

Constructing dependency in coping with stressful occupational events: At what cost for wives of professional athletes?

Steven M. Ortiz
Department of Sociology
Oregon State University
Corvallis, OR 97331-3703

(541) 737-8920

sortiz@oregonstate.edu

November 19, 2002

Key Words: Control, coping, dependency, wives, professional athletes

Abstract

In taking a multidimensional approach to selected areas of the much neglected sport marriage, this article identifies and examines the survival strategies used by wives in coping with stressful occupational events in the careers of their husbands. Using a control management perspective, the idea of control work is introduced and evaluated both as a control process and a coping process, while it is further proposed that it can also be viewed as a dependent process. An analysis of the survival skills used by wives of career-absorbed husbands in responding to stressful occupational events reveals that control work is a combination of coping, control, dependent, and adjustment processes. In their effort to maintain family and marital stability, these wives have normalized these interrelated processes--but at a high cost.

I. Introduction

1.1 Stress is a fact of life for wives of professional athletes. In comparison to their husbands, and despite some effort to identify their sources of stress (e.g., Cronson & Mitchell, 1987; Farole, 1996), we know very little about how they define, cope with, and are affected by the occupational uncertainties and occupational insecurities inherent in the careers of their husbands. While occupational fluctuations in a husband's career may be anticipated, perhaps even welcomed by some wives, for others they become crisis situations. Drawing from the literature in stress/coping (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Pearlin, 1989; Thoits, 1995) and life events (e.g., Avison & Turner, 1988; Conger, Lorenz, Elder, Simons & Ge, 1993; Ge, Conger, Lorenz & Simons, 1994) to frame this analysis, I refer to these emergent situations as *stressful occupational events*. The acute and sometimes accelerated

changes that typically occur in the careers of the husbands include such events as lockouts and labor strikes, getting cut from a team, getting traded from one team to another, getting sent down to the minor leagues, not getting called up to the major leagues, forced retirement, season- or career-ending injuries, and free agency. These events require the wife to define the situation, construct a line of action, and eventually adjust in some way (Blumer, 1969; Thomas, 1937). When experiencing a stressful occupational event brings with it a sense of fatalism, this is reflected in their coping styles. Feelings of powerlessness are common (Kanungo, 1979). When the wives are unable to construct an effective coping response, or if they rely on an inadequate coping response, the consequences may be tragic.

1.2 These wives are on their own in managing family life and they often have a great deal of control in this area. Thus, it is typical that striving for control is a common coping strategy for these women in response to the unpredictable nature of the husband's career. This coping process often involves what I call *control work*. Using what I term the *control management perspective* to understand how partners try to influence or control each other, and to examine this control process in the sport marriage, I discovered that these wives rely on control work for various reasons. This article, however, is limited to an analysis of the control work of the wives in coping with the stressful occupational events in the careers of their husbands.

1.3 Of particular concern here is the highly dependent nature of the control work of these wives. I suggest that varying degrees of dependency exist for partners within the sport marriage, and are reflected in attachment and dependency patterns. Both the wife's dependency and husband's dependency may be individually viewed on a continuum, ranging from low to high, and conjointly viewed as "mutual dependency." In the sport marriage, the husband's career comes first. Through sport and career socialization processes, he has learned to depend heavily on his career for self-identity, positive feelings self-worth, power, financial security, and psychological well-being in general. Thus, we may regard the husband's immersion and self-absorption in his career as a form of dependency. Just as the husband learns to be dependent through sport and career socialization, the wife learns to be dependent through a unique kind of marital socialization. To feel needed, loved or validated, a wife will often depend on *his dependency on her* to manage family life so he can focus on his career, and effectively cope with the demands, pressures, and stress involved. She, in turn, depends on *his dependency on his career*. Her husband's career dependency is fueled by what he derives from his career involvement, by the various occupational uncertainties and occupational insecurities that permeate a career in professional sports (Nixon & Frey, 1996, pp. 197-199), and by his often obsessive pursuit of athletic excellence or perhaps celebrity status.

1.4 Although mutual dependency is a twofold process for these partners, in this article only the wife's dependency will be examined as a dimension of a control process and a coping process. This view of dependency does not imply that the wives are submissive or weak. Instead, it seeks to better understand how wives of professional athletes manage and survive the stressors induced by the high-powered careers of their high-profile husbands. In the sport marriage, the wife is married both to her husband and to his career. Thus, dependency needs of a wife can be conceptualized to include her dependence both on his dependency on her and his career dependency, both of which depend on her ability to cope with the occupational demands, pressures, and stress in his career. When stressful occupational events occur, dependency patterns in the marriage emerge or are disrupted. As a result, a wife's level of dependency, particularly high dependency, becomes part of a coping process that is based on her need to be in control and this is evident in her control work.

1.5 As a result of the wife's efficient control work, not only is the career-absorbed husband *family free*, but also she attempts to make the family *stress free* for him. However, as expert caretakers or perfectionists, many wives in this kind of marriage often feel overwhelmed and "out of control." When combined with the demanding marital and family roles they perform in this version of the two-person career (Papanek, 1973; e.g., Finch, 1983; Taylor & Hartley, 1975), or what I call the *career-dominated marriage* (Ortiz, 1994a), there is little wonder these women experience stress, feel isolated, and endure role strain or role conflict.

1.6 A wife also feels disillusioned because she is often taken for granted and neglected, receiving very little in return for the sacrifices she makes for her husband and his career. It is not uncommon for a wife to feel betrayed by her husband's team when a stressful occupational event occurs, and by her husband because he fails to acknowledge and appreciate her coping skills, family management skills, and sacrifices during a stressful occupational event. On the contrary, he expects these survival skills. In fact, such skills are some of the reasons he was attracted to her in courtship, and perhaps why he married her. Because stress and coping processes involve emotional processes (Thoits, 1984), in addition to her control work, a wife will also do emotion work to suppress such emotions as anger, frustration, or resentment, as she performs her supportive role (Hochschild, 1979, 1983). This effort to gain family and personal stability in the face of a stressful occupational event and the strain it induces is a formidable challenge not only for wives of professional athletes, but also wives of politicians, military personnel, physicians, corporate executives, police officers, academics, clergymen, diplomats, movie stars, rock stars, and other career-dominated wives.

1.7 This analysis is worthy of scholarly attention because we know very little about the sport marriage/family, and perhaps less about the coping processes among the wives of professional athletes as they manage their career-dominated marriages. In using the control management perspective, this article proposes the idea and utility of control work as one way of gaining insight into the coping and adaptive abilities of women in career-dominated marriages. It also seeks to add to our current microsociological understanding of power and control processes in marital relationships. Therefore, the purpose of this article is threefold: to develop a microsociological basis for examining a control process as a coping process, to provide insight into the nature of the adaptive abilities of women married to professional athletes, and to contribute to the literature in sport sociology, women in career-dominated marriages, family/marital power, and family/occupational stress.

1.8 In this article, which is drawn from a larger ethnographic study on wives of professional athletes (Ortiz, 1994a), I explore the nature of coping, control, dependent, and adjustment processes among a group of wives as they respond to the stressful occupational events in the careers of their husbands. First, I describe the research background of the data. Second, I discuss the control management perspective in the context of the sport marriage. Third, I analyze the social construction of dependency among the wives. Fourth, I identify social isolation and absence of support as contributors to dependency among the wives. Fifth, I examine how the wives manage stressful occupational events. Finally, I conclude by discussing the consequences and implications of developing the kinds of survival skills that make family management possible for these women as their husbands pursue their careers.

