ask me?

SM: just what do you think about fatherhood?

Interviewer: what do I think about fatherhood?

SM: yeah, in general?

650 **Interviewer:** well, what I would say would just be kinda based on my observations, given that I'm not a biological father. I don't have any biological children.

SM: right.

655 **Interviewer:** I have a niece and a nephew that I'm very close to and sometimes over the years I've felt like I was being like a dad to them, but not on an ongoing basis, clearly. their father is very much involved in their lives, along with their mother. I have a couple of godsons. one that's 16, and one that's about 3 now, so, I've been somewhat involved. but most of my knowledge about it
660 probably comes from my work that I do in terms of trying to understand young fathers. um, it's very hard to put into words. I very much admire young fathers like yourself and some of the other fathers I've interviewed over the
665 weekend, and the fathers that I've interviewed in Atlanta, where I live, and do this kind of work because a lot of what you're telling me is kinda helping me to get a sense of what it's like to be particularly a young father who has a child basically at a point before he's really prepared, as you say, successfully, or comfortable to be able to do everything he
670 might want to do. and so, but knowing that that child still requires the same thing that a father who is pretty prepared for the child is a very interesting thing to see. and to hear young fathers like yourself talk about some of the kinds of things that you set as expectations for yourself given that
675 you may not have all of the things needed to be able to do that is very interesting, in some instances, it's very inspiring. it sounds like a lot of young fathers go through a great deal to be able to try to support their kids.

680 **SM:** hardships. (1.0) I have to say that me not being comfortable with my position in life and being as successful as I want to be at that stage when she was born, that was probably one of the greatest factors that put fear

685 into me. taking on that responsibility, her coming into the world, me not being where I want to be, so I wasn't well-prepared. no, that's good. and I didn't have that experience of dealing with a young child on, like you were saying yourself, you have a couple of godsons and nephews and nieces that you're real close to and see.

Here the interviewer talks about himself briefly. And he admits that he has no first hand experience of fatherhood. This admission could potentially turn the interactional tables, given that SM does have first hand experience as a father, and given that the interviewer has set himself up as an expert throughout the interview. SM could have criticized or teased the interviewer for his pretensions, or they could have joked about this reversal.

But these interactional possibilities do not in fact happen. The interviewer reinforces his position as an expert, by mentioning that, despite his lack of first hand experience, he has learned a lot about fathering from his research on urban fathers. He does mention that he admires the efforts of young fathers like SM. But then the interviewer mentions that young fathers like SM are in some ways not prepared, and that "you may not have all of the things needed to be able to" (line 675) meet the child's needs. This reestablishes SM's position as someone who has not followed the normative path to fatherhood, but who has behaved like a stereotypical inner city adolescent male, having children he is not emotionally or financially prepared to support.

SM acknowledges that he does occupy such a position, when he says that "I wasn't well prepared." He ratifies the hierarchical distance that the interviewer has placed between himself and SM, by acknowledging that he himself was unprepared (and thus perhaps irresponsible) and that the interviewer is in a better position to take on fathering responsibilities. SM could have picked up on the interviewer's praise for young urban fathers like him, by mentioning how he has worked hard to overcome the difficulties of becoming a young father. But instead he ratifies the distance that the interviewer has placed between them, enacting the role of someone who has made mistakes and aspires to be more like the interviewer.

Conclusions

In each of the three interviews analyzed here, the interviewer shared some of his own experiences with the respective interviewee. But this sharing had very different consequences for the relationship between interviewer and interviewee in the three cases. And, despite the fact that all interviewers and subjects in this study were matched for gender and ethnicity, and different in socioeconomic status, participants drew on

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these matched similarities and differences to create very different types of relationships.

"Similarity" between interviewer and interviewee, then, does not exist prior to the interactional events that they participate in together. Like everyone else, interviewers and interviewees draw on some of the many aspects of identity available to them, and they negotiate with other participants over the particular relationship that they will have. It can certainly help to have several potentially relevant similarities between interviewer and interviewee. But the actual shape of an interactional event between interviewer and interviewee, and the denoted content that is constrained by that interactional event, can vary widely in particular contexts.

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Appendix Transcription Conventions

- '-' abrupt breaks or stops (if several, stammering)
- '?' rising intonation
- '.' falling intonation
- '_' (underline) stress
- (1.0) silences, timed to the nearest second
- '[' indicates simultaneous talk by two speakers, with one utterance represented on top of the other and the moment of overlap marked by left brackets
- '=' interruption or next utterance following immediately, or continuous talk represented on separate lines because of need to represent overlapping comment on intervening line
- '[...]' transcriber comment

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- 'ː' elongated vowel
- '°...°' segment quieter than surrounding talk
- 'ˊ' pause or breath without marked intonation
- '(hh)' laughter breaking into words while speaking

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