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by

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> It is important for the would-be (and wanna-be) fieldworker to recognize as legitimate the personal matters that lead one into a project. (Van Maanen, 1991, p. 33)

The idea for this study has been gestating inside me for years. I can remember watching the 1985 NCAA Division I men's basketball playoffs on television with my old friend, Mike Lhamon, back in my hometown of St. Marys, Ohio. The first-round game between the University of Dayton and the University of Washington was being televised late at night in our area. It was a game of interest because my close friend, high school teammate, and star Dayton forward, Damon Goodwin, was playing in the game. I had just finished my junior season on the basketball team at Heidelberg College in Tiffin, Ohio, and was still hot with basketball fever.

As Mike and I talked and watched the game, I began talking and thinking about what it might be like to "be there." I had this inner, burning feeling that was making me curious about what the players were feeling, how they had prepared for the game, what they were learning. What, ultimately, did it mean to them? What would they "take away" from their experiences of the event and the processes leading up to it, win or lose?

At first I dreamed that I would approach the field by doing a study of the great coaches in men's intercollegiate basketball. I would spend seasons with Dean Smith, Bob Knight, John Thompson, and their teams and find out what they knew, how they taught, and what the players "took away" from their experience.

As I ventured through a graduate education at Princeton Theological Seminary and a three year stint as teacher, chaplain, and coach at Culver Academies in Indiana, I realized that the idea of the coaching case study was unrealistic. It would be nearly impossible to gain access to the coaches and to the programs even if I had the courage to ask. One time when I was in Princeton as a seminary student, when the very "idea" of the study was burning in my head and heart, I called Princeton basketball coach Pete Carrill's office and hung up when asked, "May I ask who's calling and for what reason?"

I thought, who am I anyway? I had no connections, no "ins" with anybody in the field. I had nothing on paper; I was not enrolled in any program that would give credibility to me or to such a study. I hadn't read widely in the field. I also began to realize and to admit that much of the impetus for doing a coaching case study was grounded in my own desire to get close to some big-time program and advance my own career in coaching.

After beginning my doctoral education, I still found myself enamored with questions about the educational context of athletics as a possible place for doing research in curriculum. I read books on sport and pursued projects for classes that used athletics as a context for curriculum inquiry. I wrote a paper for an independent readings class in curriculum based upon my experiences traveling as a coach with my summer AAU basketball team. The focus of the paper was on the "coach as curriculum-maker."

But I was still approaching the field from the coach's perspective. The topic was introspective and interesting to me, but my growing fascination remained with the platters and their reactions to their summer experiences. What had they learned? What things stuck with them? My perceptions of curriculum were changing: Might the "curriculum" be what the players had experienced and not necessarily, or primarily, what I had planned?

Good friend Bob Burke (1993), a doctoral student working on his dissertation entitled "Perceptions of the Twelve Step Program as Curriculum," shared his research in something that he said John Goodlad (1979) was calling "the experiential domain" of curriculum inquiry. Bob was busy examining the meanings that the participants in the curriculum of a Twelve Step Program in his case study were making out of their experience in the program.

I began to read Goodlad (1979) and others who were doing conceptual work in the field of the experienced curriculum and student perspectives; the theoretical base, the scholarly angle with which I could approach the field, was set. I would look at the meanings that students made out of their experiences with the various manifestations of the curriculum, and I thought I would look at the "experiential domain" of the curriculum in an educational athletic context. But where and how would I do such a curriculum study?

I first attempted to gain access to an athletic context for my study late in the summer of 1992. I hoped it would be the site of the data collection for my dissertation. I was negotiating access to the basketball team of a former coaching colleague and current friend when he finally balked at the notion of my interviewing his players during the season and at the possibility of my writing something "negative" about his program. He worried about upsetting the team's "chemistry" and he wanted the right to reject anything from the final document that he thought might be interpreted "negatively."

Feeling as though I had to be "responsible to [myself]" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 172), I determined that I couldn't give up either a crucial data collection technique (interviewing) or control of the study (the content of the final document). The reality I expected to face, but hoped wouldn't surface in this sport context and in others, reared its ugly head; coaches, in general, closely guard their turf and the chemistry of their teams. They are often not prone to allowing "outsiders," even friends, the access necessary to conduct a field study, especially if the study involves in-depth discussions with the players.

So, although disappointed and cautious, even stewing for several weeks about what to do given that I had spent so much time in doctoral coursework reading and preparing for this type of study, I set out to gain access to another sports team. I turned to two old friends who happened to be coaching a women's volleyball team at a major university, Sandborn State, in hopes of saving the idea for the study.

