

THE FOOTBALL WIFE

THE FOOTBALL WIFE:
DEVELOPING A COURTESY IDENTITY

By

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ABSTRACT

Virtually the entire body of scholarly literature on professional sport focuses on athletes themselves, rarely directly considering the impact of sport on the significant others in their lives or the role these significant others play in the career path and decision-making processes of athletes. In recent years, a limited, but growing, body of scholarly literature on athlete's wives and sport marriages has begun to emerge with respect to American sports. However, little work has been done on the role and experiences of football spouses in the Canadian context. This dissertation focuses on football spouses in the Canadian Football League (CFL). I use an ethnographic approach relying on in-depth interview with football spouses from the CFL to explore how they experience their partners' football careers, with a focus on their identity construction. I also used participant observation (at training camp and football related events) to gather data and collected and analyzed secondary documents (newspaper articles, blogs, tweets).

Working from an interactionist perspective, I offer the empirically grounded concept of a "courtesy identity" to explain how these women confront the challenges of being known through their intimate relationships. I argue that these women are active agents who negotiate how much they are willing to transform themselves to meet the demands of football life. The "football wife" identity is always emerging and changing in response to the messages women receive about being a football wife during their interactions with others (both insiders and outsiders in the social world of the CFL) and as they encounter new situations. I demonstrate this argument by exploring: (a) how these women develop the football wife identity by focusing on their day-to-day private lives; (b) how the spousal subculture helps these women to negotiate the challenges of being a football wife while at the same time creating challenges of its own; and, (c) how football spouses negotiate their husbands' celebrity status by examining how these women manage their presentation of the football wife identity in public.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION	1
Canadian Football League, Professional Sport.....	3
Athletes' Wives.....	7
Dissertation Overview	14

CHAPTER TWO

INTERCONNECTION: THE THEORY AND METHOD USE TO STUDY CFL FOOTBALL SPOUSES	17
Symbolic Interaction.....	17
The Ethnographic Approach	19
Getting Started: Why Football Spouses?.....	21
Participant Observation.....	23
In-depth Interviews.....	24
Secondary Documents	27
Researcher Bargains.....	30
Searching for a Gatekeeper.....	31
Maintaining Confidentiality.....	32
Dealing with Sensitive Information.....	35
Grounded Theory Approach to Data Analysis.....	38
Open and Focused Coding.....	39
Memo Writing	40
Using Sensitizing Concepts	41
Self and Identity.....	44

CHAPTER THREE

MANNING THE HOUSE: INTERNALIZING THE FOOTBALL WIFE ROLE ...	52
Defining Self as a "Real" Football Wife.....	53
Meeting Prior to his Professional Career.....	55
I Love the Man, not the Football Player	56
We Made It	58
Life Revolves around Football: Role Engulfment	61

Following their Partners' Lead	62
Football Comes First.....	64
The Role of The Football Wife.....	66
Managing the Household	67
Raising Children	69
Managing Instabilities in Uncertain Times.....	71
Helping Recover from Injuries	74
Managing the Football Wife Identity.....	77
Negotiating the Football Wife Identity	84
Conclusion	87

CHAPTER FOUR

JOINING THE SPOUSAL SUBCULTURE: NEGOTIATING THE FOOTBALL

WIFE IDENTITY	89
Properties and Characteristics of the Spousal Subculture.....	91
The Role of the Head Coach's Wife.....	93
Gaining Access	94
Involvement in the Spousal Subculture	98
Factors of Destabilization	104
Team Competition	105
Career Mobility.....	106
The Man Code	108
The Spousal Subculture Hierarchy	110
Relationship Status.....	111
Role on the Team.....	113
On-field Performance.....	116
Conclusion	117

CHAPTER FIVE

MANAGING HIS CELEBRITY STATUS: DEVELOPMENT OF A COURTESY IDENTITY AND PRESENTATION OF SELF AS A FOOTBALL

WIFE	119
Celebrity as a Lived-Experience	120
The Rule of Being a Football wife	123
The Ideal Image of the Football Wife.....	124
Keeping Quiet: Football Related Information is Private	127
Consequences for Misbehaving Wives.....	130

Personal Costs to Being a Football Wife	135
Media	135
Angry Football Fans	137
Advances from Groupies	140
Conclusion	142
CHAPTER SIX	
CONCLUSION	144
Contributions.....	144
Future Research	153
REFERENCES	159
APPENDIX A INTERVIEW GUIDE	177
APPENDIX B LETTER OF INFORMATION CONSENT FORM	180

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Whether they like it or not, NFL women are defined by who their partners are and what they do for a living. The women become “football wives” and there is no escaping the label. Some women accept it with great pride, and others hide their association with the NFL as much as possible, for once this association is revealed, it becomes their primary identity, even with friends. (O’Toole 2006:82)

In her book *Wedded to the Game: The Real Lives of NFL Women*, Shannon O’Toole (2006) provides firsthand accounts of women married to professional football players and coaches in the United States. Her book highlights how these women are often primarily labeled as “football wives” because their identity becomes associated socially with their husbands’ careers. A limited but growing body of scholarly literature on athlete’s wives has echoed this sentiment, noting that most people have a tendency to refer to them as “so-and-so’s wife,” rather than referring to the woman as an individual person (Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2006; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995, 1999). While this issue has, to some extent, been explored with respect to American sports, in this dissertation I focus on the Canadian context in order to offer a comparative base for understanding the culture of sport and sport marriages.

The purpose of this dissertation is two-fold. Substantively, I examine how football spouses¹ from the Canadian Football League (CFL) experience their husband's career and achieve the identity of a "football wife." Theoretically, I develop the concept "courtesy identity" to explain the characteristics and parameters of this football wife identity. While identity construction is the focus of the dissertation, the analysis explores the day-to-day life of being married to a professional football player in the CFL, how these women participate in supporting their husbands' careers, their involvement in the football spouses' subcultures, and how they deal with the celebrity side of professional football. In doing so, I illustrate how football spouses experience the highs and lows, the excitement and frustrations, and the perks and limitations brought on by being attached to a man with a career of professional football. In this chapter I will: (1) provide a literature review of the existing research on athletes' wives and describe the dissertation's theoretical contributions; and (2) present an overview of the chapters to come. First, though, I will describe the CFL and highlight its differences and similarities to other North American professional sport leagues. I also take the time to summarize some of the research done on the leagues and its players. While some of this research may seem tangential to the experiences of football spouses, in fact it is pertinent in the sense that it describes the world within which they find themselves.

¹ For consistency and coherence, I use the term spouses when discussing my participants generally because interviews were done with women who were dating, engaged to, or married to players and coaches in the CFL. When quoting a participant, I will refer to their status title (for example, "as one girlfriend said"). While the terms "athlete's wife," "so-and-so's wife" and "football wife" are commonly used in the literature, I will use the term "football wife" when referring to the identity.

CANADIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE, PROFESSIONAL SPORT

The CFL is Canada's national professional football league. The CFL has its own unique history as a sport arising from the combination of English rugby and American football. The game has gone through many changes and transformations over the years and is currently distinct as compared to the National Football League (NFL).² Unlike other major professional leagues in North America (NFL, Major League Baseball (MLB), National Hockey League (NHL), National Basketball Association (NBA)) which have over 30 teams in each league, the CFL is smaller with nine teams across Canada, stretching from Vancouver, British Columbia to Montreal, Quebec. The league is divided into an Eastern Conference and Western Conference. In the east there are four teams: Toronto, Hamilton, Montreal, and Ottawa. In the west, there are five teams: Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia. As a smaller league, the CFL offers fewer employment opportunities and therefore makes up a comparatively small social world to study.

The CFL is unlike other professional leagues such as, for example, the NFL, MLB, NBA, and NHL in other ways. First, the CFL places requirements on nationality in the form of an "import-ratio." Each team has to have a minimum of 21 "national" (Canadian) players and the maximum of 20 international players. For players, this ruling can mean they will be cut from a team, not because they lack skill, but due to their nationality. Second, the salaries of CFL players are relatively low compared to other

² See Cosentino (1995) and Stebbins (1993) for a discussion on the history and development of the CFL.

major league professional athletes and salaries are not publicly disclosed. For the 2016 season, for instance, each team has a maximum budget of 5.1 million dollars (as cited in the CFL Collective Bargaining Agreement 2014). This is a very small amount compared to the 2016 salary cap of \$73 million per NHL team (The Associated Press 2016) and the NFL cap of \$155.27 million dollar salary cap per team (Knoblauch 2016).³ In consequence, while athletes in most other major professional sport leagues earn around a million dollars, with the stars making well over 10 million dollars, the average salary for a CFL player is between \$80,000-85,000 (Scott-Clarke 2012). This salary is not high enough for players to save for retirement nor does it provide adequate financial resources to cover medial costs after being injured or released from their teams (Fogel 2013). In fact, many players have to work in the offseason because their football income is not high enough (Fogel 2013).

While the salary and import ratio rule are the key differences between the CFL and other major professional leagues, the CFL is similar to other professional sport leagues in that its culture can be characterized as an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity. That is, it is an organization that celebrates and supports the ideal that men in sport are to be dominant, aggressive, ambitious, strong, unemotional and self-reliant (Connell 1987; Fogel 2011, 2013; Messner 1992; Stebbins 1993). The CFL is also similar to other forms of professional sport in that careers are unpredictable and uncertain. These uncertainties include the reality of being a saleable commodity (e.g., trades and re-signing contracts),

³ The CFL salaries are more equivalent to the American Hockey League (AHL) or Minor League Baseball (Milb). These two leagues are the farm teams for the NHL and MLB, respectively. For example, an NHL team is affiliated with an AHL team. If the NHL team needs players (due to injuries), they can call up players from their farm team.

setbacks (e.g., injuries, losing form), and lack of control over terms of employment (Fogel 2013; Roderick 2006; Young 1993). Professional sports are one of, if not, the only occupation where employees (athletes) are treated like commodities that have a monetary value, who then are bought, sold and traded within an organization (Goldman 1983).

