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Clinical Typifications by Wives of Professional Athletes: The Field Researcher as Therapist

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ABSTRACT

In addressing an often neglected aspect of qualitative research, this paper explores how our research identities are constructed by those we are studying. During my field research on wives of professional athletes, I gradually became aware of the ways in which I was typified as a "therapist." Despite my attempts to deconstruct this research identity, and the therapeutic role I was placed in, their construction of a therapist self persisted. I examine how this serendipitous process emerged in the context of "sequential interviewing" by assessing specific characteristics, and certain conditions, which shaped their typification of a therapist. The ways in which our research identities are constructed by those we study can provide us with another important dimension of knowledge about those we study.

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We know that qualitative research embraces a wide variety of methodological tools in the gathering of data. However, while the costs or benefits of these diverse methods are often discussed, there appears to be little discourse on how we, as field researchers, are defined by those we study. What can we learn from the typifications of those we study about ourselves, and our methods or strategies? The typifications we construct in the world of lived experience in our definitions of situations, and rely on in our interaction with others, enable us to interpret roles, identities, and presentations of self (Hewitt and Stokes 1975, pp. 2–3; Rogers 1983, pp. 40–1; Schutz 1971). As field researchers, we rely on our perception of those we study and of their world. But how do those we study see us?

My interest in this apparently neglected aspect of qualitative research was sparked by the recurring ***clinical typifications*** of me as a mental health professional, and of my research project, by the wives I was studying. My study examines how women experience their "career-dominated marriages" to professional athletes, how they cope with the stress induced by the sport careers of their husbands, and the mental health needs of this vastly under-researched group of women. It was during my field research that I gradually became aware of the ways in which I was being typified as a ***therapist***. This analysis seeks to help us to understand how our research identities are constructed by those we study, and to contribute to both qualitative research and clinical sociology literature.

In this paper, I focus on this typifying process by exploring how I was typified as a therapist by the wives in the study. First, I describe the research background of the study. Second, I examine those characteristics which contributed to their typification of a therapist. Third, I analyze those conditions which were conducive to their typification of a therapist. Finally, I discuss the implications of their construction of my research identity as a therapist.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

My three-year odyssey, covering 36 consecutive months in the closed world of the professional athlete's wife, was a very intensive but enriching experience as I traveled thousands of miles, lived out of a suitcase, and visited roughly 40 different towns and cities (many on a regular basis) in different parts of the country. Over a four-year period (1989–1993), the final year of which involved intermittent interviewing as I gradually exited from the field (see Ortiz 1993a), I kept a journal of field notes documenting my observations, feelings, and

experiences. I also relied on a variation of "between-method" triangulation consisting of participant observation, in-depth interviews, personal documents, and print media accounts (Denzin 1989, p. 244). However, as the primary method of collecting data, I developed the technique of *sequential interviewing* (Ortiz 1989, 1990).

Since gaining access to this closed world is an extremely difficult process (Ortiz 1988), I implemented a preset sampling procedure of not limiting the selection of the sample to wives of active players. Despite the problems encountered in gaining access, and relying on two mailings and snowball sampling (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981), 48 women participated in the study. They included the wives of active players (N=39), the wives of retired players (N=8), and the divorced wife of a retired player (N=1). The sample of 47 wives, nearly half of whom are women of color, represents over 28 different teams in the four major professional sports: football wives (N=21), baseball wives (N=21), basketball wives (N=3), and hockey wives (N=2).

To clarify, corroborate, and supplement the data obtained from my structured open-ended interviews with the wives, I also conducted structured open-ended interviews with 8 peripheral and subordinate figures and the ex-wife,[1] and semistructured interviews with 10 husbands. My interviews with the husbands were very sporadic and were more in the nature of spontaneous conversations. They took into account specific aspects of their jobs, their sport careers, and their side of certain topics and issues. I conducted these interviews individually or jointly with their wives.

The interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to 7 hours. They took place at different times on weekdays and weekends, and I conducted them in a wide range of settings and circumstances. I also conducted a variation of the "group interview" with a few of the wives (Frey and Fontana 1991), during such "stressful occupational events" as the major league baseball lockout (Ortiz 1991a), and in other spontaneous fieldwork situations. I conducted a few telephone interviews when face-to-face interviews were no longer possible. I also conducted follow-up interviews with many of the wives.