II. Research background and methods

2.1 During my three-year stay in the closed world of the wives of professional athletes, which consisted of 36 consecutive months, I relied on a triangulation of methods consisting of participant observation, in-depth interviews, personal documents, and print media accounts (Denzin, 1989). Although this multiple-method approach was very productive, my primary method of collecting data was the longitudinal technique I developed and refer to as *sequential interviewing*. Over a four-year period (1989-1993), the final year of which involved intermittent interviewing as I gradually exited from the field, I also kept a journal of field notes documenting my observations, emotions, and experiences.

2.2 Because gaining access to this closed world is a difficult process and, as I later discovered, because sequential interviewing proved very demanding (e.g., Ortiz, 1994b, 2001a), I implemented a sampling procedure that did not limit itself to wives of active players. Despite the problems encountered in gaining access and relying on two mailings and snowball sampling, 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 were women of color, had husbands employed by over 28 different teams in the four major professional US sports: football ($n = 21$), baseball ($n = 21$), basketball ($n = 3$), and hockey ($n = 2$).

2.3 To clarify, corroborate, and supplement the data obtained from my semistructured interviews with the wives, I also conducted semistructured interviews with eight peripheral and subordinate figures and one ex-wife (Jonassohn, Turowetz, & Gruneau, 1981), and semistructured interviews with 10 husbands. My interviews with the husbands were sporadic and more in the nature of spontaneous conversations (e.g., Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). They took into account specific aspects of their occupations, their careers in professional sports, and their concern with certain marital/family topics and issues. Some of these interviews occurred individually and some were conducted jointly with their wives.

2.4 The in-depth interviews varied in length from 30 minutes to 7 hours. They took place at different times on weekdays and weekends, and they were conducted in a wide range of settings and circumstances. I also conducted a variation of the group interview with a few of the wives during a crisis situation in the careers of their husbands and in other spontaneous fieldwork situations (e.g., Frey & Fontana, 1991). I also conducted a few telephone interviews when face-to-face interviews were no longer possible.

2.5 I defined the wives who finished the lengthy interview guide or process as long-term participants ($n = 15$). As full-time collaborators, they constitute the core and roughly a third of the sample. As part-time collaborators, those who were not able to finish the interview guide or were only able to do a few in-depth interviews, I defined as short-term participants ($n = 32$). The information acquired from 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 were also sequentially interviewed. When possible, after completing the interview guide or after stopping at some point in the interview guide, and after varying periods of time, I conducted follow-up interviews with several of the wives.

III. Control management in the sport marriage

3.1 Research on family power has often relied too heavily on resource theory. Also, it has largely neglected one key aspect of marital power--power exertion--and it has generally ignored ethnographic research as a methodological approach. For these reasons, I offer a divergent interpretation of marital power. This interpretation will focus on marital power as a coping process, and emphasize empowerment among wives in a unique career-dominated marriage: the sport marriage. From this perspective, marital power will be analyzed as a different kind of control process, one that takes into account dependent and coping processes.

3.2 Marital power has been defined as the ability of one partner to control the actions of the other (Aytac & Teachman, 1992) and, as Szinovacz (1987, p. 671) maintains, "specific power bases are linked to specific means of control." Alternatively, I propose that marital power may also be interpreted and identified in specific ways as *marital control*. By looking at instances of marital control we can better understand the nature of "doing power" in marriage--a process I conceptualize specifically as control work and generally as the control management perspective (i.e., the ways in which partners attempt to influence or control each other, or to cope with familial/marital/occupational stressors). Despite the many possible consequences of doing control work in this career-dominated marriage, to survive stressful occupational events the wives find it necessary to rely on control work as a way of coping with them. Therefore, as a control process, control management involves the use of power bases, power exertion (i.e., control attempts/control work/control tactics), and power outcomes (i.e., control outcomes). Generally, for partners, control management may be seen as the process of gaining, negotiating, managing, exerting, and enforcing control in marital interactions, situations, and relationships. Thus, for our purpose, in using the control management perspective, we cannot think of power without thinking of control, and more specifically control as exercised power (Szinovacz, 1987). In using this approach, my emphasis is on the idea of control as the "behavioral side of power--the exercise of power, power use, or power in action" (Stets, 1995, p. 245).

3.3 As a career-dominated marriage, the sport marriage provides an excellent model with which to conceptualize marital control, to gain insight into the nature of women's power in the family as they manage the impact of men's work on the family, and to explore how women cope with the stressful occupational events induced by men's work. But what do we actually know about the men and women involved, and about the stress, strain, and conflicts in their marriages? Clearly, we know a great deal more about the high-profile husbands. In contrast, we know very little about the almost invisible wives. In fact, we know very little about how these women experience and cope with the stressful occupational events that may benefit their husbands' careers, benefit their husbands or their marriages financially, or in some way translate into career milestones for their husbands. Indeed, we know very little about the price these women pay for male career success.

IV. Dependency in the sport marriage

4.1 Dependency is socially constructed and often learned in childhood, particularly from dysfunctional experiences. There may have been alcoholism, substance abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, or some other type of family dysfunction. This was the case for several of the wives in the study, and we explored many of these issues in our in-depth interviews. In addition to their early childhood socialization experiences, the wives were "genderized" to normalize certain familial and relational dysfunctions. However, we must also note that

dependency can transcend gender, which it is situational because, regardless of gender, children are affected by the dysfunctions they experience. As children, it may have been necessary to construct and apply survival skills and, as adults, to continue applying them in relationships. However, in normalizing the supportive role in adult relationships, they may become too supportive. For women, learning to be dependent may not be limited to childhood socialization; it may also include early female socialization--a twofold process in which dependency is learned. Thus, it may be possible for some women to be attracted to men who need caregivers, or men who will not be a threat to their need to be in control.

4.2 Early in her marriage a wife of a professional athlete finds she can have a great deal of control in her marriage. Because her husband is generally self-absorbed, because he is fully consumed by his career, and because he leaves family management to her, usually he will not threaten her need to be in control. Because of his dependence on her in this area and her early socialization experiences, a wife becomes the “organizer” or “planner” in the family. Such roles reflect taking the role of controller (Turner, 1956, 1962), and this particular role is often reflected in the form of an intergenerational family pattern, which has been reproduced and perpetuated in the families of the women in the study.

4.3 A wife’s need to please others is frequently included in her social construction of high dependency and this is often inherent in her control work. Thus, she does control work to get love, and doing control work becomes doing love. As the controller, in performing the dependent role and in following a familiar pattern in the two-person career, the wife has normalized a process in which she tries to include the needs and wishes of others in making her decisions. Although she knows she is responsible for her own welfare, she also has difficulty defining self apart from others. Therefore, a wife’s reluctance or inability to separate self from others can create certain dilemmas in defining self as her own person with her own identity apart from her husband. Indeed, she has socially constructed a vicarious relationship with her husband--one in which personal autonomy is difficult to achieve because she has defined her control work as an aspect of personal autonomy. This becomes a paradox. The wife sees her control work as a form of personal autonomy, but because she has a vicarious relationship with her husband--one in which self merges with the roles that favor her marital relationship--at times she may see herself as a martyr or a victim in certain situations (Turner, 1978). In a highly dependent relationship such as this, a wife’s sense of self is validated by her marital labor or her husband’s career success, and self is legitimized as a worthy wife and/or mother. At the same time, however, a wife may believe that she does not deserve such validation because she thinks she can do better, or that more needs to be done. Thus, no reward will ever be enough because she is not content to accept things the way they are. Through this form of denial there may be little or no self-acceptance of her accomplishments because she is constantly thinking, “If I can do better, if I behave, or if I succeed, then everything will be fine. I will be needed. I will be loved.”