Stebbins (1993) and Fogel (2013) shed light on this particular Canadian subculture by providing detailed accounts from players from the CFL. For example, in exploring football in Canada, Stebbins (1993) interviewed players from a junior team, a university team and professionals from the CFL. He found that there were five career stages that football players (both amateur and professional) go through. These stages include: (1) the beginning; (2) development stage; (3) establishing one's self; (4) maintenance stage; and (5) the declining stage. Within these stages Stebbins illustrates the different turning points and contingencies that football players in the CFL face. Stebbins (1993) notes the life of a typical Canadian football player:

... is one of jolting bumps, painful bruises, and incapacitating injuries, and sometimes uneasy relations with the press, bitter disagreements with team management and an assortment of other detractors from the game. Added up, they make an impressive list. Yet, when weighted against the powerful love of football that drives its players, the detractors seldom tip the scales towards quitting the game. (P. 122)

This research highlights the many career contingencies and instabilities football players are faced with during their career. It demonstrates how players deal with these uncertainties because they love the game of football and are committed to having a professional career.

More recently, Fogel (2013) studied crime and deviance within sport and examined on-field violence, hazing, and performance-enhancing drug use in Canadian

football. His study concentrates on how these acts are “tolerated by individuals in positions of power because they serve the interest of capital accumulation and create precarious labour conditions for players” (Fogel 2013:139-140). Fogel’s research also focused on various personal issues faced by players in Canadian football (such as serious injuries, chronic physical pain, and psychological harm), illustrating how players get little support from their teams or the league, especially if they are no longer active in the league. He argues that a career in the CFL is precarious labour: “few CFL players have guaranteed contracts, their income is short-term, and they are not provided with long-term health care benefits despite the violent nature of their work” (Fogel 2013:112). This high degree of instability and uncertainty not only affects the players themselves but also those who are close to them, especially spouses who tend to provide their major form of emotional and family support.

To date, there has been little discussion of the lives of football spouses or their roles as part of the player’s football career in the CFL. Stebbins (1993) does touch on the role of women in the male-oriented world of professional football, but his discussion is limited to only four pages of his book. He notes, that it is common for professional football players to be married⁴ and writes, “women of football players accept football as a way of life. Some players say their wife or girlfriend is accepting because she knows that it will last only a few years” (Stebbins 1993:160). While this finding may be true for some football spouses, it offers a limited view of the actualities and experiences of women involved in intimate relationships with football players. There is a definite lack of

⁴ Stebbins (1993) reports 83% of the professional players were married.

research attention to the partners of athletes in all professional sport leagues, but a relatively small body of literature has begun to emerge. I review the main findings of that work in the next section.

ATHLETE'S WIVES

The topic of athletes' wives has gained popularity in the media over the past decade. Originating in the United Kingdom, the prominent term WAGS (wives and girlfriends of sportsmen) is often used when referring to these women. It is not uncommon these days for television cameras to focus in on these women at games, or for them to be asked to volunteer their time for charity. Sometimes pictures and stories about their lives appear in newspapers, magazines, or on social media platforms such as Twitter. Various reality television shows have also featured the lives of women married to professional athletes, for example VH1's *Baseball Wives* and *Football Wives* and E!'s *WAGS*.

The Canadian show *Hockey Wives* premiered on the W Network March 18, 2015. This show gives an insider perspective on the daily lives of women dating and married to NHL hockey players, portraying the glamorous lifestyle while also illustrating the difficulties and stressful situations hockey wives face because of their husbands' careers. This reality show confirms stereotypical images found in the tabloid media, which often portrays these women as beautiful, thin and wealthy, living glamorous lifestyles with few worries (Clayton and Harris 2004; Roderick 2012). As Clayton and Harris (2004) argue, this imagery reproduces masculine hegemony in professional sport. The women are framed as submissive and passive relative to their husbands.

While these stereotypes exist in media representations, they differ (at times, dramatically) from the lived experiences of athletes' wives studied to date (for example Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995). The major contributor to the literature on athletes' wives is Steven Ortiz (1997, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011), whose insightful ethnography included 48 in-depth interviews with spouses of professional athletes from MLB, NFL, NBA, and NHL. Drawing on the concept of career-dominated marriage, Ortiz (2002) describes life for an athlete's wife in a sport marriage,

which requires them [athletes' wives] to support and defer to their husbands' high-profile, high-status, high-income, and high-stress occupation. These wives usually lead lives characterized by geographic mobility or instability and deal with their husband's routine and extended absences from home because of work-related travel. (P. 528)

Ortiz (2002; 2006) argues that women married to professional athletes learn through marital and emotional socialization to be responsible for family care work, to enact a "wife of" role, and to participate within the marriage in a "two-person career" (see also Finch 1983; Papanek 1973). Ortiz (2002) examines how the professional athlete's wife must manage the domestic side of their life and try to make "the family stress free for him" (p. 3). He furthers this argument by describing how these women engage in "control work." That is, they control the domestic side of their shared lives as a response to the unpredictable nature of their husbands' careers. By supporting their partners' careers these women feel needed, loved and validated.

Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) confirm Ortiz's analysis of the traditional roles played by athletes' wives in their study on how the structure and constraint (high

geographical mobility, husband's frequent absence, lack of social support network and the precariousness of baseball careers) of professional baseball careers shapes their lives. These authors found that a baseball wife's primary role is to support her husband by taking on heavy responsibility of their daily life and parenting and, importantly, placing their own career plans on hold. The authors illustrate how baseball culture idealizes masculinity and male dominance and, in doing so, idealizes images of home and family: "[P]layers and coaches need wives to have 'homes.' Wives provide companionship, stability, and emotional support off the field—all positive goods in the baseball world" (Gmelch and San Antonio 2001:353). Gmelch and San Antonio's focus on women's performance of domestic labour is a topic commonly explored in the literature. Their findings support other reports that most athlete wives embrace the role of a traditional housewife and make personal sacrifices for their husbands' careers (Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 2002, 2006, 2011; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1999).

Some research has focused on the interactions and relationships between athletes' wives (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997; Thompson 1995, 1999). Findings indicate that socializing with other wives is common, and that they often attend public events and team related occasions together. They also take part in team charity events and team-related family social events (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997; Thompson 1995). Since these women often live in similar social situations, Thompson (1995) found that hockey wives often develop their own group culture. Within these contexts, some women remain distant but friendly with other wives, while others will develop close friendships with two or

three other spouses, offering support for each other (Thompson 1995). She also found that hockey wives are reluctant to make friendships outside of hockey because they worry that people outside of sport are interested in their friendship only as a way of getting close to their husband (Thompson 1995). The uncertainties of the professional sports career can also make women less inclined to invest in outside friendships because there is always a chance that their husband might be traded or signed to another team. For example, Gmelch and San Antonio (2001) found that baseball wives are often isolated—they may be “friendly with fellow baseball wives, but these relationships are seldom long-standing or again deep due to their husband’s mobility” (p. 340). These studies highlight some of the problems athletes’ wives face in forming lasting friendships.

The literature also suggests that many athletes’ spouses are required to follow a “code of conduct.” This might consist of following informal rules and norms set by the team’s subculture or official rules issued by the team’s organization (Ortiz 1997; 2011; Thompson 1995). Ortiz (1997) illustrated the types of informal rules baseball spouses had to adhere to while traveling with the baseball club: there were certain players who they could or could not talk to on airplanes and buses; spouses were to stay out of hotel bars; and they had to display appropriate emotions and behaviours based on to the team’s performance (e.g., no laughing and appearing happy after a loss). While the players and coaches set these rules informally, some sport teams do have official rules and expectations for these women. For example, the following memo was placed on an NHL hockey team’s bulletin board. Although it is lengthy, it shows how spouses’ conduct is regulated as a result of their husbands’ careers through formal rules:

To: All Hockey Wives

1. Talk about other players only as you want heard about your own husband.
2. Don't let the ups and downs of your husband's career or the way he is going on the ice, at any given time, affect your behaviour.
3. No error is funny because your man has 80 games a year in which to duplicate it or maybe make it worse.
4. Fans may upset you but as long as he is on the ice, he belongs to the team and to the game, not you.
5. Trades are made by the front office. Though good friends are leaving, the merits of a trade belong in the front office. No trade is ever approved by Good Housekeeping.
6. Since your husband is in the NHL, he is a star. The life of the wives of stars is a happy one. The paydays have been healthy and regular for a long time. Your husband plays every game and every night seems like Academy Award Night. Your biggest question may be deciding what products to endorse. The wives of the star must become natural leaders of the hockey wives society. You must be careful not to form too tight a clique or the hockey club could find itself in the struggle between the high rent district and the middle class instead of one for the title.
7. Tell your husband you don't play hockey, you WORK at hockey. The true hockey wife knows that hockey is not a game when your paycheck depends on his ability to perform.
8. Your husband is something special to us and to you. Help us care for him. (*The Waiting Game* as cited in Thompson 1995:20).

In this example, the organization clearly lays out guidelines and expectations for hockey wives. Both examples illustrate how women are socialized into the world professional sport and learn to support their husbands' career, behave in public, interact with other wives and defer to their husbands' careers (Ortiz 1997, 2002).

Recently, Ortiz (2011) documented the emotional work athletes' spouses do as part of the unwritten rules of the sport marriage. Drawing on Hochschild (1983, 1990), Ortiz (2011) focuses on how these women use emotional management to convey the "right emotional" demeanor for appropriate situations ("feeling rules") and how to convey these to others ("display rules") as a form of invisible marital labor within a sport

marriage. These rules include, presenting her “wife face,” sharing moods, managing her emotions at home, and performing her wifely duty. Presenting her “wife face” means wives have to express the right public image, maintain their poise and avoid making the “wrong face” in public (Ortiz 2011). Furthermore, spouses are socialized to subordinate their emotions to their husbands’ or the teams’ emotions (Ortiz 1997, 2011). For example, when problems arise at home, wives tend to be reluctant to make an issue out of them for fear of upsetting their partners during the sports season. Instead, they will wait until the season is over to share their concerns. Another emotional management strategy includes performing her “wifely duty,” which means making themselves available sexually so that their husbands are not tempted to seek out extramarital relationships. In sum, these women become socialized to accept their male career-dominated relationships and have normalized their use of emotion management to serve the team’s needs. In turn, this can have profound negative effects on their own emotional stability (Ortiz 2011).