The wives who finished the interview guide, consisting of roughly 450 questions, I defined as the "long-term participants." They constitute the core and roughly a third of the sample. Those wives who were not able to finish the interview guide, or were able to do only a few interviews, I defined as "short-term participants." The information acquired from my sequential interviews with long-term participants constitutes the primary source of data. The information gained from interviews with short-term participants, peripheral and subordinate figures,

husbands, and the ex-wife provide important additional data. The majority of short-term participants, and a few of the peripheral and subordinate figures, I also sequentially interviewed. Of the 47 wives, 15 are long-term participants, and 32 are short-term participants. Together, they combine for a conservatively estimated total of 920 hours of tape-recorded interviews.

Sequential Interviewing

In discussing the importance of immersion in the field, Blumer (1969) maintains that we must carefully scrutinize those we are studying in order to develop the intimate familiarity necessary to understand how they experience their world.[2] To achieve this, I wanted to get to know the wives well enough to interpret, from their point of view, how they experience their world. In my effort to see their world through their eyes, and because participation in their closed world required more than marginal involvement, I attempted to conduct a series of interviews with each wife.[3] This, and the longitudinal nature of my field research, required that I synchronize my reality with the wife's reality of everyday life (Ortiz 1989). Learning to construct my reality to fit the realities confronting the wives was not only a gradual and cumulative process, but it became increasingly important as a sequential interviewer. Eventually, I was able to draw on my stock of knowledge of, and my engrossment in, their world as I carried out my field research (Goffman 1974; Schutz 1971).

As a longitudinal interviewing method, there were three distinct advantages of sequential interviewing. First, it provided a greater understanding of the ways in which the wives construct their seasonal lives, particularly their "seasonal clocks."[4] Throughout my field research, I not only followed the seasonal cycles of their lives, but I found myself deeply immersed in the simultaneous ebb and flow of many diverse seasonal clocks. Second, it provided the unusual opportunity to document emergent and spontaneous phenomena. I was able to simultaneously record their past experiences together with the events taking place in their lives as they unfolded. Through a series of intimate interviews, we explored sensitive topics and a wide variety of issues candidly. This, and our longitudinal interaction, greatly influenced my changing perception of the wives from participants to collaborators.[5] Third, it provided the unique opportunity to obtain a more personal view of how women construct career-dominated marriages in the male-dominated world of professional sport. My rare backstage perspective would not have been possible without the sequential interviews.[6] Consequently, I was

uniquely sensitized to the behind-the-scenes and taken-for-granted meanings and feelings of their lived experience in their world (Douglas 1976, pp. 84–7).

Sequential interviewing, however, was not without its risks and disadvantages. Aside from the wives who were unable to continue participating in the study for reasons not related to the sport careers of their husbands, the major disadvantage was primarily related to sustaining access. Some of the husbands acted as "internal gatekeepers" when they attempted to intimidate me, or when they discouraged their wives from participating further in the study (Ortiz 1988, 1991b). Much of the difficulty in sustaining access, and the disruption in the continuity of sequential interviewing, was attributed to the many occupational fluctuations occurring in the husband's sport career (e.g., seasonal moving). Full participation was also difficult for other reasons. For example, as new data emerged from the personal changes, occupational fluctuations, and stressful occupational events (e.g., trades, cuts, free agency) taking place in the lives of the wives, additional research questions and new topics were generated in an effort to capture this spontaneous phenomena. This contributed to the length of the interview guide.

Since my primary focus was on the accumulation of data, and because of my immersion in their world, I was not initially cognizant of how I was being typified by the wives. Gradually, however, I became aware of their clinical typifications of me. In fact, much to my surprise, one of the unintentional consequences of sequential interviewing, and the nature of the research questions, was their typification of me as a "therapist."

THE ACCIDENTAL THERAPIST

Certain "characteristics" and "conditions" were conducive to the wife's typification of, and construction of my research identity as, a therapist. In the following, I examine those characteristics, and analyze those conditions, which played a part in how I was typified as a therapist.