It so happened that the main project for a qualitative research methods class I was taking in the fall of 1992 was to conduct a field study in an educative context in order to experience the "doing" of fieldwork. Hoping that the dividend of doing a good job would be the continued and expanded access to the site in order to collect data for my dissertation, I set out to negotiate access to the Sandborn State women's volleyball team for the field study.

I knew I had a good shot at gaining access to the site because I had made friends with the two assistant coaches–Julie, the assistant coach, and Val, the graduate assistant coach–at a coaching clinic we all attended on the east coast in the spring of 1992. Julie and Val had mentioned

then the possibility of my visiting Sandborn and observing practice in the fall of 1992 in order to give them feedback on their coaching. They never actually called to set this up, but I felt I had one foot in the door already.

The other foot wouldn't prove so easy to get through the door, however. In fact, the process of gaining access, at times, played itself into no less than a harrowing saga. How true is Shaffir and Stebbin's (1991) observation that in qualitative fieldwork, "far from being a straightforward procedure, it [getting in] involves negotiation and renegotiation ..." (p. 25).

I decided early on that the most probable strategy for gaining access to the site was to use the powers of my main informant, Julie; I believed that she had the best chance of effectively negotiating my entry to the field with the gatekeeper, Bill (the team's head coach) whom I had never met. My intuition proved right. Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) words ring true for the fledgling fieldworker operating within a complex organizational structure such as college sports: "It helps to have an 'informant,' an insider who knows the individuals and the politics involved, to advise you in making access decisions" (p. 34).

Van Maanen (1991) also notes the important roles of the informant: "They run interference for the fieldworker, provide testimony as to the fieldworker's aims and character, and in general, offer member interpretations for the passing scene" (p. 35). Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) and Van Maanen's (1991) insights proved to be on target for my relationship with Julie and for her role in every regard throughout the study; Julie was the key to my gaining access, a most valued informant and guide who traversed many obstacles on my behalf.

I first contacted Julie by telephone early in the season (Tuesday, September 8, 1992) during a week that was extremely busy: the players had just come off an exhausting weekend road trip to Southeastern University; they were playing a tough Varden University squad that night; high school recruits were coming to visit on Wednesday and Thursday; and the team was leaving again Thursday night for a road trip to Bagley State. I found out in my first conversation with Julie that *time* was a precious commodity for everyone involved in the volleyball program; from that *time* on, I continually encountered *time* as one of the primary obstacles in my attempts to gain access, to develop and maintain relationships, and to collect data.

Julie enthusiastically supported my idea for the study. It was a typical reaction for her–a positive, energetic, life-loving teacher, friend, and person. Julie's first, unsolicited suggestion was that she personally, privately asked Bill's permission for my access to the team. She felt as though she could get Bill to say "yes" to having me around, even if she had to lay the groundwork carefully over the course of several days. Julie's plan was to bring the topic up with Bill in their daily coaches' meeting on Wednesday and then reiterate her support for my study on the weekend road trip to Bagley State.

Also, Julie herself insightfully echoed the sentiments of Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) who, when citing Wax, note that "the group wishes to know not only what the researcher is up to but also what they stand to gain by cooperating" (p. 26). In this case, Julie felt that the individual gatekeeper, head coach Bill, also needed to be persuaded of the project's worth in order for me to gain access.

Julie thought that she could convince Bill of the relative lack of harm in having me around, but that I should determine what it was that I could do for Bill and the team by conducting the study and be ready to speak to it when he asked. Bill, Julie said, was typically not open to having outsiders

close to the team during the season unless they offered him and the team some tangible benefit through their presence.

I found later, however, after extensive talks with Julie, that Bill's probable motive for finally granting me access matched Eisner's (1991) description of a motive some practitioners adopt for granting access to researchers: "an association with a university is a sign of being forward-looking" (p. 171). Two closely related factors made having someone around doing scholarly research on the educational nature of the team's and the coaches' endeavors a positive situation, effectively raising the program's status. The first factor was the team's poor performance (the team finished at 5 wins - 25 losses, and was at 0-3 and 3-0 at varying stages of my pursuit of site access). The second factor was the potential that Bill's job might be on the line as a result of low performance in terms of wins and losses.

Julie said she would call me on Wednesday afternoon, September 9, to inform me about how Bill reacted to her initial request on my behalf at the meeting. I waited. And I waited. She didn't call. And I stewed about whether or not I should bother her with a call about *me* on an important practice day following a big loss to Varden. Julie's schedule that day was tight on *time*. Coaches' meeting, noon. Practice, 3:00 p.m. Weight lifting, immediately after practice, 5:30 p.m. Julie would leave for dinner with the visiting recruits promptly after lifting weights and stay out all evening with them.