Finally, the majority of the studies on athletes’ spouses confirm that a major problem encountered by these women is establishing their own identity (Cronson and Mitchell 1987; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2002, 2006, 2011; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995, 1999) As Thompson (1999) claims, hockey wives find it hard to establish their own identities because they are consumed by their husbands’ careers (Thompson, 1999; McKenzie, 1999). Notably, Thompson (1995) found that hockey wives described how, being very young when they met their husbands, “they were really too young to have established their own identity” (p. 55) and came to perceive themselves as part of the team.

More recently, Binns-Terrill (2012) conducted a detailed autoethnographic and narrative inquiry into the lives of NFL spouses. Her work focused on the communicative processes and struggles these women face in negotiating what she calls “duelling selves” and their identities in their romantic relationships. She found a “relational dialectic of dependence/independence,” in that NFL spouses want to have their own identities but also want to be the NFL wife, which means “individuality is sacrificed to be a part of the NFL team experience; that may mean not only identifying with the team, but also becoming an extension of the NFL player” (Binns-Terrill 2012:326). This tension suggests that these women do not just lose their identities but are constantly negotiating who they are. Given this body of research and the common themes present in the literature, it is highly likely that similar patterns of external/internal social constraints and identity uncertainties will exist in CFL spouses.

Building upon this knowledge base, I explore the football wife identity from the perspective of CFL spouses, women who conduct their everyday lives as part of an intimate relationship with a professional football player. Instead of viewing the CFL spouse as a victim who constantly submerges her sense of self to meet the demands of football life, however, I argue that these women are active agents who negotiate just how much they are willing to transform themselves to meet the demands of football life. In other words, the identity of “football wife” is always emerging and changing in relation to the messages received about being a football wife in interaction with others (both insiders and outsiders of the social world of the CFL) and in new situations encountered. I offer

the empirically grounded concept of a “courtesy identity” to explain how these women become known through their intimate relationship.

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

Chapter Two explains the theoretical framework that informs my research and the research methods I used. The chapter addresses the use of symbolic interactionism and ethnographic methods as they relate to the research setting and the conceptual framework on which my data analysis is based. I follow this with a description of how the data was collected using participant observation, in-depth interviews and secondary documents. Employing a grounded theory approach, I analyzed the data focusing on the emerging themes and concepts as they related to the football wife identity. I conclude the chapter by reviewing the literature on self and identity providing a basis for the analysis of the concept courtesy identity.

Chapter Three focuses on the processes of socialization involved in learning the social rules of being a CFL spouse and how they construct their own personal identities as a “football wife.” In that chapter, I provide a view into the private lives of football spouses and argue that, as much as their husbands, these women acquire the perspective that their husbands’ football career is the most significant factor in their lives. Specifically, through the process of marital socialization, these women learn to defer to their husband’s career, and to provide the domestic labour for the family. They become so engulfed by the world of professional sport that their sense of self becomes tied to the successes of their husbands and their accomplishments. The chapter also highlights the tensions football spouses face in defining themselves as individuals and the challenges

they face in forming an identity separate from their husband. Finally, the chapter illustrates that the football wife identity is negotiated situationally through their interactions with others (both insiders and outsiders of the social world of the CFL).

Building on the established understanding of the socialization processes from Chapter Three, Chapter Four then examines football spouses' participation in spousal subcultures. I demonstrate how others both perceive and value these women as extensions of their husbands rather than as individuals in their own right. It is this social identification that continues the process of developing and maintaining the courtesy identity of a "football wife." Focusing on football spouses' subcultural involvements, I describe the properties and characteristics of these subcultures and how these women gain access to them. I show how these subcultures provide a place for these women to feel supported by peers who have a sympathetic understanding of life in professional sport. However, I also demonstrate the barriers these women encounter in forming close ties and friendships with other spouses. I argue that these subcultures are sites of socialization and social control, where traditional values are reinforced among football spouses and the normative expectations of what it is to be a "good" football wife are upheld. This contributes to a process by which the football wife identity becomes a central social identity that is continually changing and transforming, not due to her own accomplishment, but due to her husband's football accomplishments.

Chapter Five addresses the celebrity side of professional football. The chapter focuses on the "football wife" identity as a public identity that spouses learn to perform. I explore how football spouses manage their presentations of self in public and how they

learn informal rules for behaving in public (as well as the consequences of breaking these rules). In short, these women quickly learn that their behaviour can affect their husband's career. Finally, I also examine how these women manage and negotiate their interactions with the media, hostile football fans, and groupies. I argue that these women constantly self-monitor their behaviour to perform a socially acceptable presentation of the "football wife" identity.

In the last section, Chapter Six, I summarize the major findings of this research. I discuss the concept of a courtesy identity as it relates to my research data. Specifically, I argue that the "football wife" is a courtesy identity that women construct through their relationship to their husband, their connection to their husband's professional football career, and within their spousal subcultures. I maintain that a courtesy identity is a viable "sensitizing concept" that can be employed to help us understand the influence relationships have on identity construction, especially intimate relationships involving significant others such as partners and close family members. I conclude the chapter by suggesting areas for future research.

CHAPTER TWO:

INTERCONNECTION: THE THEORY AND METHOD USED TO STUDY CFL FOOTBALL SPOUSES

In this chapter I present the theoretical and methodological approaches emphasized in this research. From the outset, I adopted a symbolic interactionist approach that privileges people's lived experiences and how they make sense of their life situations in conjunction with others (Blumer 1969; Prus 1996). Researchers working in the tradition advocate for a particular methodological approach that focuses on lived experiences, emergent theory, and social processes. As such, I wrote this chapter in such a way as to show how theory and methodology are connected. As I progressed through the research project, I continually moved between data collection, data analysis, and theory. I demonstrate these connections mainly through my discussion of sensitizing concepts and a description of how the "courtesy identity" concept emerged in my study.

In terms of this chapter's progression, I begin by discussing symbolic interactionism and how it is best suited to attend to the lived experiences of football spouses. Next, I describe how I became focused on football spouses and collected the data for this project. I follow this discussion by detailing how I analyzed the data and the subsequent emergence of the sensitizing concept "courtesy identity." I conclude by highlighting more specifically the literature on self and identity.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

The theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism provides a distinctive approach to the study of human group life and human conduct. Symbolic interactionism is

rooted in American pragmatism, specifically the works of John Dewey, William James, Charles Horton Cooley, and, most notably, George Herbert Mead. Based on Mead's (1934) pragmatist philosophy on acting and knowing, Blumer (1969) outlined three basic tenets of symbolic interactionism: "(1) human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them . . . (2) the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows . . . (3) these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process" (p. 2). Symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products that individuals create through their defining activities, especially as they interact with one another. In consequence, the focus of symbolic interactionist research is on the emergent and ongoing processes that form human activity (than on the means or setting for human conduct) (Blumer 1969; Prus 1996).

Prus (1996) summarizes Blumer's vision of symbolic interactionist research as "the study of the ways in which people make sense of their life-situations and the ways in which they go about their activities, in conjunction with others on a day-to-day basis" (p. 10). The key assumption of this theoretical approach is that individuals attach meanings to objects (including themselves) and act (individually or collectively) on the basis of these meanings. Symbolic interactionism rejects cultural and biological determinism of individuals and provides an understanding of human conduct that takes into account "agency, process, interpretation, minded activity, role taking, meaning, and situations" (Musolf 2003:113).

Symbolic interactionism is not a subjective or objective approach to studying human behaviour, but rather an intersubjective approach (Prus 1996, 1999). An intersubjective approach highlights how meanings are collectively constructed, negotiated and maintained by groups. Symbolic interactionists aim to understand how individuals continually construct meanings of objects and situations and how they use these meanings to fit together lines of action. This perspective gives priority to the group or community, as opposed to the individual, when it comes to understanding meaning making processes (Blumer 1969; Prus 1996). This methodological approach challenges the conventional positivistic (deductive) methods by seeking to understand reality not in objective terms but intersubjectively—reality becomes constituted and experienced by social actors as they collectively create meanings and define the situations they confront (Blumer 1969; Prus 1996; Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve 2003). For this reason, symbolic interactionists both advocate for and rely on ethnographic methods that enable them to study how individuals continuously construct meaning as part of the social worlds where those individuals conduct their everyday lives. As a symbolic interactionist, I wanted to examine how the social actors involved in the CFL came to construct their definitions of the situation and/or obdurate “realities” (Prus 1996; Thomas and Thomas 1928). Because of this, I needed to engage with the research population intimately, within their social environment.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH

The ethnographic tradition was first developed by Albion Small, W. I. Thomas, Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Ellsworth Faris. It was later built on by Herbert Blumer

and Everett Hughes (Prus 1996). In order to understand human behaviour and social processes, Park and Hughes insisted that researchers must immerse themselves in the world(s) of their subjects and study individuals in their own terms, specifically by attempting to grasp the symbolic meanings that the people themselves defined as important (Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve 2003). When Blumer spoke of achieving intimate familiarity, he was referring to the researcher's immersion into the social world(s) of their subjects through ethnographic methods.

Ethnographies are based largely on data gathered through participant observation and in-depth interviews. Depending on the social world being studied, however, documents are often included; for example, journalistic accounts, autobiographies, diaries, and personal letters can be useful sources of information (Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve 2003). This type of data gathering requires researchers to “do everything possible to get to that life and know what is going on in it” (Blumer 1969:38). Therefore, the research methods used in my study of the CFL included: (1) participant observation, (2) in-depth interviews, and (3) secondary documentary data (including the use of Twitter). Incorporating data drawn from multiple sources allowed me to pursue the triangulation approach advised by Denzin (1978), who insisted that researchers use multiple methods with a variety of data as a means of increasing the depth of theoretical understanding of the material evoked in their research project. This was the theoretical and methodological position I brought to my interest in CFL players. Following my supervisor's advice “to just find someone to talk to”—and bearing in mind Park's admonition to his own students to “go get the seat of their pants dirty in real research” (in

Herman-Kinney and Verschaeve 2003:227), I set out to explore the world of professional sport (CFL). The following section addresses how I entered the field and collected the data for this project.

GETTING STARTED: WHY FOOTBALL SPOUSES?