Characteristics of a Therapist

When we speak of social types, we refer to those shared abstractions, or perceptions of roles based on familiar characteristics, which evoke certain images in our common-sense assessment of lived situations (Klapp 1962, pp. 9–11; Rogers 1983, pp. 38–9). The social type, then, is a result of the typing process

which gives life to a shared idea of what we expect from others (Klapp 1962). Although celebrities are often subject to social typing, and while there is a great diversity of popular social types in American society (Klapp 1962, 1964), the therapist (often a rubric for such mental health professionals as marriage counselors, psychotherapists, clinical psychologists, or psychiatrists) is perhaps one of the more widely recognized. Consequently, there were certain characteristics which were attributed to therapists, and contributed to the wives' emergent typification of a therapist. Indeed, I did not typify or present myself as a family therapist, or a therapist of any kind. However, while I maintained my researcher self, and despite my attempts to deny the imputed therapist self—primarily through disclaimers (Hewitt and Stokes 1975)—throughout my field research, their typification of a therapist persisted. The wife's typification also seemed to be based on what she expected from a therapist, or what she expected a therapist to say. The style of asking research questions, sympathy, listening, probing, empathy, confidentiality, and objectivity were some of the qualities referred to by the wives in their typification of a therapist.

The style of asking research questions, and related emergent questions, appeared to have a major influence on the way in which I was typified as a therapist. Initially, my method of asking research questions tried to convey my deep interest in, and gradually my stock of knowledge about, their world. In discussing this communication skill, Elizabeth reflects on having a sympathetic ear, and the ability to listen, as qualities she associates with a therapist:

> You definitely are a therapist. You could have asked the questions, and just taken down the information. It's not the nature of the interview, I don't think. You just seem to impart a lot of yourself into this, and figure people out. You have the ability to get down into the whys, and wherefores, and "Have you considered this angle or that angle," and draw parallels .... You want to know. Most people don't want to hear it, and don't believe it, but you do. You're a good listener, you're a sympathetic ear, and had good insight and input. I think a lot of that is intrinsic. It's not something everybody would bring to the party. If I was doing the interviews I might, or might not, do that. You know what I mean? It's something that's you.

Therapists are frequently characterized as caring and sympathetic. However, it was important not to always stay with the wife's point of view when probing during an interview. Beth notes:

> Although you were sympathetic, you also gave us things to think about. You know, like, "On the other hand," or playing the devil's

> advocate, or whatever, which I think is good for you because it really makes you look at the whole picture, and not just one part of it, and that helps. . . . Sometimes, when you're expressing your feelings on a certain part of wherever you're at interviewing, you might say something that makes us think about what kind of answer we just gave, that maybe we're not really looking at whole picture. You know, we're just feeling just part of what's going on. We're not really tuning into the whole thing.

Robyn also comments:

> [Wives] can tell you things that they wouldn't normally talk about . . . . You make good points, . . . and you ask questions that make you take a look at your situation, and . . . that make you think about things, and look at yourself. . . . I mean, in-depth, real intellectual questions.

The style used in asking research questions encouraged the wives to examine themselves, their marriages, their feelings, their husbands' sport careers, and other aspects of their lives. This method not only allowed them to become more involved in the interview sessions, but encouraged them to open up and freely express their innermost feelings, thoughts, and opinions. For wives, this was consistent with their perception of therapists. Michelle observes:

> A lot has to do with just being able to get people to talk. That's all the therapists do. [They] get people to talk about their feelings, and once you can get it out, then you can deal with it. A lot of people just have everything so pent up because they're scared to talk about things. . . . [You do] the same thing that a therapist would do in terms of just keeping the ball in their court, and making them find the answers, and you're just directing them in the right direction in terms of the questions that you ask.

In discussing the capacity to be concerned, and as an "empathic other" to have an "empathic understanding" of (Rogers 1961; Thoits 1984, p. 231), or an "unconditional positive regard" for (Rogers 1961), what wives experience, Michelle makes a comparison to the comfort that ministers provide:

> Having talked to a lot of different ministers, I felt as though it was similar, in that, the ones I have spoken to, that's basically what they do. They want to hear you talk it out, and then they give you

> advice based on what the Word says about a particular problem that you're dealing with. But mostly, their function is just to be a listening ear, and to be able to offer comfort wherever they can. And I equated that [with] you because you seemed to be sympathetic to the problems that a lot of people are going through. It must be very comforting to them to talk to somebody that they feel understands. Because the hardest thing, in talking about the problems that athletes' wives go through, is having somebody that can relate to their problems because it's such a unique situation.