V. Contributing to dependency: Social isolation/absence of support

5.1 As discussed elsewhere (Ortiz, 2001a), during the course of her husband’s career, the wife must cope with the stress induced by two greedy institutions: her husband’s occupation and her family (Coser, 1974). The wives of professional athletes represent an extraordinary composite of wives in other career-dominated marriages, where they are required to support and defer to the high-profile, high-status, high-salaried, and high-stress occupations of their husbands. Furthermore, as enablers, these wives must not only cope with several sources of stress that are peculiar to a career in professional sports, but also with such sources of stress

as the demands of being the primary parent, role conflict experienced in managing multiple roles (i.e., marital roles, family roles, public roles), celebrity status of their husbands (e.g., self/identity issues in a hypermasculine occupational world), possibility of their husbands' involvement in extramarital relationships (Ortiz, 1997, 2001b), and various power struggles with their husbands and controlling mothers-in-law (Ortiz, 1998). Indeed, in meeting the demands of the sport marriage, these marriage workers learn from their female socialization, marital socialization, and emotional socialization experiences to rely on their impression management skills (Goffman, 1959), emotion management skills (Hochschild, 1983), and control management skills as they perform their many roles. Thus, the very nature of the sport marriage induces stress and contributes to the social isolation of these wives.

5.2 For wives in the masculinized world of professional sports, social isolation is another fact of life (e.g., Mitchell & Cronson, 1987), one that may often produce feelings of alienation, and perhaps greater vulnerability to stress. Constant moving disrupts family households, makes it difficult for displaced wives to form friendships in the city where the husbands' teams are located, and separates them from close friends or family members. Many wives have difficulty establishing lasting friendships with the other wives on their husband's team, and they often avoid trying because they are not sure how long their husbands will remain on the team. Many also have difficulty forming friendships outside of the wives on their teams (Ortiz, 2001a).

5.3 Because a wife is isolated she may rely more on her control work as a strategy in coping with her isolation, and her isolation can intensify marital/familial issues or occupational fluctuations. As a result, her control work becomes a way of claiming personal autonomy and raising self-esteem. As an efficient wife and mother, her domestic skills are often a reflection of her control work. She often feels compelled or pressured to do it all and her control work is a reflection of this. However, despite normalizing her isolation, and despite her relative independence, a wife's dependency can become more difficult to manage when she is separated from her husband (i.e., usually when he is absent from family life); for example, when he is at spring training or training camp, or traveling during the season. Consequently, when stressful occupational events emerge, her isolation becomes even more intensified, her dependency often increases, and her control work becomes more pronounced. Therefore, over a period of time, she may feel trapped in her home.

5.4 In many sport marriages, the wife provides emotional and esteem support for her husband (McCubbin et al., 1980), but his support for her seems to be minimal, particularly during the season or when she is coping with stressful occupational events. His often self-absorbed pursuit of his career frequently leaves her feeling neglected, unappreciated, and emotionally abandoned. As a sisterhood, other players' wives could be an important source of social or emotional support, but despite the appearance of solidarity there are many barriers to developing trusting relationships with them. Not being able to trust or confide in someone often means she has to suppress her emotions and work to present a calm front (Goffman, 1967), particularly in public roles or public situations, as she tries to cope with stressful occupational events. Consequently, her husband's relative indifference, lack of support, and neglect often contribute to a wife's high dependency because he has failed to validate her sense of self as the capable caretaker of their marriage. This often results in emotional strain and feelings of emotional abandonment. As a result, she often tries harder to please him, to feel needed, or to feel loved. Since she does not feel rewarded for her marital labor, and because she may try harder to be the perfect player's wife, her need to be in control becomes

intensified. Thus, her control work becomes self-affirming or self-rewarding in itself, and may replace the minimal or lack of support from her husband.

5.5 How the wives socially construct dependency in their control work, and how mutual dependency emerges in their control work, becomes evident when control work is used as a coping process in responding to the stress induced by the occupational uncertainty and occupational insecurity in their husbands' careers. As the wives often told me, "You have to learn to go with the flow." Failure to do this, or failure to learn this from the unwritten book of rules for wives, may result in a failed marriage. This implies that a wife must be strong, resilient, and adaptive. Wives are provided with numerous opportunities to cope with the stress induced by occupational fluctuations, and to rely on their control work to cope with such stress. This is particularly challenging for wives because, as typical occupational/marital stressors, the diversity and frequency of stressful occupational events require a multidimensional process: stress, coping, control, and adjustment.

VI. Stressful occupational events

6.1 As part of a stress process (e.g., Noh & Avison, 1996; Pearlin, 1989; Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan & Mullan, 1981), the use of control for many wives is inherent in their coping strategies, and they rely on different control tactics as part of their control work in coping with the demands, pressures, and stressors induced by the careers of their husbands. The husband depends on his wife's ability to effectively cope with various familial/marital/occupational stressors, and in doing so the wife often depends both on her husband's dependency on her and on his career to feel needed, loved, or validated. Since wives have no control over the unpredictable occupational events in the careers of their husbands, they have a need to be in control of their households as the consequences of these events spill over into family life. In fact, it is not uncommon for a wife to be a perfectionist. For some wives, perfectionism is a way of compensating for their lack of control. Having control, and doing control work, provides them with the means of coping with the stress induced by occupational events, and demonstrating domestic mastery. Moreover, having control also becomes an intrinsic aspect of a wife's sense of self, particularly for a highly dependent wife. In emphasizing this point, Kathleen said, "It makes me feel important. I'm not a cheerleader. I have a brain. I'm not just sitting in my home or spending the money. But I don't think anybody else knows what I do." Generally, a wife's control work can raise her self-esteem, provide feelings of competence, and provide an avenue for gaining approval and love. In certain ways, these control outcomes are interrelated. A wife's need to be in control, and her control work, involves more than being in charge of specific family situations. Her self-esteem, self-image, and strong feelings of self-worth all play a part in her control work, particularly when she accomplishes a desired outcome and feels successful or masterful when confronting a stressful occupational event (e.g., Szinovacz, 1987). Additionally, the *illusion* of control may in itself be sufficient as a coping strategy. In other words, a wife may define a stressful occupational event as controllable, but in reality she has little, if any, control. Nevertheless, her control work helps her to maintain the definition of the stressful occupational event as controllable--firm in her belief she has control--until it is no longer necessary (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). As a result, it may be very difficult for some wives to minimize their control work, or to relinquish control, because their self-image is linked with their feelings of being in control, and because of their need to be needed. Indeed, as aspects of extreme dependency for certain wives, the enormity of stressful occupational events is emphasized so that inner conflict can be avoided, and a lack of control can be

avoided because failure to do so may induce feelings of insecurity, instability, or some variation of emotive dissonance (Hochschild, 1983).