I am often asked what made me want to study football wives. With an awkward smile, I say, “I didn’t.” In fact, I was hesitant to switch my initial research focus from players to spouses. The allure of the professional athlete had hold of me. I have been a fan of sport for as long as I can remember. Some of my earliest memories are watching hockey with my dad and my best friend. Every Saturday night we would have a sleepover and watch the Toronto Maple Leafs. I have fond memories of her shaking her fist at the TV as we watched the Leafs. Eventually, I found myself watching football. I like both the NFL and CFL. I am a Hamilton Ti-Cat fan and I had season tickets for a few years. I play fantasy football⁵ with my partner and we spend a lot of time talking about the game. Drawing on my interest in sport and how I was spending my free time, it only seemed natural to do a study on the people who were part of the social world that had captivated my attention for so long.

This research began the first semester of my doctoral program. During my first meeting with my advisor, I approached him about wanting to study professional football players. Given the challenges in locating and gaining access to celebrities, including

⁵ Fantasy football is an online activity where each week you take on a friend’s fantasy football team. Each player drafts a football team made up of current players in the NFL. These players earn you points every week for their on-field performances (for example, if the quarterback of your team throws a touchdown, you score 7 points). After all of the NFL games are played, the fantasy team with the most amount of points that week wins.

professional athletes (see Aguiar and Schneider 2012), I was advised to start by finding a few retired players to interview for the qualitative methodology course I was about to start. As part of that course, I began a small project that looked at the careers of football players and how they experienced retirement by approaching a few retired football players to see if they would be interested in doing an interview. These early interviews gave me my first insights into the inner workings of the CFL and the experiences of those who have been part of the league. These insights provided a basis for an understanding the CFL, the thrills and frustrations that players' face, how they deal with career contingencies (e.g., trades, injuries, releases), and how they experience retirement.

During this time, I was able to attend an alumni event where a former player was honoured. Many current and retired football players, coaches, managers, the media and fans were in attendance. As the event was a formal one, many of players and coaches brought their spouses. This event reshaped the direction of my research and shifted the focus from the football player to football spouse. Here is a field note taken from that evening:

During the evening I met Melanie. She was the wife of Sean, one of the first players I had interviewed. She was incredibly friendly and came right up to me. She introduced me to Maria, another wife of a player. Their husbands played together during the same years. And they started to talk about when their husbands were playing together and won the Grey Cup. They also pointed out that not a lot of wives are still around because divorce is very common. Melanie tells me they are the "veterans," the ones that are still married to their husbands. I mention to her that I was interested in hearing about her experience in the CFL. And, to my surprise, she said she was more than willing to talk some time. (Field Note November 4, 2010)

Through conversations that evening, I quickly realized that players do not experience their careers in isolation, but that their spouses and families are an integral part of their

careers. Melanie was enthusiastic about sharing her experience of being married to a professional football player. She was excited about my research and offered to help me find other football spouses if I was interested. It was during this conversation that I realized the possibilities of studying the spouses of professional athletes. From that point on the project became focused on these women, their involvement in their husbands' careers, and the ways in which they experience the day-to-day impact of professional football life. Next I discuss both how I conducted participant observation and in-depth interviews, and collected secondary documents.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

In this study I made observations in public spaces where members of CFL were present. I attended a number of events, including training camps, open practices, games and award banquets. These events and practices are attended by a variety of people involved in the CFL, including football spouses, providing me with access to potential participants who might have been difficult to access otherwise. In these settings, I talked informally with those present and then produced hand-written field notes of our conversations. These observations and informal conversations provided information on the activities and routines of individuals in the CFL.

Every year of my doctoral studies I attended training camp, which was open to the public. I had the opportunity to meet many retired players, current players, coaches, sports reporters, and various other people involved in operating a team and the league. To my surprise, I also met some football spouses at training camps. During training camp the players on the football team essentially live together, meaning they do not go home to

their families at night. Some women explained that they had not seen their partners for a few days and missed them. Coming out to practice gave them a chance to at least see their husbands.

More importantly, attending these events, practices and games gave me access to possible participants I could approach for an interview. I would always be searching for someone to talk to. In total I recruited 4 football spouses and 7 others (former players, reporters, coaches) from being in the field. I also heavily relied on personal referrals from participants, as well as family and friends. This allowed me to recruit another 10 football spouses and 18 former and current players and coaches including others who were involved in the league in some capacity. I also advertised my study on social media but only had 3 people agree to be interviewed.⁶ Relying on being in the field and personal referrals worked best to recruit participants. Having the ability to explain my project to possible participants and answer their questions and concerns I believe went a long way towards generating an interest in participation. Also, having personal referrals worked well because it usually meant someone involved in the league vouched for me, making it easier to for me to establish some amount of trust prior to the actual interview.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

In total I interviewed 43 participants including 16 football spouses, 2 family members, 16 players, 2 coaches, 3 people who occupy managerial roles on the football team, 1 former commissioner, 1 individual from the CFLPA and 2 sport reporters. At the beginning of data collection I interviewed players, coaches, staff members and sports

⁶ Later in this chapter I discuss using social media in collecting secondary documents.

reporters which provided me with a crucial understanding of the social world of professional football and significantly informed the interviews with the football spouses.

The majority of data drawn on for the analyses chapters came from interviews with football spouses. Of those women 11 identified as Canadian and 5 were American. Their ages ranged from early 20s to late 60s, 11 women had partners active in the league at the time of the interview. Many of these women had occupied multiple statuses during their partner's football career. I interviewed 11 players' spouses and 5 coaches' spouses. All but 2 women were married and the 2 girlfriends have since broken up. These categories of status (relationship and husband's position) are not deterministic or static. For example, it is not uncommon for women to go from girlfriend to fiancée to wife during their husbands' career. Further, 3 women have gone from a players' wife to coach's wife.

I maintained contact with many of these women over the course of a few years through emails, phone calls and instant messages. In the event of a partner being traded or released from the football team, I would email or phone the football spouse to offer my support and ask about the experience. In many cases the participating spouse emailed me back to express her feelings on the matter and share insights into what had happened and how the career change had impacted her and the family. Other times I emailed participants in order to congratulate the football wife on her husband's retirement or Grey Cup championship. These subsequent follow-ups (emails and phone conversations) focused on how these women experienced their partners' football careers as they were

happening. For example, after the husband of one of my participants landed a coaching job, I emailed her to congratulate her and her husband. She emailed back and wrote,

It's [sic] been great being back with a team and being part of a football family. Loved being active in team events and getting to know the players and their families. . . . All in all an exciting year for Jerry and I. Although we're enjoying the off season at our home in [city], it will be fun to head back in a few months to [city] and start all over once again.

Throughout this research, I worked to stay in touch with the women I interviewed. I found it helpful in gathering new insights by getting a sense of how their husband's career was affecting them as it happened.

The interviews were semi-structured, following an interview guide (see Appendix A) that identified the themes and questions I wanted to address at some point over the course of the interview. Themes listed included:

- Early Life (when the couple met)
- Day-to-day home life
- Being traded or release
- Other football spouses
- Injuries
- Culture
- Using social media
- Retirement

Under each theme was a set of open-ended questions. However, these questions were treated as a starting point for further probes into issues that arose during the interview.

Interviews assumed the form as an informal conversation and generally lasted between 45-60 minutes.

Interviews took place at an agreed-upon location where the participant felt comfortable and safe. For those participants who did not live close by or were too busy to meet in person interviews were conducted via Skype or the telephone. All participants agreed to be audio-recorded. In total, 31 interviews were done face-to-face, 10 interviews were conducted over the phone and 3 interviews were done over Skype. Phone and Skype interviews were beneficial because I was able to gain access to, and complete interviews with, football spouses located in the southern United States, British Columbia, and Western Canada in addition to those living in Southern Ontario.

SECONDARY DOCUMENTS

This project also relied on documentary data, for example, newspaper articles, blogs, books, posts and tweets (Twitter) by members of the CFL. I gave specific attention to those documents involving spouses and topics related to family. For example, I analyzed a series of blogs written by Sharon Higgins on being a “football wife” in the CFL where she discusses what life has been like being married to a man who has been a football player, coach, GM and director of officiating for the league. She shares an insider perspective on the challenges, frustrations, triumphs, and disappointments she has experienced from her husband’s career in professional sports as she discusses issues ranging from going to the Grey Cup, to being fired, to raising children. These documents not only provided insight into the lives of football spouses but helped me form interview questions and probe for more information about particular topics Higgins addressed.

Doing research on participants prior to the interview was also important. As Spector (1980) advised, researchers who are interested in studying public figures, like professional athletes, need to do their homework about the participant before the interview. I learned this lesson early on during one of my first interviews when I did not realize the player I was interviewing had played on multiple football teams. I was embarrassed when he realized I was not familiar with his history. The information was publicly available and I had not done my background research. I felt the rapport I was trying to build in the interview starting to dissolve. In that moment, I realized the importance of demonstrating your interest in the interview and the need to be familiar with whatever information about the participant that is publically available.

From that point on, I did preliminary research on all participants. Even when I interviewed football spouses, I did background research on their husband's career. I did this to establish that I was a serious researcher, but also to ask specific questions about CFL-related issues. I would find out if her partner had played in the Grey Cup. If so, I would incorporate questions about that experience and read up on that Grey Cup to see if her partner was mentioned in the media or any details of the event that may help elicit more background information for the interview questions. Collecting public information prior to the interview gave me a good sense when to probe (and not probe) for information and direct the conversation to events I wanted to hear more about.

During data collecting, Twitter emerged as an important resource and source of data. While having an informal conversation with a sports reporter, he mentioned how Twitter had changed the way sports are reported on and made note of how many players

actively used the social media platform. This spontaneous conversation prompted me to join and see what was happening on Twitter and how this might add to my understanding of professional football. When I logged on, I realized the potential this social media site presented, giving me access to a wealth of documents, participants, and online interactions.

Twitter is considered a microblogging service that allows users to post and read 140 character “tweets.” Twitter is considered a hybrid of social interactions and media because like radio or TV it disseminates information such as, news articles, videos, blogs by linking them to tweets but also gives users the ability to make comments and interact with other users (Murthy 2012). Professional sport organizations, like the CFL, have been quick to adopt this social media platform (Hambrick et al. 2010). Thus, both the popularity and accessibility of Twitter as a personal news media tool used by members of the CFL made it a data source worthy of inclusion in this research as it offered a glimpse into a significant dimension of the football world. Due to the important role that Twitter plays in the CFL, and in professional sports generally, I felt it was necessary to include it as part of my data collection (Altheide and Schneider 2013; Hambrick et al. 2010; Norman 2012; Simonetto 2016).