Feeling comfortable enough to unload their suppressed emotions, private thoughts, or deep-seated problems also took into account the salience of confidentiality. In being characterized as a "sounding board," it was important to wives, such as Paula, that I not pass judgment on them. When defined in this way, I did not pose the same threat as others in their world, and as an outsider I was defined as "safe" to confide in. Paula reveals:

> I hate to compare it to a problem because why else do people go see therapists or their ministers, . . . but it's problematic if you can't talk to anyone else. We can tell you everything, the good things and the bad things. . . . [The interviews] allowed me to unload with you, and tell you [my] problems. And then you could help me by giving me alternative ways to handle certain things, or [what] to do what in certain situations with wives on the team, other players on the team, or the organization itself instead of going to another wife. Because there are a lot of wives out there, and I may be one of them, that some may think gripe too much. So you're like a sounding board. I can say things to you, and I don't have to worry about you telling me I'm griping too much, [and] I don't have to worry about what you think of me. You wouldn't go and tell anyone else, "Do you know what Paula told me?" I feel like I can gripe all I want, or I can talk about silly little things as much as I want, nitpick. And I don't have to worry about you telling somebody else, "Paula is a real nitpicker. She gripes all the time. They're making this much money and she thinks they're poor." Things like that. You're like a sounding board because I can tell you all these things, and I don't have to worry about you repeating them. You take it in, and use it in your research, but you won't betray that confidence that we've set up. I don't have to worry about my reputation with you.

Therefore, while I was accepted as an insider, my status as an outsider made me safe to confide in. Like the therapist, Paula saw me as someone who was safe to open up to because I maintained confidentiality, and did not pass judgment on her. Also, like the therapist, I did not pose a threat to her because I did not have a vested interest in her world. She could speak quite freely and frankly. Elizabeth explains:

> Because you're so nonthreatening, [wives] tend to open up more. You're not a football player or a wife. You're doing something totally different. You know what I mean? Because you're an outsider, wives aren't threatened by you because there's no competition, no similarities. You're not going to steal so and so's job next year. Plus, a lot of wives came to you voluntarily. They weren't forced. I responded voluntarily. I thought it'd be interesting.

The significance of maintaining confidentiality, and withholding judgment, was also emphasized by Phyllis, the wife of a major league baseball trainer. In her discussion of confidentiality, as a crucial reason why wives were so willing to confide in me, Phyllis makes a comparison to a priest:

> These women divulge marital problems, or whatever, to you and know that it's not going to go any further. It's like going to confession and going to a priest. You can't talk about it because you can't say who [it] is. It's like a priest in confession. You see what I mean? Do you ever find it amazing, though, that these women have opened up that much to you? I'm amazed.

The wives also believed that it is also part of the therapist's job to have some degree of objectivity. Elizabeth discloses:

> This is not your life and death. This is your research. You do definitely care about what you're doing. But you're not involved, where it's your life in deciding between the forks in the road [because] sometimes people can't. It's hard to make decisions because you can't see. You're objective and analytical because it's not a personal experience for you. This isn't your life. [You're] like a therapist because it's not their life, yet it's their job. They're involved in their job.

Although it was not my intention to be typified as a therapist, and while I was quick to deny any clinical training or semblance of being any kind of therapist, this serendipitous process continued and seemed to be facilitated by certain conditions which were conducive to the wife's typification of a therapist.