It was 2:35 p.m. Should I call? If I didn't reach Julie today, I wouldn't speak with her until Monday. Five whole days! If Bill's answer was "no," I would have to find some other study to do and I would have lost five more days. But I *wanted* (*needed*?) to do *this* study. *Time* was running out! I searched my home office frantically for Julie's card and phone number. I couldn't find it. 2:30 p.m. I called the Sandborn State switchboard. The operator gave me a number that looked familiar, but not quite right. 2:43 p.m. Surely Julie would call me! Should I call? By now the coaches would be getting ready to move from their offices toward the practice floor. I would be catching Julie just as she was leaving, if I caught her at all.

What harm could my call do? I would appear over-anxious, unsure of myself, unsure of Julie. But I was! Would I get shut out of this study too? I dialed ... one ring ... two, three, four ... "Pick up!" I got my wish: "Click ... Hello, you have reached the office of Bill Sampson, head Sandborn State women's volleyball coach. Please leave your name, number, and a brief message, and I'll call you back. Beeeeep."

> *I faced a moment of truth because of a technological wonder in today's world–the message machine. Should I leave a message for Bill, introducing myself and inquiring for access on my own behalf? No. I hung up the phone right after the beep. I decided to stay with my original plan to let Julie speak for me first. I didn't want to hurt her feelings by going over her head. I also didn't have the confidence or the courage to put 4-5 eloquent sentences together for Bill on the spot like that. I didn't want to blow access that way, either, by sounding like a dork. (Journal, 30)*

At the sound of the beep I decided that I would have to trust Julie, her trust in me, our friendship, our plan, and the merits of my fieldwork data. Van Maanen (1991) notes that trust "is built slowly and comes forth only in particular situations with particular people as the field-worker displays a practical understanding, a partisan stance, and a visible conformance to the forms of conduct followed by those studied" (p. 35), and that ultimately, "trust underlies all social interaction" (p. 35).

It isn't hard to imagine trust developing over time since most of us have models of trusting relationships at work in our personal, private lives outside research. It is harder to pay close attention to the "particulars" of developing trust when doing fieldwork. But developing trust in fieldwork requires hard work on the "particulars." To be trusted means to trust with such fervor that the energy and tension in the inherent dialectic of trusting never escapes the thought processes and actions of the fieldworker in particular situations from the first contacts in the field to the publication of the text.

Julie still hadn't called me back by the time I called her late on Monday afternoon, September 14, to find out how the weekend games went. I knew from newspaper reports that the team had won only one of three matches at Bagley State, putting the team's record at a dismal 1-5. I was more interested in how the coaches and players were feeling, and in how Julie was doing. I was determined not to bring up the study myself.

Julie, instead, brought it up, and although she was pressed for *time*, she related some pretty bad news: Bill hadn't said anything in the coaches' meeting the week before, either a "yes" or a "no" to my doing the study. Bill simply heard Julie out and moved on to the next topic. She had brought up the topic several times with Bill while the team was at Bagley State, during moments when Bill's mood seemed to be positive enough to deal with something outside the current state of the team, all the while building me up with examples of my character, intelligence, and wit. But still no "yes" for me from Bill.

Julie promised that she would bring up the topic again in the coaches' meeting scheduled for the next day, Tuesday, September 15. I got a message on my answering machine Tuesday night from Julie that Bill had agreed to the study; however, he wanted to meet me and he wanted to read a copy of the prospectus before I could come to practice. "Terrific!" I was in! At least, I thought so.

I attended the match against Pine Valley on Wednesday night, September 16. Julie left a ticket for me at "Will Call" and I felt so official, so important walking around Sandborn Hall as "researcher." The women, though, were mauled by Pine Valley, a Top 20 team, in three quick games. I stayed after the match hoping to console Julie, to wish her luck and safety on the road trip to Carroll University, as well as to set up some *times* to interview her, to meet Bill (I hadn't met Bill that week because he had house guests, therefore *time* was tight for him and I was counseled by Julie to "let it slide"), and to introduce myself to the team. I hoped we could do it all the next week.

Julie reasoned, however, that we faced a huge obstacle, *time*, since (a) I had classes on Monday and Tuesday afternoons during the team's regular practice *time*, (b) Bill had another recruiting trip on Wednesday and Thursday, and (c) the team would be leaving for Sellersburg State on Thursday night. Julie didn't think it was a good idea for me to meet the team for the first *time* when Bill was away given Bill's stated wishes for meeting me first. Next week simply looked like a bad *time* for meeting Bill and the team. However, I could meet with Julie on Tuesday, September 22. She thought she might have about an hour's *time* to see me then. Whew! Thank goodness that was settled. But it wasn't.