6.2 Because of the unpredictable nature of her husband's career, because he is usually reluctant to take control if it interferes or detracts from his game, or because of his frequent absences from the home, the wife believes that if she does not take control, no one else will, and nothing will ever be accomplished. As Arisa put it, "I had to take control. He wasn't here most of the time. So I had to take control and then it just spread." In fact, if the husband is highly dependent on his wife, and he has been reluctant to take control in many areas of the marriage, this tendency may be even more pronounced when stressful occupational events emerge. To be "in control of," or to "have control over," a situation is both a way of coping and expressing domestic mastery, particularly during stressful occupational events, and this is often expressed through a wife's control work. Indeed, as Robyn told me, "I had to be controlling and I didn't like that. But I don't see a way to get out of it because, otherwise, our lives wouldn't function." In performing the enabler role and allowing her husband to concentrate on his game, and to be relatively free of family distractions and most family responsibilities during stressful occupational events, a wife normalizes her effort to make the family "stress free" for her husband and his career "family free." Through her domestic mastery, she gains the power to cope with demands of managing their family, and proves she is worthy of praise or love. During a stressful occupational event, a wife's ability to prove domestic mastery through her control work is often reinforced by her husband's dependence on her, and their mutual understanding that he can count on her. In this way, he not only depends on her, but also expects her to effectively cope and do whatever is demanded of her during the stressful occupational event. Consequently, the wife often assumes too much control in their marriage.

6.3 Most occupational events in the careers of their husbands are not only sources of stress for many wives, but also very difficult to cope with because they do not have any control over their emergence, existence, or consequences. In fact, they are powerless to do anything about them, and the more dependent the wife, the more intense her feeling of powerlessness. However, what they feel they can control is the home and family. Thus, through their control work, they exhibit a control pattern by overfocusing on the home and family, and underfocusing on the stressful occupational event. The diversity of stressful occupational events that affect the wives demand a great deal from them emotionally and test their coping skills. Occupational uncertainty and occupational insecurity often evoke feelings of powerlessness, and require a wife's control work and emotion work as she provides emotional support to her husband, and as she herself copes with the stress induced by each.

VII. Occupational uncertainty

7.1 Occupational uncertainty is inherent in different kinds of stressful occupational events, but perhaps the "waiting games" and "setbacks" in the husband's career are two of the more difficult for a wife to cope with. In fact, these events are also very difficult for the husband to cope with because he is highly dependent on his career. Therefore, when they occur he will often shift his dependency from his career to his wife, and overemphasize his dependency on her. This high dependency on his wife is particularly evident in setbacks. She becomes his means of support, and often his only means of support, as he deals with the crisis in his career. Moreover, her husband's dependency often adds to the stressful impact that waiting periods and setbacks have on a wife. As sources of stress, waiting periods and setbacks are stark reminders of, and vividly characterize, the instability of a career in

professional sports. In addition to the increased dependency of their husbands, they disrupt the seasonal routines of the wives, which serve as ways of stabilizing family/marital life in an unpredictable occupational world.

Waiting games

7.2 Playing the waiting game is nerve-racking for wives because of the uncertain nature of an occupational event. Because they have no control over the outcome, they feel “out of control.” Wives, along with their husbands, have to wait for the telephone to ring and hope it is the call they are waiting for. During contract negotiations, for example, family life is on hold until the waiting period is over. Couples have to wait for a designated period of time to pass, typically during the off-season or just before the new season begins, to learn if the husband will receive an offer from a team. After the negotiations are complete, which the husband's agent usually handles, the husband signs his new contract and leaves to join his new team, if he has not already. In doing “organizational” control work, the wife moves the family to their seasonal residence or a new residence. As Marsha put it, “I think, with baseball, men have enough to worry about. They don’t need to worry about planning and organizing.” Because a wife may need to gain approval from herself, or to seek it from others, proving domestic mastery in this way often reflects her dependency on her husband for his approval. However, although the wife often does the moving herself or makes the necessary arrangements, as the family organizer she is constantly aware of trying not to rely on certain control tactics in manipulating her husband if she needs help and if he is reluctant. Relying on the organizer role can have serious repercussions. For example, depending on the stressful occupational event, this role may include a wife’s tendency to rely on “faturizing” as a coping strategy--the process of planning for every possible contingency or outcome. In imagining certain gains and benefits, while avoiding mistakes and pitfalls, futurizing is often an ineffective coping strategy when it becomes a way of trying to control the uncontrollable. Also, as part of her control work, the embracement of the organizer role can become so embedded in the marital relationship that it may lead to certain problems after the husband retires from his career (Goffman, 1961).

7.3 The lockout in major league baseball, which delayed the beginning of the 1990 season, was a very stressful waiting game for wives, but one of the worst waiting games in major league baseball was the labor strike in 1994 that resulted in ending the remainder of the season. These and other kinds of stressful occupational events involve waiting periods that are very difficult for the wives to cope with. Waiting and wishing for the desired outcome, and waiting for their husbands to return to work is often more stressful than wives could ever anticipate. Aside from the fact that wives are not prepared for specific stressful occupational events, much of their psychological distress is based on the socially constructed reality that they do not have any control over stressful occupational events (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). All they can do is to wait and to do control work in ways that help to minimize their stress. During waiting periods, family life--and in many ways marital life--is at a standstill. The uncertainty of the final outcome creates a great deal of tension and anxiety among these couples. Not having any control during these stressful episodes often intensifies a wife’s need to be in control, and this is expressed in her control work as she copes with her feelings of isolation, tension, anxiety, anger, fear, or powerlessness. In this way, a wife’s control work can help to minimize the emotional or psychological strain of what she cannot control. “That’s the only sense of power we can have because everything else in our lives is out of our hands,” insisted Robyn.

7.4 This was apparent among some of the wives during the lockout. Contributing to a wife's stress during the lockout was the presence of her husband in their home, because he "should be" at spring training and not at home--not "underfoot." The presence of the husband can interfere with a wife's control work as a coping strategy. For example, in discussing her husband and her seasonal routine of spring-cleaning as a form of control work, Olivia told me, "All I know is that Lewis shouldn't be here and I can feel it because he's messing up my spring-cleaning. It's just something I'm used to doing right now. I'm edgy because he shouldn't be here." She further explained, "It's not just the spring-cleaning. It's everything. He's getting on my nerves. He's been here too long. Putting it bluntly, it's time for him to go. He's really, really, working on my nerves. He should be at spring training. I need to miss him. He needs to go so I can miss him because right now I don't want him here." Because Lewis is home and underfoot, his presence creates additional stress for Olivia. In such stressful situations, when certain kinds of control work are no longer feasible, a wife will often rely on other kinds of control work. In addition, when the husband is home during a lockout (or strike) he is not as dependent on his wife to manage the family. When he is away from home, at spring training or during the season, he depends heavily on her to manage the family, and she needs him to depend on her to do this. When he is home, his dependency on her to manage the family is somewhat minimal. When the lockout was finally over and the husbands reported to spring training, the stress process and coping process were so intensive for the wives that it took them a long time to recover, and to adequately adjust to a completely unexpected occupational event in their lives.