Conditions Conducive to a Therapist

The development of trust and rapport, social isolation, and absence of social support were a few of the conditions which were conducive to the ways in which I was typified as a therapist. Wives often feel their trust is betrayed by those inside their world, such as team management, and particularly by those outside their world, such as members of the media. As Tanya puts it, "You become less trusting, and you hate to think that you can't trust anybody, even your mother." Tracy also admits, "I barely let people in that wanted to be my friend, just as [a] friend, because I don't trust many people." Consequently, not only are wives reluctant to trust those who approach them, because they are often taken advantage of, but their feelings of betrayal can contribute to their feelings of powerlessness (Ortiz 1991a). Although earning their trust was not without problems, sequential interviewing often provided the basis for earning trust and building rapport with the wives over an extended period of time. Surprisingly, however, in some cases, this was achieved during, or after, one interview session. The cultivation of trust and rapport allowed wives to feel comfortable. Susan confides:

> I probably would have been fine after getting to know you, or finding out how you were going to conduct the interviews. But, initially, . . . I may have been less trusting with you, or did I spill my guts the first time?

In discussing the importance of feeling comfortable, and in making a comparison to someone who is a spiritual force, Michelle reflects:

> I was thinking, . . . [because] you do talk to so many people, and the things they have shared with you, how it must be similar to when they are talking to somebody who is a spiritual force; or who they feel comfortable enough [with] to express intimate details of their lives without having really known you before. I mean you have people opening up to you on the first meeting.

According to Beth, I did not seem to be the type of person and the type of field researcher who who "just wanted the answers, but didn't care about our feelings." For Linda, feeling comfortable also took into account personality:

> It was your personality, mainly. Being comfortable and being able to click. Until people prove me wrong, I just trust them. I probably shouldn't be that way. I do keep my guard up, but people really have to prove themselves wrong in my eyes, and if they do then I'm not going to deal with him or her.

Management of a "professional self" involving specific lines of action, such as "attending" or showing deference and the right demeanor (Egan 1986; Goffman 1967), also contributed to the establishment of rapport. Paula explains:

> You're willing to listen, and take everything in, and analyze it, rather than just sluff off some things as being trivial. You're professional about it. If you weren't professional about it, I probably wouldn't do the interviews.

Diane concurs:

> You make the wives really look more into the situation. . . . They have to explain it, and once they explain it to you, they're explaining it to themselves. And it makes more sense, to themselves, about what's going on. And then, at that point, they have to deal with some things they probably didn't want to deal with. Now if you were an arrogant, macho, male chauvinistic pig, we couldn't talk. But you're very professional with how you're handling it, especially dealing with women.

In specific situations, trust and rapport were so firmly established that I was publicly referred to as a therapist. For example, in describing me and the study to other wives on her husband's minor league baseball team, Paula told them I was "like a therapist." I was once introduced by Beth as "my therapist" to a group of her friends, and she also referred to me as "my therapist" at a family dinner we attended at the home of her husband's parents. When discussing her participation in the study with others, Beth refers to me as "my therapist." Beth states:

> When I talk to my friends, and anybody that I tell about the interviews I did, I usually do say that it's like having a personal therapist for two years. I mean, I explain to them why I really feel

> like it's therapy.... It's like going to a therapist, because when you have problems, it's through questions that they ask you that they help you determine what's best for your life-style, and how to cope with it. That's why I call you my therapist.

On another occasion, I was talking with Lori in the hallway outside of her office when Phyllis walked by and stopped to chat. As we chatted, she told us another wife on the team often calls me her therapist, and that the interviews are her "therapy" (see Ortiz 1993c).

When wives are experiencing stressful occupational events in the sports careers of their husbands, I was told, "You can really understand what I'm going through." I was told, "Because you're interviewing other wives, you can see what I'm going through." Beth confides:

> How can you explain to somebody what your life is all about if they have no clue what it's like to be married to a ballplayer, or what kind of life-style you really have? They only look at it from the point of view of what they see on the "Rich and Famous" [on TV]; and from the newspapers, or what they're led to believe from whoever tells them what it's all about. It's nice to talk to somebody who really knows where you're coming from, because at times even my husband's mom and dad don't even know where you're coming from, because they're not married to him.

Marsha also reveals:

> I told my husband it's almost like having your own therapist because you talk about things that you've never been able to talk about. I mean, I tell you things that I wouldn't tell another wife. You know what I mean? I'm able to talk about things that I couldn't talk to anybody else about. Do you know what I'm saying? I mean, even like family members, they wouldn't understand. But you've been in the study. You've talked to wives, [and] you have an understanding of what we go through, even though you haven't lived our life.