I used Twitter to keep current with events happening in the CFL, especially making note of how football spouses were using it, what they were posting and with whom they were interacting. I started to follow all of the CFL football spouses who I could identify. I followed these women online, paying attention to their activities and discussions. As I became more aware of the increasing popularity of Twitter during this research, I began

to raise the issue in my interviews with football spouses their use of Twitter and other social media sites. I could draw on actual tweets or scenarios that were happening online and this elicited more information. My inclusion of Twitter as a data gathering tool brought me various insights into the social world of the CFL that I do not believe I would have gained otherwise.

RESEARCH BARGAINS

The McMaster's Research Ethics Board (MREB) approved this research. While I tried to anticipate problems that could arise in conducting research on the people who are involved in Canadian Football League, there were several unexpected situations and dilemmas that arose. In this section, I provide a reflexive account of the "research bargains" that I made and did not make throughout this project.

Haas and Shaffir (1980) described the research bargaining stage as a process that is continually being negotiated through the research project as the researcher attempts to secure others' cooperation. These negotiations "typically require the development of relationships of equality, involving an idea of exchange or give and take" (p. 245). Specifically, Haas and Shaffir discussed the dilemmas and negotiations they made while conducting a study on the socialization process of medical students. They illustrated the difficulties of studying professions compared to people with less power, status and prestige because "professionals are by definition groups that attempt to control the definitions of the situation" (Haas and Shaffir 1980:246). Similar to other high status professions, sport organizations are also concerned with controlling the definitions of their situations. Throughout this research process I found myself faced with various

dilemmas, which had me continually engaged in negotiations with participants as I tried to balance my research interests against their interests. In the following sections I present three significant dilemmas that I faced in maintaining this balance: (1) searching for a gatekeeper, (b) maintaining confidentiality, (c) dealing with sensitive information.

Searching for a Gatekeeper

At the beginning of this research I wanted to find a “gatekeeper,” someone who could put me into contact with former players. One afternoon at a training camp practice, I met a former player who was now involved in the CFL alumni association. I thought this person would be a great connection to have since he would be able to introduce to me to some former players and, hopefully, their spouses. I had talked to this person a few times and seemed to be building a rapport with him.

Around the same time, the effects of concussions on the brain began to appear in the media. The *Hamilton Spectator* published an article, “*Life after Football*” (August 6, 2011), which painted a dismal picture of the long-term effects of concussions on former players. During my next meeting with this potential gatekeeper, I found out that he was upset about the newspaper article. He felt betrayed by the author of the article and I sensed he was genuinely worried about his own health. He accused me of trying to dig up dirt about concussions and did not think my research intentions were honest. Although I tried to reassure him that it was not my intention to write a “tell-all” piece, I felt that the rapport I was trying to foster was falling apart as a result of this newspaper article. Given this interaction, I observed the fragility of the relationships between researchers and gatekeepers, and that there were multiple competing interests and conflicts in the social

world of professional sport that I had not been prepared to meet or address. More importantly, this interaction made me understand that access to the football community would not be easy, and that such access is delicate and could be quickly dissolved through no fault of my own but rather because of the various competing interests in the CFL.

The CFL encompasses many different organizations and professions, including the CFL players association, the CFL alumni association, affiliated media organizations (local/national newspapers, and television), and corporate sponsors. All of these organizations and people have their own interests and stakes in the CFL, and their priorities can come into conflict with one another. There are various roles within the league itself: players, coaches, managers, referee, office workers, accountants, sales representatives, and legal staff. In the situation described above, a former player felt betrayed by the reporter and this conflict spilled into the research relationship I was trying to foster. For this reason, I decided not to seek a formal gatekeeper and instead employed more informal strategies to recruit participants through personal referrals and identifying participants in the field.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Research bargains often involve a promise of confidentiality that the researcher makes with participants (van den Hoonaard 2015). While confidentiality was important in this research, I also realized that confidentiality agreements cannot be generic and that varying expectations of confidentiality may need to be made by the researcher to address the unique needs of individual participants. Usually players, coaches and team management with a higher status, or those who had retired, were less concerned with

confidentiality. Often at end the interview, participants would close by saying I could use their name as an endorsement when recruiting others. For example, a former player invited me to a banquet dinner he was organizing and sat me at table with other former players. He was not concerned with his confidentiality and helped me recruit many other participants. I even had a coach tweet about doing an interview with me, thereby breaking the confidentiality bargain required by the university ethics board.⁷

In contrast to this coach's tweet, I quickly realized confidentiality was extremely important to those people who are still active and occupy less secure roles in the league, such as current players and coaches. Given the precarious nature of the CFL (as discussed in Chapter One), many of the participants expressed concerns about confidentiality and would often need reassurance about my research stance. As a reporter put it, the social world of the CFL is quite interconnected and nobody (players or their spouses) will talk unless you have assured them of confidentiality and have a reputation for keeping it:

[I]f you don't have confidentiality then they won't talk because they know they could get fired. And if something that is said by you that belittles the team or him and that's it you're done. . . . And it gets wind across the league, there are only so many teams in the CFL and somebody gets wind of that then you don't work anywhere. It is a very scary and unstable career. (Reporter)

The reporter emphasized the need to ensure confidentiality with players and coaches; his tone demonstrates how saying something that disparages or offends another member of the CFL could cost that person his job. The consequences for speaking out or divulging too much information are severe for all involved in professional sports.

⁷ Active coach tweeted: "Spent a minute w Deana Simonetto, Doctoral Candidate @ Mac who is researching the effects of Pro Football on families...Interesting stuff!"

Confidentiality was extremely important for football spouses. This was consistent with literature on athletes' spouses, who are described as guarded and are often hesitant to share information with outsiders (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997, 2003, 2004; Thompson 1995). Binns-Terrill (2012) argues that football wives put up a "wall of protection" (p. 87) around themselves to defend against outsiders. I felt this apprehension on the part of spouses almost immediately. For example, I asked one football spouse if there was a difference between American players and Canadian players and, if so, how she would explain it? Before she answered she replied, "I can as long as this isn't..." she paused, and then said, "I'm worried about confidentiality." I had to reassure her that I would not disclose her name. Throughout my interviews with football spouses, I found that they would share stories about being afraid of what they said in public and they noted how they could not freely voice their opinions. Aware of how their own views and actions reflected on their husbands, the women worried about damaging their spouses' careers (I take up this theme further in Chapter Five). For this reason, as a researcher, I became more sensitized to the significance of confidentiality; and, more importantly, I became hyper-vigilant in guarding my participants' identities by removing any potentially damaging or identifying information from what I wrote.

Complicated by the reality that there are only 9 teams in the CFL, football spouses are leery about sharing information because "everyone knows everyone." There were numerous interviews where a participant told stories about other spouses in order to explain their perspectives. I quickly found out that information travels fast in this league and nothing is secret. Like many of the spouses interviewed, Katie was extremely worried

about confidentiality because her husband still plays in the league. She explained to me, “We are pretty private, that’s why I asked you twice about my name being attached to this because we are not boat rockers at all.” As I did in these situations, I reassured Katie that all participants would be given pseudonyms but I also reminded her that sometimes the stories we tell reveal our identity and to consider this when answering questions. This information was also outlined in the letter of information in the study consent form (Appendix B). As such, writing this dissertation presented many ethical challenges in terms of confidentiality. In order to mitigate risk, I have carefully chosen quotes that do not give identifiable information regarding specific situations or certain characteristics about the participant. I also removed all identifying information such as their hometowns, which teams their husbands were on, the participant’s occupation, and any other information that might reveal participant’s identity.⁸

Dealing with Sensitive Information

Building rapport and earning trust is difficult to achieve with athletes’ wives who are part of the closed social world of professional sport (Binns-Terrill 2011; Ortiz 2001, 2003; Thompson 1995). Ortiz (2004) argues that athletes’ wives preferred a male ethnographer because “they feared that a female ethnographer might betray their trust and become envious of what they had or skeptical about their claims” (p.604). In discussing

⁸ Due to these cautions, I found Chapter Five, in particular, challenging to write because it examines the celebrity side. As such, I decided not to include the participant’s pseudonym when providing examples and used the generic term football spouse in fear confidentiality might be broken unintentionally or unknowingly.

interviews with athlete's wives, he provides quotes from the women who share a distrusting view of a female researcher:

If I'm talking to a woman, I'm wondering why she's asking me these questions. You have your guard up. I don't want her to know everything about me. Maybe she's after my husband. You think of all those things. I think for this study it was perfect to have a male because we've talked about groupies, the women-around-the-husbands-type-of thing. We already have that threat. We don't need it an interview. I would have been more reluctant to be in the study if you were a woman. I preferred having you—a guy, not a woman. (Ortiz 2003:604-605)

While I do not know if my participants had this view of me, this article made me hyper aware that the football spouses from the CFL may distrust me. In fact, this article made me overly nervous about interviewing football spouses and I became conscious of my presentation of self in the interview. Prior to starting the interview, I would engage in small talk with the participant and try to causally make a reference to the fact I was in a serious relationship, for example I have said, “me and my partner are big Ti-Cat fans! We love CFL football!” I did this to try and ease the participant's mind. I tried to frame questions around their experiences and I tried to avoid mentioning their partner. In response, some women would start to answer a question in terms of their husband and I would then follow up with, “how did that affect you?” or, “what was that like for you?” I wanted to show that my focus was on their perspectives.

During the interview, I tried to be more accommodating in discussing sensitive issues, like infidelity and divorce⁹, and did not challenge the participants' responses. Realizing that many of these women could be uncomfortable with me prying into their

⁹ Divorce and infidelity are commonly cited issues in the world of professional sport (Binns-Terrill 2012; Roderick 2012; Ortiz 2004; 2011).

marriage, I did not press these issues but rather asked questions in a hypothetical sense or about the league in general, as to not come off as overly interested in their marital relationship or husband. For example, I asked: do or did you worry about infidelity? Is infidelity an issue in the CFL? Do you think spouses typically worry about their partner cheating on them? This tactic seemed to work because the majority of football spouses interviewed expressed some sense of being worried about their partner cheating, but mainly discussed cultural meanings of the stereotypes of being married to a professional football player and constantly having people assume their husbands were unfaithful. Take Jasmine's response to my question, did you worry or do other wives worry about infidelity?