7.5 Free agency is one of the most stressful waiting games these couples must deal with. Before the beginning of the new season, training camp or spring training can be very stressful for a couple because of the uncertain outcome of this occupational event. A husband with free agency status may not be able to immediately sign a contract with a new team, or to sign any contract with a new team, despite having a fairly successful career with his current team. This is very frustrating for the husband, particularly when current team management has led him to believe he will be re-signed, or when new team management has led him to think he will be signed. The outcome is also uncertain during training camp or spring training because the husband may not make the team, or he may be injured and unable to play. In each situation, the husband may become overly dependent on his wife for emotional or psychological support as he copes with the stress induced by such situations. Because she has to wait until some outcome is determined, free agency is also a stressful situation for the wife. The strain of waiting can be unbearable for a wife because she has to cope with the uncertainty of an uncontrollable situation. This is quite apparent in one of the letters I received from Susan, a mother of seven small children and the wife of a basketball player: "We still haven't signed with a team. Our agent says teams are waiting until after August first because that is when the league reconstructs the salary cap. However, a couple of other free agents have signed recently. . . . Both those teams were possibilities for us." In emphasizing her lack of control over the situation, she stated, "Meanwhile, life goes on, but the suspense is getting nerve racking. . . . It makes me want stability, to be home with just my family. And now, because we don't know where we're going to live, the feeling is intensified. It becomes almost a panic if I let myself think about it too much. I hope this doesn't go on for another month or more." But it did continue for another month, and longer. What seemed to be a short-term situation for Susan turned out to be a stressful long-term waiting period. During this time, while Bill waited and while his agent tried to find an NBA team to sign with, Susan and her family stayed with her parents and siblings for three months. As the new season began, and Bill was still trying to find a new team, this situation intensified her sense of being "out of control." This unexpected and unusually long waiting period also was stressful for Susan

because her seasonal routine was disrupted, and her control work was minimized because she was away from her home--a significant power base for her (McDonald, 1980). Until a husband signs with a team, the wife feels that she has no control, and she will do any kind of control work to cope with the stress induced by the uncertainty of free agency. However, because of her displacement, Susan's control work was greatly hampered and this also contributed to her stress.

7.6 Even under the best of circumstances, an NFL training camp can be a stressful experience for a wife. Waiting to learn if her husband will make the team is difficult because she is powerless to do anything but wait for the outcome, particularly if he is "on the bubble." Throughout the course of her husband's football career, training camp has always been stressful for Elizabeth. During one particular training camp she had a very difficult time waiting to learn if Andrew lost his starting job as the kicker for his team. As the wife of a veteran football player, and a new mother of a baby boy, Elizabeth was well aware of the possibility that her husband could lose his starting position to another kicker. But as Robyn has argued, "You learn to live with the knowledge that you can't control it, and you don't let it get to you." Clearly, Elizabeth did not have any control over the situation. Despite her attempts to cope with the waiting by distracting herself, or blocking the situation out of her mind, she continued to worry about her husband. In discussing her ways of coping she told me, "I'd go to the bar a lot. I'd escape. I had my job, shopping, rearranging the house, and traveling to visit friends I don't get to see very often. But all the time you worry. You don't really ever enjoy anything." During this waiting period, the media and the profusion of "nonstories" about the unfolding events in training camp also contributed to Elizabeth's stress. However, despite her stress, she supported Andrew by trying to make the situation less stressful for him. She explained, "I would go quite often to practice. I would talk to him constantly on the phone. Analyze and reanalyze, pump him up, try to make him feel better that things were okay at home, that we would make it through this, and that everything was going to be okay." Relying on her emotion work, Elizabeth suppressed her fears and anxieties about the outcome as she provided esteem support to her husband to try to boost his confidence (McCubbin et al., 1980). Although she performed the supportive role quite well as she waited, there was nobody she could turn to for support. As a new mother she felt quite alone and isolated which contributed to her lack of control and thus her stress.

7.7 The stress induced by waiting periods is also difficult for a highly dependent wife to cope with because as the "family fixer," her stress is intensified because she is powerless to "fix" the stressful situation, or to play a part in determining the desired outcome. Her need to be needed by her husband and children often leads her to believe, "Only I can fix it." As she waits, she often feels helpless because as a solo stay-at-home mom, and the marriage worker in a two-person career, she believes it is her responsibility to smooth things over or to make things better for her husband and children. Thus, she often becomes more controlling as a way of coping with what is uncontrollable. A common coping strategy is to try to control self by controlling her expectations, frustration, and anxiety. Working on their emotions and controlling their expectations often helps to prepare wives for the worst possible outcome. Contributing to such stress is the constant media coverage of these occupational events. As another common way of coping with such stress, through her "domestic" control work, a wife will try to manage her constant worry about the uncontrollable outcome by distracting or distancing herself from the stressful occupational event (overfocusing on the care of the children, household tasks, or family responsibilities). Still another commonly used coping strategy is to block the situation out of her mind, and domestic control work helps her to do this. As forms of denial, such survival strategies may be effective when they are used for

short periods of time. However, when they are relied on for long periods of time, serious consequences may result.

Setbacks

7.8 In certain ways, setbacks are related to failure in the careers of professional athletes (e.g., Ball, 1976). Setbacks can be stigmatizing for the player (Goffman, 1963), and whenever possible they are to be avoided. Generally, setbacks can be extremely stressful for couples because they create a great deal of uncertainty about their future in professional sports. Setbacks in major league baseball occur, for example, when the couple are convinced that the husband will sign with a major league team but he is instead sent down to the minor league, or when the couple are convinced he would have an opportunity to play in the big leagues but he is not called up. Setbacks in professional sports may include injuries (i.e., severe or chronic), getting cut from the team, getting traded from one team to another (particularly if the new team is not a winner), and early (or forced) retirement. Setbacks in her husband's career can be particularly stressful for a wife, and they are difficult to cope with because serious setbacks may signify the end of his career. Setbacks often induce anxiety, tension, and fear in the wives. Whether expected or unexpected, setbacks are disruptive and confusing for the wives and children. Consequently, many wives define certain setbacks as crisis situations, and they can be so devastating that wives feel betrayed by team management, or feel they are the victims of uncontrollable circumstances or events. In Elizabeth's case, although he managed to make it through training camp, Andrew was eventually cut from his team during the preseason schedule. On a beautiful Sunday afternoon, as Elizabeth was driving and listening to a preseason game on the radio, she was shocked when he missed a crucial field goal. She was so surprised that she shouted out loud, to no one in particular, "Oh my God, that's it, that's it, that's it, that's it." A short time later he was cut from the team, and she was powerless to do anything about it. She was not only furious with team management, but she also felt victimized. For the highly dependent wife, her husband's failure is often perceived as her failure. Elizabeth was devastated by Andrew's release, because he did not have a job when the new season began, but more importantly because it was a serious setback in his football career. Initially, denial became her primary coping strategy. After she was able to fully construct the reality of her husband's release, she began to cope by denying the severity of the cut and by having an optimistic outlook: "It's only a matter of time until he signs with another team." However, when the season was well underway, after Andrew had tried out with several teams but had failed to sign with another team despite his efforts and her support, Elizabeth realized that he would not sign with another team. The reality was so difficult to manage that she gradually descended into a deep depression for a number of months as the season passed them by.

7.9 Beth, the wife of an aging journeyman ballplayer who has seen more time in the minor leagues than the major leagues, had high hopes that he would sign with a major league ball club. After all, Cliff had a very successful career in minor league baseball. But as the end of spring training drew to a close, she was very disappointed when Cliff told her one evening as they were driving home, "We're going down. I got sent out" (i.e., released). She confided, "Until you actually get the news, you always have that ray of hope. So when the axe does fall then it really shakes you. It's like after you've been in an earthquake. It's like that kind of a shock. You want to cry, but you're not sure if you should." This was yet another setback in Cliff's constant struggle to get into big league baseball. Initially, Beth relied on her emotion work to suppress and conceal her frustration and anger. "There are some feelings that I think you have to suppress because you know that no matter what you say it's not going to change

the end result for Cliff. It only reinforces that fact that he got sent out,” admitted Beth. Because she had no idea why he was sent down, her lack of control in the situation was intensified. Like Elizabeth, she felt betrayed and “used” by team management. Her stress and lack of control was further intensified because she was temporarily living with her in-laws, and she was looking forward to moving out of their home and finding a place of their own. Throughout the season, Beth was engaged in a power struggle with her controlling mother-in-law, one in which her control work consisted of countering or deflecting the control work of her mother-in-law. This stressful situation greatly contributed to her sense of isolation.