What both Beth and Marsha are alluding to is the extent to which they feel isolated. Social isolation is not only a fact of life in the world of professional sport, but it plays a vital part in the wife's typification of a therapist. The nature of the sport career contributes in many ways to the wife's feeling of isolation.[7] For example, unexpected moving (e.g., trades, cuts, injuries), and seasonal moving,

often create problems in maintaining relationships with acquainted and significant others. Constant moving (i.e., particularly in major league baseball when the husband is sent down to the minor leagues and called up, more than once, during the season) also makes it difficult for the wife to form friendships with others in the city where her husband's team is located, and separates her from close friends and family members. Many nomadic wives also find it problematic to establish lasting friendships with other wives on the team. Moreover, wives who have relocated across the country, from where they were raised, find it difficult to form friendships outside of the wives on the team. Consequently, wives feel isolated, particularly when they are experiencing problems in the marriage. Linda maintains:

> When you go to different places you feel so isolated. It's like nobody knows you. You don't even know the other wives on the team. You don't know where the grocery stores are. You don't know where to shop at. So when you get to a point where you don't know anybody, how are you supposed to even deal with what's happening to your husband, and the changes you see in him, when you don't even know the first thing about the area? In so many ways you feel so isolated, and you might not give the attention to your marriage, and to your husband, that you would, ordinarily. Because, ordinarily, you might live in one area. You might have your folks down the road. You might have your folks available to you, and you could say, "Mom, something's wrong with Don. He's this or he's that," whereas, in the league you're just by yourself. You're just all by yourself in this, and you feel like—I don't know—you just feel so isolated. And because of the isolation, you might not reach out to friends because they're not there, . . . because the friends you have are new or brand new, or you haven't known them that long. How can you confide in them in that kind of situation? So, in many ways, I think that you have been my, you know, "I went to see Steve today to get my help. I needed some help." You know, that kind of situation, but not even realizing it.

Wives also feel isolated, and often experience a heightened feeling of vulnerability, when the husband is away from home on long or constant road trips during the season. Wives frequently feel isolated because of the consuming demands during the season, or because of the celebrity status of their husbands since they are in the public eye and the focus of media scrutiny. Friends, neighbors, or outsiders may take advantage of the wife's friendship, reveal private details about

her marriage, or perhaps try to use such information to their advantages and entice the husband (Ortiz 1991b). The fear her trust will be violated further isolates her. As Olivia insists, "There're so many [people] that ask questions that we purposely don't open ourselves up to people around us." Linda tells us:

> Even on the same team you don't form those kind of friendships, or the bonds, not in football. I don't know about baseball. That might be totally different. But you don't form those bonds in football that you ordinarily would because, I guess, there's a mistrust there. You just have to be careful of who you deal with. There is so much pettiness, sometimes among the wives, . . . [and] sometimes . . . [on] some teams it seems like there's a pettiness that exists, a jealousy. So that makes you even more withdrawn into a shell. . . . The neighbors, too, because they only want one thing. You feel like that's the only reason they want to be your friend. So why would you confide in them? You just deal with your problems by yourself.

Wives also experience isolation when they feel there is no one they can confide in, particularly when they are coping with the pressure of the sport careers of their husbands, or the stresses in their marriages. Since acquainted others know very little about what the wife experiences, she finds very few who fully understand her special circumstances. Indeed, many wrongly assume the wife lives in an exclusive world of glamor and celebrities. As a result, there are very few people wives can talk to about the emotional strain of a "sport marriage."Paula explains:

> There's no one else to talk to . . . . Jason is so sensitive I can't tell him these things. I can't tell my friends these things because they don't understand. I can't tell the other wives because they think I'm bitching, or if I gripe about a certain person on the team, I don't want them to know it. I can't really tell my parents because they don't understand, and I can't tell his family because they don't understand. . . . So you are isolated . . . . There's no one, no one else to turn to, . . . unless you live in the city where you play, and you have a close friend like a neighbor, or someone that you can talk to, . . . or if there was somebody on the team that Jason was best friends with, and if I was best friends with the wife, and we could totally confide in each other. But there's no one. That's a rare thing, I think, unless there's two wives who have been on the same team for years, which is rare. But that's the main reason, for me, especially since we talked about his family, and the problems with them.