After the long drive to Sandborn, Julie and I finally sat down in her office in Sandborn Hall that next Tuesday, September 22 (it had been 14 days since my first inquiry and 6 days since I had been given access by Bill). Her news shocked me; she told me that when she mentioned our meeting to Bill that morning, he expressed no recollection of who I was or that he had ever granted permission for me to do what I wanted to do. I panicked. "What!?!" I half-laughed and half-cried out. "How could somebody forget something like that?"

Though somewhat mystified, the degree and intensity of Bill's attention to the immediate situation of his team finally began to sink in. Outside events sometimes never made their way into his proverbial long-term memory storage. My "being around" really wasn't going to offer any immediate rewards or stop the show; therefore, its forgetability. I realized at that moment that the stakes for Bill were much greater than any I had ever encountered as a coach or as a player. Julie didn't think Bill was playing some cruel trick on us. Bill was just so absorbed in what he was doing that he forgot. But I was too far into this, although I hadn't really gotten anywhere, to have the plug pulled or to be scared off.

Julie continued the bizarre tale. When Bill claimed ignorance, she desperately reiterated to Bill all that she had told him beforehand about me and my study. She knew how much I wanted to do this and how much time I had already invested (wasted?) in planning and reading and she was going to fight for me and the project. What finally reconvinced Bill was Julie's desperate explanation that Sandborn's football coach, Ed Sizerly, had previously granted me an open invitation to attend his practice sessions because of my friendship with the family of one of his close friends. I had attended several football practices last year, and Coach Sizerly knew who I was. Bill responded: "Oh, well, if he can go to Coach Sizerly's practices, then he can come to mine." Case closed. Just like that, I was "in" again. Odd.

> As fieldworkers sometimes have painfully discovered, completing a successful bargain with the gatekeepers is no guarantee of full cooperation from the group or even the gatekeepers themselves ... the bargain is conceptualized ... as a continuing process of negotiation in which promises between the various parties may shift and even change over time ... (Geer, quoted in Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991, pp. 28-29)

I wonder if Geer had the kind of odd scenario I experienced in gaining access in mind when she penned this observation. Before I had been out to observe a practice session, access to the site had been negotiated with the same gatekeeper, conclusively, twice. And this wouldn't be the end of it, either. Julie and I determined that she had done all that she could for me in terms of negotiating my access. It was time for me to get involved before Bill forgot again.

Since Bill was going to be out of town recruiting again for the rest of the week, I decided to send him a copy of my pilot study prospectus along with a short introductory letter inviting him to call me at his convenience early the next week after the team's trip to Sellersburg State. I couldn't go on much longer as if I were walking on eggshells around Bill. It was *time* to see if this project was going to fly or crash. The letter did its intended trick–*Bill* finally called *me* on Monday morning, September 28, and we negotiated the terms of my access to the field.

The period between September 8, when I first made contact with Julie, and September 30, when I finally met Bill and the team, was nothing short of nerve-wracking. My sentiments echo the feelings of Gans as quoted by Shaffir and Stebbins (1991): "Until I feel I have been accepted, the research process is nerve-wracking; I lack the personal security to banish rejection or anxieties" (p. 30). My "nerve-wracking" stage covered a lengthy period, lasting from the initial-like process of gaining access through the very end of my stay.

These initial stages of negotiating access were particularly hard because I fretted about losing another potentially rich context for doing this type of study, about starting over on a project for the methods class (*time* was slipping away), and about maintaining the moral support of my wife–absolutely crucial throughout life but especially during graduate school.

My wife, Chris, and I were beginning to wonder whether or not any coach, anywhere, would grant access for the type of study I wanted to do. She reasoned that if close friends in the field wouldn't grant or couldn't secure site access in a quality context, then I might be better suited looking for another topic, another type of research context. She even yelled at one low point, when Julie was having trouble getting a "yes" answer out of Bill on the access question: "They (coaches) are all like you when you were a coach, Tom–eccentric, crazy, protective, secretive–except they're not obsessed with the education thing! Maybe you should just give it up."

Now, my wife is not cold or uncaring. But she can tell when I'm feeling anxious and can get stressed out herself. She has an enormous amount of common sense as well as a good handle on what's realistic. In these respects, she complements me quite well. I thought she might be right for a day or two, even though her statement made me angry and caused a rift between us. So I laid low, not pursuing any new angles while I trusted Julie to get the job done. Patience and a carefully written and well-*timed* note to Bill paid dividends in the end, which in this case actually proved to be the beginning.