7.10 For wives, the stress induced by setbacks in the careers of their husbands involves a wide range of emotions such as anxiety, envy, jealousy, rage, and sorrow; and manifestations of stress such as tension, disorientation, confusion, depression, and lack of sleep. In coping with stress or feelings of fear, anger, powerlessness, or vulnerability, a wife will rely on less productive strategies such as denial (e.g., blocking out, distancing, distracting, or avoiding)--because if she does not deny it she feels powerless to do anything about it--emotion work, and control work. More effective strategies often include her low or guarded expectations (i.e., not getting her hopes up), optimism (i.e., thinking things will turn out for the best or that it is temporary, or having faith in God), emotion work, and control work. Given her level of dependency, how a wife defines and copes with the waiting games and setbacks in her husband’s career will often determine how she eventually adjusts to them, and how she accommodates them in managing family life. Also, a wife’s need to be in control may increase if her husband copes by withdrawing from her, excludes her from his coping efforts, or refuses to express his emotions or discuss his concerns. Consequently, she may become even more controlling. Additionally, the more isolated and unsupported she is, the more acute her feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, and thus the more controlling she becomes.

VIII. Occupational insecurity

8.1 Occupational insecurity is the result of the recurring occupational changes in a career in professional sports, and its unpredictable nature in general. The husband has to cope with occupational insecurity because it comes with the occupational territory, but it is the wife who must also cope with it because it comes with the marital territory. Occupational insecurity becomes another source of stress for many wives because the fragility of a career in professional sports and the unexpected occurrence of occupational events contribute to feelings of powerlessness. Through her control work the wife tries to cope with the many twists and turns in her husband’s career as she tries to minimize what she cannot control. Thus, when unexpected occupational events emerge, a wife’s insecurity becomes much more intense, and her stress and coping responses reflect this. Because of the underlying presence of occupational insecurity, when an unexpected occupational event occurs, a wife feels that her world has turned upside down. She is often taken by surprise, and in some cases even shocked, because she does not or cannot anticipate it. Therefore, she feels abandoned, ambushed, and betrayed. She may blame her husband for its occurrence, but more often she blames team management because she has often been told and has come to believe that, “We are family and you and your husband are an important part of our family.” Thus, lacking any control, a wife’s need to be in control is intensified. To cope with a world torn apart by events that are clearly beyond her control, she will often compensate by becoming more controlling, and her control work is a reflection of this coping process.

The last to know: Coping with a life-changing event

8.2 Although occupational insecurity is difficult to live with, it may not always be disruptive or damaging to the husband's career. However, occupational insecurity will often enhance the impact of a stressful occupational event when it does occur, and for some wives it can make a stressful situation even more so. This is often the case with the unexpected trade. Of the many stressful occupational events occurring in a husband's career, perhaps one of the most devastating for the wife is the unexpected trade. A trade can benefit the husband's career. For example, it can add a few more years to his career, it can remove him from an unpleasant situation on his team, or it can put him on a winning team. However, a trade can also be a serious setback. For example, it can put him on a worse team, or it may result in less playing time (or ice time) on the new team. Regardless of the various reasons for a trade, when it is unexpected, the husband has little to do with the final decision. For the wife, the result is a major disruption of her seasonal routines, family life, personal or work life, and generally an established living pattern. In other words, it becomes a situation over which she has no control. A change of residence is usually necessary, along with many decisions about the children and the moving process. Such displacement is not only stressful, but often results in loss of control for many wives, particularly when the first unexpected trade occurs and because of the nature of unexpected trades in general.

8.3 When Todd was unexpectedly traded from his hockey team, and after experiencing the initial shock of what occurred, Gina was so devastated she was beyond emotions. During our morning interview the day after the trade, she told me, "I was numb. I had no emotions. I wasn't shocked. I wasn't surprised. I wasn't anything. I was just going through the motions. I was empty. I was nothing." Gina found herself caught up in what became a serious life-changing event, one in which important marital lessons had to be learned. She did not have any reason to think Todd would ever be traded. Gina may have been highly dependent on Todd's hockey career in the NHL for financial security, or perhaps his hockey career instilled in her a sense of personal or marital stability. Whatever the reasons, the unexpected trade resulted in a major disruption in her life and therefore a loss of control. A wife's false sense of security may often imply a high dependency on her husband's dependency on her or on his career. At the least, it may involve aspects of a wife's dependency on the former or latter, or both. In revealing a false sense of security in our interviews, Gina was secure in her belief that trading Todd would only hurt his team--until it became a reality. When it occurred, she had to socially construct the reality of the trade, and shape it into a reality she could cope with. But this was very difficult for Gina because it did not make any sense to her, and this added to her consternation and resulting disorientation. She insisted, "I'm very logical. That's why this whole thing doesn't sit well with me because it's too illogical. Nothing makes sense. It's all just helter-skelter. It's a stupid business."

8.4 The abrupt way in which the trade was announced by team management and reported by the media, and her emotional response to it, reminded Gina of a death and subsequent funeral. "It was like somebody you are close to dies and you have nothing," she said. Initially, as part of the stress process, she found herself in a state of limbo, numbed by what had occurred. "Sometimes people experience it in slow motion and it just drags on and on, and for other people it goes so fast. But I didn't have my time. It was like the day between the death and the funeral," revealed Gina. In viewing the trade as the end of an important part of her life, comparing the trade to a death and funeral seemed to allow her to help define the trade as a transitional process in Todd's hockey career and their marriage. The funeral image had great symbolic meaning for Gina because she was mourning the passing of an important

part of her life, and processing her grief (Hewitt, 2003). But this was very difficult for her; throughout this stressful occupational event she kept saying to herself, “This isn’t really happening.” She felt betrayed by team management and denial became her initial coping strategy because she resisted the reality of the situation, and her control work reflected this. However, after the trade announcement, as she and Todd were waiting with the team owner and his entourage in the terminal for their chartered flight home (after playing in his last game for the team owner), Gina felt tired of the prevailing hypocrisy and her emotion work in suppressing her anger and resentment. She was tempted to express her fury at the team owner. She recalled, “We were sitting in the lobby, and they had all forgotten that they’ve screwed up my whole life. They turned my whole life upside down, and not just mine but my husband’s, my family, my friends, anybody who knows us. And the owner is being really flip about this, and I just wanted to scream out and say, ‘You’ve just totally fucked up my whole life and you think it’s a joke!’”

8.5 For Gina, occupational insecurity was particularly evident during the events leading up to the trade announcement. She was upset and felt powerless throughout the series of incidents that culminated in the unexpected trade because it did not make any sense to her, and because in her mind it did not seem to be logical. Thus, she firmly believed the trade would never take place. The media coverage surrounding the trade rumors and the eventual press conference also contributed to Gina’s stress. In her effort to cope with what was uncontrollable, Gina was in denial throughout much of the trading process. She tried to ignore the rumors, the possibility it could happen, and finally the telltale “signs.” During much of the trading process she relied on the strategy of denial as she tried to block out of her mind any aspect of the trade. Acceptance and adjustment came slowly in this life-changing event. Gradually, her means of coping became more optimistic as she looked at what she called the “big picture of life,” and decided that for certain reasons (e.g., financial) the move would benefit her husband’s hockey career. After the trade, her false sense of security was not only shattered, but her life changed dramatically. In many ways, it would never be the same.