Therefore, as a field researcher who came into the isolated lives of many of these women, they not only found someone who they could trust and confide in, but someone who wanted to listen, who was not critical, and who was supportive.

The isolation that wives experience is often intensified by the absence of social support.[8] In fact, the irony of many sport marriages is that while the wives are the primary source of social support for their husbands, particularly during the season or stressful occupational events, they appear to receive little social support in return (Ortiz 1991a, 1991c). Beth confides:

> At times I think he doesn't want to listen, or he's the type of person that a lot of times he keeps everything in. So when I start talking to him about things that bother [me], and [he doesn't] understand, . . . it's like he doesn't get it because he doesn't come to [me] with those kind of problems. So sometimes he looks at it like, "Why are you bothering me?" And, "You're just blowing this out of proportion," or something like that. So I think that at the time when we were going through a lot of different things, from not making the team out of spring training, the call-ups, the send outs, and stuff like that; it was great that you were there because I had somebody I could express [to] how I felt when I needed to really unload. . . . That's [when] I started to think, after a while, "Oh, it's time for my therapist." But it was good, and it did help because a lot of times when [I] was really frustrated, or something was happening, the interviews definitely helped [me] to release.

The husband's sport career is not only demanding, but he knows it is comparatively temporary. Given the precarious nature of his occupation, the occupational realities of professional sport, and deep concern for his job, his wife may feel he is not as supportive as he could be. Consequently, while the wife provides emotional support and esteem support for her husband (McCubbin *et al.* 1980, p. 133), his support for her seems to be minimal, especially during the season or when she is coping with stressful occupational events, and she may feel emotionally abandoned. Marsha explains:

> I guess that's probably one of the wives' biggest complaints. I guess that would probably be the biggest problem in a marriage because I don't think we're thought of as much. . . . But I knew that coming into it. So I think I'm prepared, and I don't really think about it. It doesn't bother me as much. [But], now and then, I'll try to get Glenn to be, . . . I'll say, "You know, I really need you to give me a break." Like

> when I was in school. I mean, I needed that emotional support as [much] as he did.

The wife's feeling of isolation can be closely linked to her need for social support from her husband or significant others, and the absence of social support can deepen her feelings of isolation or powerlessness. Also, while wives can be a source of social support for one another, since they understand their special circumstances better than most, for various reasons they often are not. For wives, separation from their families can intensify the absence of social support. Linda contends:

> If the family was there, they could take care of the kids, and you could do things together. But here we are, thrust in a situation where we don't know anybody lots of times. You don't have any family members. The sitters that you do have are the sitters that you have to pay. [It's] a situation where it fosters, to me, an environment that pulls you apart, in a sense, because you don't have the family there for you that ordinarily you might have. . . . We don't have the support around us that we need. In other words, good support, surrounding yourself with the good people that you know you need to keep you on track. That's what's wrong. . . . With PAO you realize that sometimes you do need help, and going there, I think, is a recognition of the fact that we don't get the support somewhere else. . . . You just have to know where you have to go to get your support, and to get it in the right places.

Whether it was one interview session, or several interview sessions, there was a tendency for the wives to open up, and confide in me. Their social isolation, and the absence of social support, may have influenced this tendency. In addition to these conditions, the wives also appeared to receive some kind of coping or emotion management assistance through the interview session(s) (Thoits 1984, 1986), particularly when they were coping with some form of emotional or psychological distress induced by "occupational stressors" in the sport careers of their husbands (Ortiz 1991a). Therefore, these conditions, and the degree to which trust, rapport, and support were established, seemed to have an influence on their emergent typification of a therapist.

CONCLUSION

As fieldworkers we are often preoccupied with formulating and testing hypotheses, developing interview guides, finding the right method of gathering data, collecting the data itself, or leaving the field. In this paper, I explored an often neglected aspect of qualitative research. Specifically, how do those we study construct our research identities? Perhaps the larger question is what effect do we, as field researchers, have on those we are studying?