I fully expected my first phone conversation with Bill to be a tense one. However, when Bill called, I was pleasantly surprised that his voice was smooth and calm in tone, that his questions and statements were carefully measured, and that his overall demeanor was kindly, even friendly. He spoke as though he'd always known me. I surmised that it was the recruiter in him that gave him such an edge.

I gave Bill some personal background about myself and some specific insights about the project, what I intended to do, and what I expected to happen. In turn, he graciously gave me full access to the practice sessions as observer and agreed that the players could interview with me in the evenings. He was careful to ensure, however, that I would not be overly demanding of the players' free *time*, which was in short supply as it was. He cleared me to address the team in order to seek permission from them for the study.

> The research intentions will obviously vary with the particular audience–but the testimonies of field researchers suggest that the best accounts are brief, straightforward, and devoid of academic jargon (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991, p. 26).

Knowing that *time* would be limited for addressing the team before practice on Wednesday, September 30, I planned to cover only the very basic points concerning the nature of my study, what I would be doing in the field, how the players might best participate, and the rights they had as subjects. I remember worrying about whether or not the players would all agree to participate in the study. What would the ramifications be if some decided not to participate? But I had been blessed with "a strong recommendation" by Julie, and I hoped that a strong introduction would "strengthen [this] fieldworker's capacity to work in [this] community and thus improve the quality of the data" (Fetterman, 1991, p. 94).

I realized early that I might have to deal with the two problems Van Maanen (1991) says often hinder the early stages of fieldwork in organizational settings: (a) that the researcher is identified with the third party (in this case the coaches) through which he or she forces him or herself on the group, or (b) that the researcher may not have much to offer in terms of obvious value to those who are studied (p. 34). Fortunately, the team was willing to participate without reservation even though my work didn't seem to have any immediate value to them. As I discovered, the players sometimes identified me with the coaches; but the potential problem of this association did not seem to be a negative factor in my study except in one instance, which I will relate later.

I recall feeling nervous at home before that first practice, my nervousness manifesting itself in my indecision about what to wear to the event. I changed clothes at least three times. I initially fell into the trap which snagged Griffin (1991) when she "spent hours agonizing over the appropriate shoes, clothes, and hairstyle to adopt before visiting each school for the first time" (p. 112). Did I want to appear casual or formal? Cool or square? Well, considering that it's hard for me to look cool at any *time*, and that such considerations were taking up too much *time* and energy and ultimately constituted so much silliness, I decided to refocus my energy and *time* on my demeanor and qualities as a human being.

I took to heart the advice of Fetterman (1991) that "a non-threatening and unobtrusive demeanor will enable a field worker to probe the thought and capture the behavior of a people with greater accuracy and depth" (p. 89) as well as Shaffir's (1991) observation that "the skills in using commonplace sociability (friendliness, humor, sharing) are a prerequisite in conducting field research" (p. 80). I believe that successes in "entering the field and cultivating rich relationships are attributable mainly to the researcher's personal attributes and self-penetration and to others' judgments of him or her as a human being" (Shaffir & Stebbins, 1991, p. 29).

In retrospect, I would rank my skills in the "human dimension" as my main assets as a researcher in this context. I was able to come off as interesting, humorous, and non-threatening in my well-received, though rushed, initial presentation to the team and throughout most of the study. I was able to refer to several of the players by name in that initial meeting, connecting with them in a personal manner without seeming to force familiarity. I kept things simple and to the point. I believe that the success of this initial meeting was a crucial factor in quickly establishing rapport with the players.

I do recall feeling rushed, however, even in the short period of *time* (only about five minutes) during the presentation. While I was talking, the players anxiously completed their final stages of dressing (putting on knee pads, lacing shoes) in order to be ready for the start of practice. Bill entered the gym while I was talking and Julie immediately came over, interrupted me, and said, "Bill likes to start practice on *time*." And after I said, "That's it, thanks ... Are there any questions?," Barb, the team captain, clapped her hands and jumped up saying, "That's it ... let's go!"

Though all were cordial and attentive, there was literally no *time* to waste. If I hadn't gotten the hint by now that there was some serious business going on inside this context and that *time* was a crucial factor, a precious commodity not to be wasted, I surely had to have gotten it in that brief introduction into the experience of this particular team.

After overcoming my initial nervousness, I felt comfortable for most of the first practice session. I do, however, remember feeling a little awkward at one point; I was sitting next to the water bottles on the first row of the temporary bleachers in the auxiliary gym when the team took its first water break about 45 minutes into the practice session.