It's always there. I hear a lot of stories and I think that it affects people constantly. If you say you're married to a football player, they automatically assume "oh he must be sleeping around" and that "he travels all the time, I'm sure you don't know what he is doing." I've had lots of comments. Probably not even direct comments but you hear things, I always hear about other guys... My husband and I have been together since high school and I have never ever had any fears, what so ever. It has never crossed my mind. He was the kind of guy that would travel and would come home with baby cloths because he would go spend his money for things at the mall then going out with the guys. You know what I mean. That was the kind of guy that I'm married to. But I've definitely heard stories about others, and I know for a fact that people who are not part of it assume that every guy is sleeping around because he is a football player and that is the stereotype.

Jasmine was quick to point out that the stereotype that all pro football players are unfaithful is something that football spouses are very aware of. While she trusts her husband completely, she has heard things about other players who are not faithful.

Interestingly, none of the football spouses disclosed that their partners were unfaithful but rather referred to knowing about another football spouse that had been

cheated on. While football spouses with less-than-perfect relationships may have avoided participating in this study, it is also possible that I had not built enough trust with my participants and they were not ready to disclose. As part of building trust with my participants, I did not want to push subjects they would not be comfortable discussing with an outsider, especially if they felt threatened by a female researcher as Ortiz (2003) suggested. I did not push sensitive topics with football spouses because I worried about the women distrusting my intentions. I relied on personal referrals and with the league being so small, I did not want to get a reputation for making these women uncomfortable by prying into issues like infidelity and/or their sex lives. I made the decision not to pry but ask general questions allowing the women to disclose the amount of information they felt comfortable with.

GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO DATA ANALYSIS

To gain conceptual insight into the social world of the CFL and into the ways football spouses experience their partners' career, I used a grounded theory approach. This framework enabled me to generate emergent sensitizing concepts and informal theory that is firmly grounded within data (Charmaz 2006, Clarke 2005; Glaser and Strauss 1967). A grounded theory approach allowed me to create sensitizing concepts that uncovered the range of variation, differences, and complexities embedded within the social world of the CFL (Charmaz 2006; Clarke 2005). In the following section I will discuss the ways in which I analyzed the data, used sensitizing concepts, and developed the concept of courtesy identity. I then conclude the chapter by locating this novel notion of courtesy identity within the literature on self and identity.

Open and Focused Coding

I began the data analysis by using an open-coding process. I coded line-by-line transcribed interviews, field notes and documents for larger themes, concepts and ideas. I created Microsoft documents around these emergent themes, which included: “daily life,” “culture of CFL,” “experiencing career contingencies,” “family life,” “raising children,” “retirement,” and “managing a public image.” During this research stage, I placed different sections of interview data in corresponding theme documents. Here, the “football wife” identity developed as an overarching concept that I could use to organize smaller themes and capture the meanings and descriptions that these women used in describing their everyday lives.

Once I had created documents corresponding to the emergent themes that arose in open coding, I focused on coding each theme. For example, the emergent concept of the “football wife” was re-coded into smaller codes that were focused on how participants described the social process of forming and maintaining the identity. I examined how these women continually defined themselves, paying particular attention to their daily activities, views, and how they saw themselves in relation to self and others. In doing so, more codes emerged to capture the meaning of being a football wife, such as: early involvement, playing the part, and managing the household.

Based on the “constant-comparative” method (Glaser and Strauss 1967), I used focused coding to continually refine sensitizing concepts of the football wife identity and to gain insight into the meanings participants attached to their identity. I examined situations when these women revealed their identity or when they would conceal their

identity. Further, I divided the broad concept of identity into three categories—(1) personal identity, (2) social identity, and (3) public identity—which addressed how these women privately identified themselves, but also looked at the ways they defined themselves in relation to their partner and to other football spouses, as well as considered their presentation of the football wife identity in public. Throughout this coding process I engaged in memo writing to make connections between concepts, theory and early ideas.

Memo Writing

Charmaz (2006) recommends memo writing as a space to “actively engage in your materials, to develop your ideas, and to fine-tune your subsequent data-gathering” (p. 72). I wrote memos on themes and concepts that were emerging in the data. This strategy was beneficial because it allowed me to write all codes, concepts, and themes, make comparisons between them, and use empirical evidence (data) to interrogate early analysis. For example, I wrote the following memo about the status hierarchy among football spouses:

The status hierarchy among football spouses is shaped by two factors: (1) The status of woman depends on the status of her relationship with her player (i.e., girlfriend, fiancée, wife); (2) The status the player occupies will trickle down on to his spouses. For example, many women talked about the extra perks a “quarterback’s” wife may have.

Wife
Fiancée
Girlfriend

Being a girlfriend, fiancée or wife will shape how others see your relationship and upon this appraisal football spouses will cast you into a status among wives according to your relationships status. This finding was also consistent with Thompson’s study on hockey wives with some differences. The arrangement of the hierarchy may be in a different order depending on the

sport but there is always some type of hierarchy. Example of the status hierarchy comes from Sara who explains,

Definitely there was kind of a wives club, I think there were a couple functions if you weren't married, and you know we would go to functions where the wives were paid for. I know my friend whose husband, fiancée, they just recently got engaged, I feel like she has mentioned before, because they are not married, she doesn't have all the same perks that the wives do. Not there were definitely a lot of perks for family, girlfriends, and wives. A few functions I think it was the wives were only invited or it was more favourable to be a wife. (Memo, February 6th 2014)

In my memo writing, I used emergent themes to connect with different sociological concepts and made notes on the similarities and differences between my findings and those presented in the literature on athletes' wives. I also identified the quotations from my data that had inspired the emergent concept. This process of analysis helped me to advance my coding to a more theoretical level (Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967) and to consider how the participants' status as a football wife might affect how they self-identified as a "football wife" as well as how others' label them.

In presenting these themes in the following chapters, I use the conventional words to discussing my findings. I use *few* for 10 percent of football spouses or less; *some* for more than 10 percent of the football spouses but less than 25 percent; *many* for more than 25 percent of spouses but less than 50 percent; *most, majority, typically* for more than 50 percent football spouses (Shaffir and Kleinknecht 2005:710-11; also see Coombs 1978).

Using Sensitizing Concepts

I developed both sensitizing and folk concepts to explain how the football spouses saw themselves and the role they played in their husband's football career (van den Hoonaard 1997). A sensitizing concept is a provisional starting point and a way to think

about your data (van den Hoonaard 1997). Blumer (1969) argues that a “concept must remain in intimate relations with the empirical world and achieve its character through interaction” (p.177), and criticizes the conventional use of concepts because they are used in deductive methodologies as measurements of different scales, attitudes, and scoring devices that ignore the emergent features of group life. Symbolic interactionists use sensitizing concepts to capture the emergent, processual characteristics of human group life (Blumer 1969; Prus 1996; van den Hoonaard 1997).

Folk concepts, alternatively, are derived from the data and offer a sense of the participants’ perspectives by focusing on their language or expression (Goffman 1967; van den Hoonaard 1997). For example, early folk concepts that emerged from the data included: “football wife,” “man code,” “manning the house,” “groupies,” and “football comes first.” These concepts use the participants’ language to describe the meaning they attached to the world around them. By making connections between these folk concepts I was led to a conceptualization of the “football wife” and what it means to be married to a professional athlete as these women explained it to me.

While folk concepts are highly concrete, sensitizing concepts are more abstract and less context-dependent (van den Hoonaard 1997). Simmel was the first to theorize about sensitizing concepts, calling them “social forms” (see Prus 1987; van den Hoonaard 1997). Many scholars have offered other terms to describe sensitizing concepts: “constructs on the second level” (Shultz 1962); “mini-concepts” (Lofland 1970); and “second-order” concepts (Denzin 1989). A sensitizing concept is one step removed from the data but attends to the more generic aspects of the concepts or, as described by van

den Hoonaard (1997) “constructs of constructs” (p. 3). Sensitizing concepts are useful for comparing and contrasting a variety of contexts and in generating theory. For example, Schwalbe et al. (2000) identified four major social processes through which inequality is produced: the social processes of othering, subordinate adaptation, boundary maintenance, and emotional management in the production and reproduction of inequality. Schwalbe et al. (200) argue that greater attention is needed on understanding how inequalities are created and reproduced. The analytic attention in a project like this one, then, is on how to generalize about the process (and not about the populations) (Becker 1990, 2014; Lofland 1970; McLuhan et al. 2014; Prus 1987, 1996, 1999; Schwalbe et al. 2000; Strauss 1970).

Sensitizing concepts broaden the analytic framework because they enable the researcher to frame the studied activity as social process (van den Hoonaard 1997). Prus (1987) developed a series of generic social processes (GSP) to encourage analytic attention on “the transituational elements of interaction, the abstracted formulations of social behaviour” (p. 251). GSPs contribute to the overall theoretical formation of sensitizing concepts because they highlight the emergent, interpretive features of association, while focusing the researcher’s attention on individuals’ activities as they go about “doing” or accomplishing human group life (Prus 1987, 1996, 1999; van den Hoonaard 1997).

Van den Hoonaard (1997) later drew on Prus’ (1987; 1996) six social processes as a framework that can be helpful in conceptualizing everyday day: (1) getting involved, (2) acquiring perspectives, (3) achieving identity, (4) doing activity, (5) experiencing

relationships, and (f) becoming an “ex.” This six part framework, in particular, helped me to consider the generic social processes involved in achieving identity, especially in thinking about and conceptualizing the ways football spouses achieved their identity (as it allowed me to keep my analytic focus on abstract social processes). Prus (1996) also provides a list of processes in achieving identity that would increase the conceptualization across a variety of settings: encountering definitions of self from others, attributing qualities to self, comparing incoming and self-assigned definition of self, resisting unwanted identity imputations, selectively conveying information about self to others, gleaning information about others, assigning identities to others, promoting specific definitions of others, encountering resistance from others, and reassessing identities imputed to others (p.152-153). These subprocesses further guided my thinking on how these women defined themselves as football wives keeping analytic attention on processes.