During my field research on wives of professional athletes, I gradually became aware of the ways in which these women placed me in the role of a therapist. I did not view their clinical typification as a burden, or as a demand placed on my researcher self, but as a reflection of the degree to which I was accepted, and their need for support. I did not try to convey the impression I was a therapist in order to gain access, to sustain access, or to gain trust. It was not a planned fieldwork strategy, but a serendipitous process. Although my research identity as a therapist remained intact, I did not take advantage of their clinical typification. I de-emphasized the therapeutic role I was place in primarily through disclaimers. I also avoided "becoming the phenomenon" (Adler and Adler 1987), and did not believe in the therapist self as their research identity for me. However, despite my denial of the imputed therapist self, and although I did not encourage this research identity, it was through specific characteristics and certain conditions that their typification persisted. Consequently, I not only found myself in the "accidental role" of therapist, but in the dual role of both field researcher and therapist.

Specific characteristics were instrumental in their typification. Moreover, certain conditions were not only instrumental, but they revealed much about the nature of their world. The method of sequential interviewing was also an important vehicle in this typifying process. Sequential interviewing involved what Egan (1986, pp. 212–19) refers to as "advanced empathy," and relied on the establishment of working relationships, or the kind of interaction which facilitated trust, rapport, support, and personal growth.

The implications of the ways in which our research identities are constructed by those we study raise significant methodological questions. I have emphasized the importance of analyzing this typifying process because the insights of those we study can put us in a much better position to learn a great deal more about those we study. Future qualitative research using the method of sequential interviewing may move us toward a better understanding of ourselves in the field, of those we study, and of our presence in their world.

NOTES

1. Peripheral and subordinate figures are those participants who provide background data on wives of professional athletes (see Jonassohn, Turowetz, and Gruneau 1981, p. 187). They included two baseball coaches' wives, a baseball trainer's wife, a minor league baseball wife, an assistant director of community affairs for a major league baseball team, a community relations director for a professional football team, a public relations staff member for a professional football team, and a former general manager of a stadium complex for major league baseball and professional football teams. These participants had regular contact with, or access to, wives of professional athletes, many of whom are in the study.

2. For discussions on Blumer's (1969) methodological stance, which he refers to as "naturalistic investigation," see Athens (1984), Hammersley (1989), and Ortiz (1992).

3. Early in my field research, I discovered one interview with each wife was not yielding the type, or amount, of data necessary to adequately understand her past and present life experiences, her responses to occupational fluctations in her husband's sport career, and her styles of coping with the stresses in the marriage or her husband's sport career.

4. When the wife adapts to, and follows, her husband's sport career, we can say she is adhering to a seasonal clock. According to this seasonal cycle, wives gear up for the approaching season, experience the highs and lows during the season, wind down after the season is over, and adjust to the off-season. The wife is often locked into a seasonal clock because it constitutes the everyday life of her husband's involvement in his sport career. Frequently, the lives of wives are so intertwined with their seasonal clocks that disruptions are often stressful (see Ortiz 1990).

5. See Duffy (1991) for a discussion on this collaborative dimension in feminist methodology. Also, see Acker, Barry, and Esseveld (1983), and Miller and Humphreys (1980), for accounts on friendships between field researchers and those they are studying. My establishment of what Egan (1986, pp. 136-40) refers to as "working relationships" in counseling, resulted in friendships with several of the wives. See Ortiz (1993b) for a discussion on my development of research relationships with the wives, or what Miller (1952, p. 98) calls "friend-to-friend relationships."

6. Indeed, as an insider, I was in a unique position to closely observe many of their dilemmas and anxieties as the wives guided me through the situations and events that shape their world. I also discovered that being "adopted" or "sponsored" (Daniels 1967; Jonassohn, Turowetz, and Gruneau 1981), by certain wives and Lori, the assistant director of community affairs for a major league baseball team, gave the study (which was often referred to as the "book," "report," "paper," or "survey") and me a legitimacy which greatly facilitated and sustained access to the wives.

7. In fact, the extent to which many of the wives felt isolated was evident when they expressed surprise, or relief, upon learning that other wives also experienced similar feelings, or situations, in their marriages or the sport careers of their husbands.

8. See Lazarus and Folkman (1984), McCubbin, Joy, Cauble, Comeau, Patterson, and Needle (1980), and Thoits (1984, 1986) for discussions on social support.

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