> *The women ran right over and started drinking. I was uncomfortable, but they weren't. They were so close. I didn't know if I should say anything to them such as "nice work" or "good hustle" or stare straight ahead, or what. I basically just smiled and tried to look harmless and interested. I did not engage any of the players in conversation today. There was never time, except when they were together in this large group drinking water, and I didn't feel comfortable engaging them under these circumstances. (Journal, 48)*

I soon got over my initial reservations about engaging individuals and groups of players. Shaffir (1991) notes that "the researcher does not simply appropriate a particular status, but discovers that he or she is accorded a status by the hosts that reflects their understanding of his or her presence" (p. 79). The players, indeed, accorded me status by responding to and initiating verbal greetings. They quickly let me glimpse the inner world of their rich language when I inquired informally about several of the nicknames I heard them using for each other, some that didn't seem very complimentary such as "George" and "Burly," and they told me their stories. The players made it easy to develop and maintain relationships.

I recalled Shaffir and Stebbin's (1991) words when I began to struggle with my search for a research identity, for a voice in this mostly female context as a male researcher: "Although social and identity categories affect access, they must not be over-emphasized, for one need not be identical to those one studies" (p. 27). And I tried to pay close attention to the potential impact that gender might play on my practices and procedures for conducting and thinking about research in this context.

I was aware that my subjects were all female, and the gender difference between players and head coach sometimes had specific effects on behaviors, feelings, and attitudes of both the players and the coaches. Gurney (1991) warns that "a field researcher who becomes interested in a setting in which participants are predominantly members of the opposite sex may experience some awkward moments as he or she attempts to gain the respect, trust, and cooperation of those participants" (p. 54). Although she is speaking from a female point-of-view, the same is true for a male in a mostly female context.

We struggled with the problem of gender difference the first week in the field when Val, my friend and the team's graduate assistant coach, and I were negotiating my first interviews with the players. She agreed to let the players meet with me for 15 minute *time* periods during their Monday or Wednesday night study halls. (An initial worry unrelated to gender, but nonetheless related to my role as researcher, was taking even this little bit of *time* from the players' schedules; but Val assured me that most were doing fine in their school work and they needed a break like this during the evening.) We both thought this was a more appropriate arrangement than my setting up private meetings outside the athletic context.

One situation that focused our concerns about gender occurred when Val began giving me directions about how to get into Sandborn Hall for my first set of interviews with the players. I was immediately taken aback as I listened to her explain the standard method for gaining access to the building after they had all arrived, since I had a class that would run late that night on top of the long drive to Sandborn, and since Val couldn't leave the door unlocked. She suggested that I simply climb up on the first ledge on the outside of Sandborn Hall, scale my way around on the window ledge to the room they were using for study hall, and throw stones at the window until they heard me and let me in.

"No way," I said, "That's worse than meeting the girls somewhere off-campus for private interviews. Can't you see it in the university newspaper headlines, 'SUPPOSED RESEARCHER CAUGHT BREAKING INTO WOMEN'S STUDY HALL–VANDALIZING SANDBORN HALL'? I'll be there on time." We laughed heartily about it, but I left my class in plenty of time, jumped in my car, and sped off with minimum regard to speed limits in order to make it to Sandborn before I would have to throw rocks at the windows to gain access.

Gender posed ethical problems like these for data collection and literally affected my ability to collect data at all. I did not have access to the locker room where much interchange takes place in the life of a sports team. I didn't have access to the informal and rich context of my informants' living quarters like I might with a male group. These factors did not prove to be insurmountable obstacles, but they existed, and forced me to work around them, actually reducing the size of the field and the *time* available for gathering data. Because of gender, my work was necessarily confined to specific places and *times* during the day.

One brief, but poignant encounter with the players subtly brought the potentially explosive issue of gender to the surface. The coaches were rushing around the offices before a practice early in October. I was waiting patiently in the office while Julie ran an errand; we were going to talk briefly on the walk down to the court.

When Julie didn't return to the office by 2:57 p.m. (practice started promptly at 3:00 p.m.), I figured she had simply forgotten about me in her rush and had made her way to practice in order to be on *time* herself. As I left the office, Bill and Julie were walking back toward their offices, talking intensely. We stopped, and Julie said, "Tom, would you please go down to the floor and ask the girls to start warming up? We'll be right down. Thanks."

"Sure. No problem. Take your *time*," I said. Uncharacteristic as their tardiness was, I was glad to help out and to have some private *time* with the players as a group. When I got down to the court, I greeted the team and congratulated them on their previous night's stunning upset of Rocky Side College. The team was in great spirits. I almost hated to say it, but I turned to Barb, the captain, and said, "Julie asked me to ask you to start warming up for practice."