IX. Control and dependency in the coping process

9.1 A wife often learns there is a personal cost in trying to rely on control work as a coping response during stressful occupational events. She may become overly dependent on her husband’s financial success or some other kind of stability, or her husband may become highly dependent on her and her ability to be in control. Her isolation may contribute to her increasing dependence on her husband and her control work as she embraces such roles as enabler, caregiver, or organizer. Her household can become her power base or cocoon, insulated within a kind of psychological sanctuary. Consequently, the more controlling a wife is, the more difficult the adjustment process after a stressful occupational event. If the wife is a controller, her control work may become a less effective strategy in coping with the stress induced by occupational uncertainty or occupational insecurity. Perhaps a more effective coping strategy is to avoid becoming a controller or embracing the controller role. However, for reasons discussed earlier, this becomes a paradox for the wife. If she can learn “realistic” control work, she may be able to decide when to take responsibility in the coping process, and when to let go of her need to affect outcomes. She can determine what is and what is not realistic. This type of control process reflects a wife’s ability to realistically define the boundaries of her control work as it relates to self, marriage, and family. The opposite of this is “intrusive” control work. This type of control process reflects a wife’s inability to define the boundaries of her control work as it relates to self, marriage, and family. These types of

control work are not only coping processes, but also negotiation processes for the wife in her definitions of stressful occupational events.

9.2 “Futurizing” may be regarded as another unproductive strategy in coping with occupational uncertainty or occupational insecurity. Most wives are quite resilient and resourceful in planning for every contingency at the outset of a stressful occupational event. As soon as the wife defines the occupational event as a stressful situation, she constructs her lines of action according to certain plans that she has developed. Many of the wives often told me, “You learn to go from Plan A, to Plan B, to Plan C, and so on. If one doesn’t work, you go to the next, and the next, and the next.” However, without clearly defined boundaries, this can become a less effective strategy because it becomes a way of trying to control the uncontrollable. Throughout this coping process, the wife often imagines certain gains, gains that may not be realistic or achievable. As a result, stress may become more intensified, and over time she may become burned out or incur health issues.

9.3 Retirement from a career in professional sports, as the final stressful occupational event, is often quite difficult for most husbands because they have been socialized to be highly dependent on their careers and thus, like other professional athletes, they retire only when they are forced to. This occupational event, and subsequent disengagement process (Drahota and Eitzen, 1998), is also very difficult for the wife because she has come to depend on his dependency on his career, and on his dependency on her during his career. During her husband’s career, her sense and validation of self (i.e., self-identity, self-image, self-esteem), has been a very important process in her control work, and in her ability to manage their family. Without her husband’s career, however, a wife’s dependency may no longer have a focus, and her sense of self may no longer be validated in familiar or reassuring ways. Thus, in adjusting to a different kind of life, it may be necessary to redefine not only her enabler or organizer role, but also her identity. This self-transformation process, however, may be very difficult if the wife was a controller, or became a controller, during her husband’s career. In fact, for some wives, desocializing from the role of player’s wife can be a very challenging process. Therefore, it is not uncommon for some wives to accommodate the familiar work/family patterns that allow them to continue with their supportive role. For example, despite her apprehension, Paula’s husband became a police officer after he retired from his baseball career as a major league pitcher. Generally, when their careers in professional sports are over, most of the husbands seem to be happiest when they can somehow stay in the world of sports. Their wives, however, despite their normalization of control work, often have mixed feelings and perhaps would prefer not to remain in the world of sports.

9.4 As one particular kind of control process, control work may become an effective coping process because of the ways in which it minimizes stress or feelings of powerlessness during unexpected occupational events. However, unless a wife pursues activities outside the home, develops interests unrelated to her husband’s career, works to maintain her own identity, reduces her need to please or make others happy, and re-evaluates her dependencies, the demands made upon her will remain stressful and perhaps contribute to the dysfunctional nature of this kind of career-dominated marriage. By learning to rely exclusively on the controller role in the marriage, the wife may learn to rely on less effective coping strategies. More productive coping strategies could be realized, learned, and included in her repertoire of coping styles if she could avoid relying on the controller role. Therefore, to cope more effectively with stressful occupational events, wives should be less dependent and controlling. Failure to do this, and failure to take advantage of intervention strategies, may result in severe consequences for the wife and limit marital success.

X. Conclusion

10.1 This article explored how wives of professional athletes define, experience, and cope with the stressful occupational events in the careers of their husbands, many of which are experienced by their wives as crisis situations or life-changing events. Of particular concern is the dependency process, that is, one in which high dependency seems to be inherent in the control process and the coping process, as wives respond to stress induced by unexpected or stressful occupational events. In the sport marriage, one in which mutual dependency is also evident among these partners, these survival processes have become so normalized by the wives and expressed in their control work that they have become a means to an important end--survival of self and family.

10.2 Occupational uncertainty and occupational insecurity are both inherent in the stressful occupational events that these wives must somehow confront and cope with. As sources of stress, these events reflect the unpredictable and precarious nature of a career in professional sports, and the occupational fluctuations that are both challenging and problematic for most wives. The wives often define waiting games, setbacks, and unexpected occupational changes as crisis situations because the events are usually disruptive, they do not have any control over the events, they are often unsupported, and they do not always have pertinent information about the events. Thus, these women do control work as a way of exerting control, feeling empowered, and coping with what is clearly beyond their control--the uncontrollable. Moreover, in doing control work, they embrace the roles that are conducive to this control process. In the beginning of the coping process, wives must confront a confusing situation, define it in some way, and adjust accordingly. However, to effectively cope with a stressful occupational event, it seems that the greater a wife's feeling of powerlessness, insecurity, or isolation, the greater her need to do control work, particularly for the highly dependent wife.

10.3 A wife's feeling of powerlessness is often characterized by her feelings of being abandoned, victimized, betrayed, or in limbo. Such emotions are experienced in the emergent situations or stages during a stressful occupational event. In the first stage, after learning of the occupational event, the wife is often surprised, shocked, or numbed. In the second stage, her emotional responses often include anger, rage, stress, frustration, anxiety, depression, disillusionment, sorrow, or fear. Many of these emotions not only heighten a wife's dependency, but also contribute to her psychological distress, or in the case of one wife, her physical illness. In the third stage, after the wife defines and acknowledges the stressful occupational event as a reality, she constructs her possible lines of action and options, accepts or rejects what has occurred, constructs her coping responses, adjusts to the new or changing situation, and does what she can in caring for her family. Much of this is manifested in her control work and need to prove domestic mastery. Coping with stressful occupational events includes not only positive and negative strategies, ranging from optimism to denial, but also some aspect of dependency.