SELF AND IDENTITY

Before moving to the analyses chapters, I review the literature on self and identity. “Self” and “identity” are concepts that have a deeply rooted history in the area of symbolic interactionism. Mead understood the self as a process rather than a structure—the development of self requires an awareness of others and the ability to continually observe, reflect upon, and take into account other perspectives (Mead 1934). Individuals enter their own experiences of self indirectly through the standpoint of others (Blumer 1969; Cooley 1902; Mead 1934), using others as a platform for getting outside oneself and assessing one’s own self-presentations (Meltzer et al. 1975). The symbolic

interactionist approach, especially in regards to the concept of self, highlights the active, reflective nature of individuals. In this framework, the self is not fixed or structured but an emergent and interpretive process that arises in interactions with one's self and others (Blumer 1969). The self is reflective in that it takes the attitudes of others (i.e., a generalized other) as a mechanism used in forming and guiding conduct. Individuals' abilities to take themselves into account allows for the emergent process of social interaction where individuals indicate, define, judge, adjust and resist meanings and construct lines action with each other (Blumer 1969).

While the concepts of self and identity have been used interchangeably, symbolic interactionists are careful to attend to the differences between the concepts. The social process through which the self arises is important in the formation and transformation of an individual's identity. Individuals tend to act towards themselves and have others act toward them on the basis of their perceptions and, in doing so, they jointly create various forms of identity (Hewitt 2007). Identity, then, is a social conception—it indicates an individual in a context of a particular social relationship or group (whether that context is situational and transient, or whether it is more enduring) (Gecas and Burke 1995; Vryan, Adler, and Adler 2003). Stone (1962) provides a useful definition of identity that distinguishes it from the concept of self:

Almost all writers using the term imply that identity establishes what and where the person is in social terms. It is not a substitute word for "self." Instead, when one has identity, he is situated – that is, cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his participation or membership in social relations. One's identity is established when others *place* him as a social object by assigning him the same words of identity that he appropriates for himself or *announces*. It is in the coincidence of placements and

announcements that identity becomes a meaning of the self (P. 93, *emphasis in original*)

In other words, achieving identity “is contingent on peoples’ capacity for ‘self reflectivity’; it requires that one begins to take oneself into account in developing lines of action” (Prus 1996:152). Becker (1970) contends, however, that identity is “never gained nor maintained once and for all” (p. 259). Identities are always emerging, changing, adapting and resisted as individuals encounter new situations and different social worlds (Strauss 1959, 1993). Individuals’ identities are ongoing reflections of their perspectives of the world and their definitions of themselves, which are continually emerging and shifting as they encounter different situations.

Addressing these shifting definitions, Vryan, Adler, and Adler (2003) divide the concept of identity into three categories: situational, personal, and social. Situational identities are emergent in face-to-face interactions as we enact and evaluate the situational identity for its similarity with culturally defined role expectations. For example, customer, student, tourist are situational identities. Personal identities are self-narratives that incorporate our biographies, aspects of personality, and define us in terms of what makes us *unique*. Personal identities tend to be more enduring and reflect a particular personal narrative (Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003), such as the good student, the busy-body, or the rebel. A personal identity is regarded as an individual’s property; that is, the individual creates, owns, and can modify his/her personal identity as he/she sees fit (Hewitt 2007). Social identities, on the other hand, denote the identification of us (by self and other) with a socially constructed group or categories of people, or by our positions within the social structure. For example, the categories of “women,” “Catholic,” “Australian,” “upper-

middle class” are all social identities that define an individual as similar to a specific group of people while differentiating them from other social identities (Hewitt 2007; Vryan, Adler and Adler 2003). These social identities tend to be more enduring and transsituational for individuals, and they last as long as we continue to identify with those socially structured groups.

Personal, social and situational identities are not mutually exclusive. Significantly, each individual in contemporary society acquires and exercises a variety of identities in his or her life due to the complexity of our society and the passage of time (Hewitt 2007). Consequently, an individual can possess multiple personal and social identities, and these identities can be more or less situationally based. Some individuals may manage one or two social identities, whereas others may have several social and personal identities that they rely on and use in response to the different social situations in which they find themselves (Hewitt 2007). As will be discussed in my research, the football wife identity emerged as both a personal and social identity that is often negotiated situationally (as these women try to conceal who they are in certain contexts).

The interactionist literature is rich with concepts that capture the processual nature of self and identity. Recently there has been an emphasis on capturing the more generic social processes involved in constructing identities (Anthony and McCabe 2015; Dunn and Creek 2015; Prus 1987, 1996, 1997, 2005; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). The concept of *identity work* is defined by Prus (1997) as “ongoing assessments and negotiations as the parties involved jointly develop (suggest, use, tolerate, resist) sets of self and other definitions (and reputations) mindful of the more particularize

circumstances in which they find themselves” (p. 64). Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock (1996) found that identity work is fundamental because it gives people “a sense of belonging, feelings of personal significance, a sense of location relative to others, a sense of continuity and coherence, and feelings of worth” (p. 122). Most recently, Anthony and McCabe (2015) point to the importance of friendship in how one defines personal identity, identifying three strategies (social processes) people use: envisioning self through others, betterment distancing, and situating with networks as processes involved in the construction of self-identity (personal identity) through friendship. Anthony and McCabe’s (2015) article offers a strong example of the concept of identity work and, importantly, how people’s relationships with significant others are part of defining one’s own identity. As I will illustrate in the following chapters, a football spouse will draw on her husband’s career, status, and activities as part of defining herself and her identity as a football wife.

Prus (1997) argues that identity work reflects ongoing assessments and negotiations as the parties involved jointly develop sets of self and other definitions mindful of the subcultures and subcultural mosaics in which they participate. Donnelly and Young (1988) illustrate how rock climbers and rugby players, for example, adopt mannerisms, attitudes, and styles of dress, speech and behaviour of members of an established subculture. As part of this process, the authors highlight how subcultural participation works to help neophytes construct and reconstruct their identities, as well as how members of the subculture confirm and reconfirm the neophyte’s identity. In this way, identities can be seen to be subject to some alteration and adjustment as people

move laterally and vertically within subcultures (Donnelly and Young 1988; Prus 1997).

In a similar fashion, football wives experience identity confirmation, refinement and adjustments within their spousal subculture (to be discussed in Chapter Four).

Finally, there are many sensitizing concepts that speak to how people develop, negotiate, resist and lose identities, such as: identity foreclosure (van den Hoonaard 1997); adopting the cloak of (in)competence (Edgerton 1967; Haas and Shaffir 1977; McLuhan et al. 2014); spoiled identities (Goffman 1963b); and identity talk (Snow and Anderson 1987). These concepts focus analytic attention on the social processes whereby individuals continuously form and transform their identities. For example, using the case of widows, van den Hoonaard (1997) develops the concept identity foreclosure to conceptualize “how changing relationships and circumstances (death of husband) have affected that transformation by stripping them of their identity and forcing them to see themselves differently” (p. 537). The concept is also useful in understanding the difficulties athletes face once their athlete career is over. For instance, Beamon (2012) found that athletes who relied exclusively on their athlete identities had negative transitions out of their athletic careers as they struggled to redefine their identities. In this way, identity foreclosure can be used in a variety of social contexts to increase the understanding of the social processes involved in identity work.

Charmaz provides a wealth of sensitizing concepts in her research on how people with serious chronic illness face questions about self and identity, focusing on identity dilemmas, master identity (1994), and fictional identities (1973, 1989). Identity dilemmas describe the process through which individuals claim valued identities that are

complicated by conflicting sets of normative expectations, and in this way, hold two contradictory identities that often compete (Charmaz 1994; Dunn and Creek 2015; Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996). Charmaz illustrates this particular concept in her analysis of the ways men who are endangered by a serious illness face identity dilemmas; she argues that as they lose valued attributes, physical functions, social roles and personal pursuits through illness, they experience the losses as threats against taken-for-granted masculine identities, which they nevertheless try to maintain and enact.

Recently, Dunn and Creek (2015) developed the concept of “blended identity” to explain how identity dilemmas are the product of generic social processes inherent in systems of stratification, including normative systems. They define a blended identity as one that “creatively combines elements of each unvalued/valued identity in ways that allow the ability to conform to conflicting demands” (Dunn and Creek 2015:4). They offer as an example the case of Christians, where being gay does not always align easily with Christian values and practices in at least some traditions. In this way, Dunn and Creek argue that a person who is both LGBTQ and a fundamentalist Christian is forced to “choose” between identities. Creek and Dunn point out that in these situations people create new identities by creatively combining parts of each contradictory identity. They give the example of how lesbian participants in their study worked to construct “good Christian” identities that resisted homophobia and fostered respectability.

These identity concepts highlight the processual nature of identity work and illustrate the more generic processes through which people come to construct and reconstruct their identities. In a similar fashion, I present the concept of courtesy identity.

I draw on Goffman's (1963b) concept courtesy stigma, which refers to how a person can be stigmatized by virtue of their relationship to stigmatized others. For example, just as prisoners are stigmatized, prisoners' wives suffer courtesy stigma and often have deal with having their identity spoiled because of their connection to their husbands. In other words, a courtesy stigma is a stigma that certain individuals bear, not by virtue of their own behaviour, but as a consequence of their association with a stigmatized other. In contrast, rather than focusing on a stigma (a negative social trait), my dissertation highlights how individuals who are closely connected to a high-profile person (a positive social trait that is socially valued and revered) may be treated similarly. I argue that the football wife can be conceptualized as a courtesy identity, which is derived not from one's own status or activities, but from those of someone to whom one is closely connected. In the next chapter, I examine how football spouses develop and identify with the football wife identity.

CHAPTER THREE

MANNING THE HOUSE: INTERNALIZING THE FOOTBALL WIFE ROLE

My journey with Tom started on the football field. We took our regular morning jog to the field where each day Tom and I interval trained prior to him reporting to the Buffalo Bills training camp. Upon arrival there, you can imagine my surprise when he pulled out an engagement ring from his cleats (which I had been carrying!) and in a very traditional way got down on one knee and proposed. Little did I know then that the football field, the bleachers, cleats and morning workouts would all be a large part of my life with a football guy. Since then, I have been blessed with the opportunity to stand beside him during his career in many different roles. I have been a player's girlfriend and wife, a coach's wife, a GM's wife and now the wife of the Director of Officiating. (Sharon Higgins 2009)

In her blog post, "Life as a Football Wife" (excerpted above), Sharon Higgins reminisces about her fairytale engagement to Tom on the football field. She did not consider at the time how being married to Tom would make football a priority in her life. The quotation highlights the fact that, like her husband Tom, she too has had her own career in professional football. Sharon was there at the beginning and stood alongside her husband through every stage of his career. It is not a surprise then that she refers to not just her role as Tom's wife but to her connection to the various other roles (player's wife, coach's wife, GM's wife) she has she played over the course of his football career.