Well, she didn't do it, and the players kept going on about their immediate business of dressing and playfully knocking a lone volleyball around, and I felt stuck. I couldn't make her or them do anything. I felt as though I would jeopardize my rapport with them if I pushed the issue at that point. When Julie came down to the court several minutes later, she immediately yelled, "Come on, we're wasting *time*. You should be warmed up by now."

And I was in trouble with Julie, too. "What happened?" Julie asked.

"Well, they wouldn't start. Who am I, anyway?"

"Well, they beat Rocky Side and now they're too big for their britches, huh?" Julie said this with a playful tone loud enough for all to hear while they ran a lazy warm-up lap. All the players smiled or laughed.

I chimed in, "Hey, come on, pick it up!" as they continued running.

And Marge, one of the sharpest, wittiest players on the team turned on me quickly saying, "Okay, ***Bill***!" with a twisting, sarcastic edge in her voice.

I understood immediately what Julie confirmed later. Marge was having a hard *time* measuring up to Bill's expectations on the court and was having a particularly hard *time* relating to him as a person, and as a male. Julie said, "Marge is finding it hard to take orders from anybody right now, especially from a man."

I learned something very valuable from this encounter: I would have to work hard in future encounters to establish deeper levels of rapport and trust with these women in order to be an effective researcher in the field. They, like Marge, would constantly test my limits and reactions as a male participant-observer, and in response I had to be open, flexible, and caring. As Griffin (1991) notes, "The main message is to maintain a degree of flexibility about the researcher's role, and to pay attention to the power relations operating in each research situation, especially those around sex/gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and class and age" (p. 119).

Shaffir and Stebbins (1991) write that "the maintenance of effective relations with subjects and collaborators is central to the social experience of field research" (p. 148). In order not to put a strain on the relationships I was building with players and coaches in the field, I confined my interviews with players at the beginning to the short *time* allotted during the team's study halls on Monday and Wednesday evenings and with coaches to informal, passing moments before and after practices. I was constantly aware of the tension Gurney (1991) pinpoints: "When the field-worker is faced with decisions that pit data collection against rapport, it is critical to the continuation of the study and to the validity of the research that the correct decisions be made" (p. 53).

I therefore determined rapport, generally, to be more important than quality or quantity of data collection for most situations. I viewed my study in the fall of 1992, realistically, as a pilot whose main purposes were to help me establish rapport with the participants and to put me in a position to gain access for further data collection. I made conscious decisions to respect the wishes of all involved that I not over-step my bounds in terms of *time* demands for data collection. My decision was buoyed by positive results I sensed from my attempts to build rapport with the players; I could see rapport building "in the willingness of others to allow access to that part of their life of interest to [me]" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 96).

During one memorable first interview in which I basically asked the players to tell me their story about being recruited by Sandborn State and about their initial impressions of college life as a female student-athlete, Rachel, a freshman, began to cry while she related how homesick she felt and how unrewarding her initial experiences with volleyball, the team, and the coach had been. She said, "I just don't know if I can make it to Thanksgiving."

I thought of Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) question: "How do you decide where the lines are between a felt moral obligation to intervene and an obligation to continue as the data collecting researcher?" (p. 115). In this case, an immediate decision seemed simple and natural for me–I turned off the tape and became a personal listener. I engaged Rachel in conversation, probing for cues about how serious her situation really was, beyond the facts that she brought up the subject and was crying about it. I decided that "what is best done is less a case of what is established as right than of what your judgment tells you is fitting" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 41).

"Are you really considering going home?" I asked.

"No, but it's just so hard here," she said.

I felt comfortable at the *time* playing the advisor role I had been implicitly cast in by Rachel; I determined that I could not pay the "psychic cost" incurred by avoiding Rachel's human need to talk with someone about how she was feeling (Asher & Fine, 1991, p. 203). I struggled later with the appropriate means to follow up with Rachel given that we were not scheduled to meet formally again until much later in the study. I decided that I would pay attention to the focus of our previous conversation by making a point to ask Rachel how she was getting along each time I saw her. She

let me know several times that things were going better, and I admit that I was glad she decided to stay, to stick it out with the team and at Sandborn.

At one point, given that every player I interviewed was extremely open, kind, interesting, and personable, I wondered if I should begin to heed Mitchell's (1991) warning that "the apparent cooperativeness of subjects may be in fact intentional, self-serving efforts to warrant a continued supply of such goods and services as the researcher is able to provide" (p. 102). Was I delivering the goods, from the players' perspectives, in terms of heightening their status with the coaches through their appearing to cooperate with me?