10.4 When the outcome of a waiting game, setback, or unexpected change is determined, many wives learn never to trust team management again. They learn that the reality of the relationship is far from being the "family" she was told to embrace. Through this marital socialization process, one in which wives must negotiate the occupational realities in the careers of their husbands and learn to survive them as they manage self and family, they learn that the world of professional sports is a business and that, because winning is profitable, their husbands are expendable. Therefore, through some difficult life and marital lessons,

these women become painfully aware that a career as a professional athlete can be fleeting, that they must avoid having a false sense of security, and that they must guard against high or naive expectations. Based upon their experiences with stressful occupational events, they have learned more than they want to learn about team politics, and about how the game within the game is played in the careers of their husbands. They have also learned a great deal more about the unwritten book of rules for wives, about how such rules are enforced by the powers that be in the hypermasculine world of professional sports, and about how little power and control they have outside of their marriages as wives of public men who are often sport heroes. Their greater awareness of the unwritten book of rules, however, raises certain questions. What is the cost for these resourceful wives of celebrated men? Is burnout inevitable? What is the basis of their coping skills? Such survival skills may serve them well, and women in other career-dominated marriages can learn from these women, but over a period of time what price do these women pay?

Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this article was presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, April 18-21, 2002. The ethnographic research reported here was supported in part by grants from the American Sociological Association Minority Fellowship Program, and the Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley. I am very grateful to Arlie Russell Hochschild for her generous comments and insightful suggestions on earlier versions. I am also deeply indebted to the wives for sharing their lives and heartfelt stories with me. All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the wives, husbands, and teams. However, their experiences have been preserved.

References

- Avison, W. R. & Turner, R. J. (1988). Stressful life events and depressive symptoms: Disaggregating the effects of acute stressors and chronic strains. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 29, 253-264.
- Aytac, I. A. & Teachman, J. D. (1992). Occupational sex segregation, marital power, and household division of labor. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, 20-24 Aug., Pittsburg, PA.
- Ball, D. W. (1976). Failure in sport. American Sociological Review, 41, 726-739.
- Berger, P. & Luckmann, T. (1967). The social construction of reality. New York: Anchor/Doubleday.
- Blumer, H. (1969). The methodological position of symbolic interactionism. In H. Blumer, Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method (pp. 1-60). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Conger, R. D., Lorenz, F. O., Elder, G. H., Simons, R. L., & Ge, X. (1993). Husband and wife differences in response to undesirable life events. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 34, 71-88.

- Coser, L. A. (1974). Greedy institutions: Patterns of undivided commitment. New York: Free Press.
- Cronson, H. & Mitchell, G. (1987). Athletes and their families: Adapting to the stresses of professional sports. The Physician and Sports Medicine, 15, 121-127.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). The research act: A theoretical introduction to sociological methods. 3d ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Drahota, J. T. & Eitzen, D. S. (1998). The role exit of professional athletes. Sociology of Sport Journal, 15, 263-278.
- Farole, C. A. (1996). Sources of stress for major league baseball players' wives. Journal of Performance Education, 1, 77-99.
- Finch, J. (1983). Married to the job: Wives' incorporation in men's work. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Frey, J. H. & Fontana, A. (1991). The group interview in social research. Social Science Journal, 28, 175-187.
- Ge, X., Conger, R. D., Lorenz, F. O., & Simons, R. L. (1994). Parents' stressful life events and adolescent depressed mood. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 35, 28-44.
- Goffman, E. (1959). The presentation of self in everyday life. Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday.
- Goffman, E. (1961). Role distance. In E. Goffman, Encounters: Two studies in the sociology of interaction (pp. 82-152). Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Goffman, E. (1963). Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Goffman, E. (1967). On face-work. In E. Goffman, Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior (pp. 5-46). Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Hewitt, J. P. (2003). Self and society: A symbolic interactionist social psychology. 9th ed. New York: Allyn and Bacon.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. American Journal of Sociology, 85, 551-75.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1983). The managed heart: Commercialization of human feeling. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Holstein, J. A. & Gubrium, J. F. (1995). The active interview. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Jonassohn, K., Turowetz, A. & Gruneau, R. (1981). Research methods in the sociology of sport: strategies and problems. Qualitative Sociology, 4, 179-197.

- Kanungo, R. N. (1979). The concepts of alienation and involvement revisited. Psychological Bulletin, 86, 119-138.
- Lazarus, R. S. & Folkman, S. (1984). Stress, appraisal, and coping. New York: Springer.
- McCubbin, H. I., Joy, C. B., Cauble, A. E., Comeau, J. K., Patterson, J. M., & Needle, R. H. (1980). Family stress and coping: A decade review. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 42, 125-141.
- McDonald, G. W. (1980). Family power: The assessment of a decade of theory and research. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 42, 111-124.
- Mitchell, G. & Cronson, H. (1987). The celebrity family: A clinical perspective. American Journal of Family Therapy, 15, 235-241.
- Nixon, H. L. & Frey, J. H. (1996). A sociology of sport. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Noh, S. & Avison, W. R. (1996). Asian immigrants and the stress process: A study of Koreans in Canada. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 37, 192-206.
- Ortiz, S. M. (1994a). When happiness ends and coping begins: The private pain of the professional athlete's wife. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Berkeley.
- Ortiz, S. M. (1994b). Clinical typifications by wives of professional athletes: The field researcher as therapist. Clinical Sociology Review, 12, 49-69.
- Ortiz, S. M. (1997). Traveling with the ball club: A code of conduct for wives only. Symbolic Interaction, 20, 225-249.
- Ortiz, S. M. (1998). Competing for power in sport families: The wife and controlling mother-in-law. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Sociological Association, 16-19 Apr., San Francisco, CA.
- Ortiz, S. M. (2001a). How interviewing became therapy for wives of professional athletes: Learning from a serendipitous experience. Qualitative Inquiry, 7, 192-220.
- Ortiz, S. M. (2001b). When sport heroes stumble: Stress and coping responses to extramarital relationships among wives of professional athletes. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, 18-21 Aug., Anaheim, CA.
- Papanek, H. (1973). Men, women, and work: Reflections on the two-person career. American Journal of Sociology, 78, 852-872.
- Pearlin, L. I. (1989). The sociological study of stress. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 30, 241-256.
- Pearlin, L. I., Lieberman, M. A., Menaghan, E. G., & Mullan, J. T. (1981). The stress process. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 22, 337-356.

- Stets, J. E. (1995). Job autonomy and control over one's spouse: A contemporary process. Journal of Health and Social Behavior, 36, 244-258.
- Szinovacz, M. E. (1987). Family power. In M. B. Sussman & S. K. Steinmetz (Eds.), Handbook of marriage and the family (pp. 651-693). New York: Plenum Press.
- Taylor, M. G. & Hartley, S. F. (1975). The two-person career: A classic example. Sociology of Work and Occupations, 2, 354-372.
- Toits, P. A. (1984). Coping, social support, and psychological outcomes: The central role of emotion. In P. Shaver (Ed.), Review of personality and social psychology (pp. 219-238), vol. 5. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Toits, P. A. (1995). Stress, coping, and social support processes: Where are we? What next? Journal of Health and Social Behavior, Extra issue, 53-79.
- Thomas W. I. (1937). Primitive behavior: An introduction to the social sciences. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Thomas, W. I. & Thomas, D. S. (1928). The child in America: Behavior problems and programs. New York: Knopf.
- Turner, R. H. (1956). Role taking, role standpoint, and reference-group behavior. American Journal of Sociology, 61, 316-328.
- Turner, R. H. (1962). Role-taking: Process versus conformity. In A. M. Rose (Ed.), Human behavior and social processes: An interactionist approach (pp. 20-40). Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Turner, R. H. (1978). The role and the person. American Journal of Sociology, 84, 1-23.