I was sorry to question the players' genuineness and authenticity, but I had never met a group that was collectively so nice, polite, and easy-going. There must be more to it, I thought; but, in retrospect, I don't think there was. Instead, I had stumbled onto an exceptional group of young women who seemed to be willing to participate in my study wholeheartedly without any guarantee of any return on their investment. I suppose that what I did have that they valued "is the means to be grateful, by acknowledging how important their time, cooperation, and words are; by expressing (my) dependence on what they have to offer; and by elaborating (my) pleasure with their company" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 123).

I feel as though I experienced during the pilot study at least one "gift of immersion," as noted by Glesne and Peshkin (1992), in which "everything that you read and hear (and do?) can be connected, or at least considered for connection, to your phenomenon" (pp. 54-55). I began constructing my independent readings list with a focus on literature related to my topic; I followed the newspaper accounts of road games fervently, clipping them and saving them in a file along with other sports and education related articles; I broke long-standing social engagements and vacation plans in order to attend home practices and matches. The field was interesting, at times intoxicating. At one point I realized that this thing called "fieldwork" in this context is what I am meant to do.

> *The feeling I get when I do an interview, when I go to a game, when I think about issues / materials / ideas that are presenting themselves to me as I have experiences in the fieldwork setting is one of euphoria and elation, mainly. Talking with Julie and Val today was like a rush, it was so exciting to have them tell me such interesting, meaningful stuff. They opened up so many cans of worms in our meeting this morning that I really don't know where to begin in this write-up. How can I possibly do justice here on paper to the thick, rich experience of fieldwork that I have just had? I can't. I can only do the best that I can and hope that the meaning my informants are making has some meaning for my reader and for me later when I attempt to write. What I know is that I belong here, doing this ... (Journal, 44)*

I fully intended to make the *time* and to secure the resources necessary to follow up with a research study for my dissertation. I was granted access by Bill to the field in order to continue with a more formal study for my dissertation through the fall of 1993. But Bill resigned as head coach in the middle of December 1992. The main gatekeeper who had guaranteed site access was now, in effect, gone. I was left again with some substantive issues to face and some tough decisions to make about pursuing the Sandborn State situation as research context for my dissertation study.

Could I, would I, risk negotiating access with a new coach when he or she was hired later in the spring? Hadn't I already experienced the tight, sometimes closed nature of sports contexts for research activity? Could I risk getting shut out of this context because the new coach might not be comfortable with or open at all to a study in which the players were to be interviewed in-depth?

What role could, would Julie play on my behalf during the spring? Would she be a lame-duck coach, asked to fulfill her contract by acting as an interim coach during the spring season? Would this give me an "in" for conducting the formal study before the new coach was hired?

I determined to seek Julie's advice again. She suggested that I go straight to the top and discuss my problem and my intentions with Sandborn's athletic director. I attempted to make an appointment with Mr. Pointer, but I couldn't get past his secretary. The secretary suggested that my only option was to pursue the matter with one of the associate athletic directors since I could not, under any circumstances, have access to the athletic director. I determined to have the matter resolved.

I made an appointment with the women's athletic director, Ms. Hollister. I met with her about two weeks after Bill's resignation in December and had a delightful meeting with her. By that time, I had determined that the only reasonable direction for me to take was to seek access to do the substantive data collection for the study, in-depth ethnographic interviews with each of the players on the team, during the spring semester, 1993.

I presented my case for continuing the study, and Ms. Hollister made two monumental concessions: (a) that I would have full access and permission to continue the study through the spring semester and through the study's completion and (b) that my situation and status as researcher in the field would be brought up in the interview process with the potential coaching candidates seeking the position. She personally guaranteed my access to the site, regardless of the new coach's feelings, until I was finished with the study.

While I counted this as a major victory, I remained wary. My best strategy, I thought, was to get so entrenched in the field that I couldn't be pried loose. This required that the formal processes for getting myself ready for the study needed to be accelerated. I quickly wrote the formal research proposal and prospectus, got my research committee appointed, defended my qualifying projects and examination, defended the proposal, and began to work out prospective protocols for the interviews. I was well on my way to immersing myself in the research context.

Julie helped facilitate my transition to the formal study by making it possible to conduct interviews with the team members according to their schedules. She, subsequently, was to stay on as interim coach until a new coach was appointed. I had conducted almost half of the interviews of the formal study by the time a new coach was appointed in March 1993. Even the new coach was open to my work in the field and made it convenient to conclude the data collection portion of the study. I concluded formal data collection procedures in April 1993.

My dream of conducting a case study with an athletic team had been fulfilled. But what had I found out? What would the implications of my findings be for education, for curriculum? Interpreting and writing the story my informants so willingly told remained as the next, exciting challenge.

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