Sharon's experience is consistent with the literature on wives of famous athletes that shows the difficulty these women have in establishing an identity separate and apart from that of their husbands (Cronson and Mitchell 1987; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2006; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995, 1999). Athletes' wives often observe that others see them primarily as an extension of their husbands—few

people know them by their name, referring to them instead as “so-and-so’s wife” (Binns-Terrill 2012; Thompson 1995). This is also true for the spouses of football players in the CFL, although my findings reveal that the connection to their partners’ careers is not necessarily viewed as a problem or even as a barrier to establishing their own identity. Instead, these women use the connection to establish their identity as a “football wife,” which is an identity that is learned, negotiated and managed in day-to-day life and interactions with others. While these women generally identify proudly with their football wife role, they also at times downplay or conceal that identity. For example some women are apprehensive about telling people they have just met who their husband is and what he does for a living. Accepting the identity of football wife means that a woman must engage in a constant process of identity management.

This chapter focuses on how women learn, negotiate, and manage their personal identity as a football wife. It considers three main processes that football spouses go through: (a) defining self as a “real” football wife; (b) role engulfment; and (c) managing a football wife identity. The football wife identity becomes the primary way these women define themselves. I end the chapter by suggesting that the football wife identity can be thought of as a courtesy identity, which is an identity that derives not from one’s own status or activities, but from those of someone to whom one is closely connected.

DEFINING SELF AS A “REAL” FOOTBALL WIFE

To be a football wife involves more than simply being married to a football player. These women see the role as having certain requirements and dispositions, one of which had to do with how they met and first became involved with their partners. For

example, Michelle shares her perspective on marrying a professional athlete and the importance of knowing each other prior to his professional career:

You know I don't envy anybody who doesn't have a wife or girlfriend before the pros because then you don't know who you are going to get. Yah maybe they find a nice girl and that nice girl is going to cook and clean and pamper them the way their moms did or the way the university did and maybe they will find a girl that feels so fortunate to be with a professional athlete that they will do whatever they ask. That's when they met during the pros. That's why I don't envy being the girl because she might feel like she owes everything to him and I don't envy the guy because you don't know if the girl is a gold digger, which they don't make a lot of money anyway, but a status digger we will call it. So I always say I don't envy anybody who meets while you're a pro because you never really know the person's intentions. (Michelle)

She continues by explaining how she met Mike:

We met in [year] at [name] University. So he was on the football team and I was on the volleyball team. When we met, I was injured and in the physio clinic and right after [football] practice the football team comes in and takes off their tape and the ice baskets are there. So then we sort of chatted. That's how we met. And we would run into each other during and after practice all the time. And we started in dating.

Narratives like Michelle's, where football spouses shared how their relationships started, were typical in the interviews. In explaining how the development of their relationships, the football spouses drew on a vocabulary of explanations,¹⁰ which consisted of a series of rationalizations and accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968) to define themselves as a "real" or "true" football wife by emphasizing the following points in their accounts: (1) meeting prior to their partners' professional careers; (2) their "love for the man" not the "professional football player;" and (3) their husband's success on the football field as part

¹⁰ Mills (1940) referred to such explanations as "motives."

of their own accomplishments. In the next section, I will address each of these explanations highlighting how these women validate their relationships.

Meeting Prior to his Professional Career

The majority of the football spouses first met their partners in high school or university, long before their professional football career began. Jasmine's story is typical.

Deana: When did you first meet Charlie?

Jasmine: High school. We went to high school together in [city]. We went to college together in [city]. We graduated with our undergrad in 2003. At that time he went to the NFL and I went to graduate school and we got married in 2005. So we got married when he was in the NFL

In fact, many football spouses, like Jasmine, were proud of the fact they knew their husbands prior to their professional football careers, often pointing out that they were friends prior to dating. Football spouses made this distinction because they wanted it to be clear that they were not interested in dating a professional football player, and that their main interest was in their partner "as a man." Jessica and Olivia shared similar sentiments in their respective descriptions of their meeting and courtship when they said:

Well my husband and I met in high school, he went to a different high school than I did but we were friends. We also knew each other through out university, and he has played football since he was young and he played on our University football team. . . . So we were friends till about that time and we started to date and we were probably dating two years and then he got drafted to go to training camp. (Jessica)

We went to the same prep school in [city]. He was older than me so he had graduated and I was dating some of his friends basically. So we've known each other since I was 17, so for 30 years. . . . We dated six months separate from each other. I was in [home city] and he was in [CFL city]. And I had no idea what the CFL was, I just knew he played football up there and got money. I just didn't comprehend it. (Olivia)

This meeting and dating pattern appeared as a common account in defining the meaning of a “real” or “true” football wife. Interestingly, many women coupled this account with the idea that there was something different about him, he was not a stereotypical football player.

I Love the Man, Not the Football Player

In the stories shared by the football spouses, the majority emphasize that they were not looking to marry a professional football player. In fact, they suggested that they became interested in their partners despite the fact that they were football players, pointing out all of the ways the men were “different,” “special,” and unlike the stereotypical image of professional football players. For example, Katie states,

I [would] tell him that the first two weeks that we met I was not even interested. But he is really different than some of the stereotypes that I originally understood. And I grew up a football fan; so I was always like no thanks! I don't want anything to do with them but once I got to know Rob it was significantly different. (Katie)

Katie quickly points out that Rob was different from how she viewed and understood professional football players. Many women in my study stated that they had started with stereotypical views of football players as sexually promiscuous and unfaithful (“cheaters”), but becoming involved with their partners meant they had to look beyond the stereotype.

Similar to Katie's initial feelings, Terri had her own reservations about getting involved with a professional football player. Terri was working at a university residence

desk when a football team was staying on the campus.¹¹ She described why she believed many women are leery about dating a professional football player and why Jerry was so different from the rest:

And I saw players come in with a wedding ring on and get rid of the wedding ring. I saw players come in with assorted women all hours of the night. It's really sad that football players have that stereotype but they do and they do for just cause, you know a few bad apples spoil the whole barrel. I knew I hadn't been raised like that. I was hesitant in that respect but however, Jerry was so completely different and I knew that. And his family came up in the summer and I met his family when I was still working at the desk. He was just different he didn't have that attitude like some of the other guys did. (Terri)

Commonly, football spouses draw on these stereotypes of football players being unfaithful and promiscuous to describe what their husbands are *not*. These women draw on positive aspects of their husband to describe who he is and how he was different. In Terri's example Jerry was more involved with his family and did not have an attitude like most players. In the following examples Lynn and Melanie dismiss any assumption that they were looking to marry a professional athlete; rather they emphasize that they were attracted to "the man" not the football player:

We first met in high school, a long time ago. But then we didn't date, we knew each other in high school but didn't start dating. I was in first year university and he was in college. I was really hesitant to get involved with a football player because that's not really [what I wanted]. I was attracted to him, not to the fact he was a football player. It was part of the package but it wasn't my goal to date a football player. (Lynn)

I knew him from high school but he didn't know I existed. That's another story. But anyways I formally met him when I was working at [university] and he was at training camp. So I didn't see him as Sean the football player, I

¹¹ Often Canadian football teams will stay on a university campus during training camp. The team will be housed in residence until the final roster has been established (about two weeks).

saw him as Sean from [city] that I had a crush on. So that might have made a difference. I didn't see him as a pro athlete. (Melanie)

Distinguishing between loving the man versus the football player became a defining feature of a “true” football wife. It is important for these women to highlight how their husbands were not the stereotypical football player when they met. Significantly, it was more important for them to emphasize that their relationship is based on love and not on a desire to marry a professional athlete. A key part of the role of football wife, then, is a commitment to one's partner as an individual.

“We Made It”

The women took pride in their relationships and their ability, as a couple, to weather the vagaries of a career in professional football. Some of the women saw it as a shared accomplishment when their partners made a professional team. Given the competitiveness of professional sport, making it to the professional level is rare. For all but the highly gifted player, professional-level sport takes dedication and perseverance. However, many football players and coaches are not alone in their journeys to the pro leagues. Most football spouses described how they actively helped their husbands succeed and talked about how this made them a “true” or “real” football wife. This definition of the situation is similar to the one noted by Thompson (1995) who points out that hockey wives often use “we” when referring to their husbands because “they feel as though they are a part of their husband's career” (p. 33). In other words, athletes' spouses internalize this “we” partnership (Ortiz 2006). The use of “we” and “us” in the wives' narratives

highlights how football spouses come to view themselves as playing a major role in their partners' success.

Examining this theme of “we made it” more closely, there are a variety of ways that football spouses see themselves as helping their husbands' careers. Some women talk about being part of the decision-making process or about advising their partners on where and when to try out. For example, Jessica describes how she urged James to try out for the CFL:

It was exciting. He wasn't done his university degree yet so in that respect it was sort of a decision: do I finish school? What do I do because he would have to take time off of university so I basically worded it in a way that—“the chance to play professional football doesn't come around very often so he [sic] can always go back to university.” So he has played football as his dream. He decided okay and he took a semester off of university and basically trained to get ready for camp. He went into that training camp and was successful. That was very exciting for us.

The quote illustrates the instrumental role that Jessica feels she played in supporting her husband's dream.

Some spouses may take a physically active role, even training with their partners. Whether it is catching footballs, jogging, or running intervals, these women work with their husbands to help them develop skills and get in shape. Michelle describes how she helped Mike make it to the professional level when she observed:

It's funny because people who think it's all glamorous, they don't realize that I was with him before he was anything. So I helped train him to get there. So Mike and I didn't date much, we didn't go out on dates. So after volleyball and football practice it would be like 8:30 at night and instead of going out and dating, sometimes we go out to eat but most of the time it would be going into the field house and he would snap a 100 balls to me and I would catch his snaps every single night until the lights would shut down. And he would be snapping to me in the dark until they said we had to get out. So it would be 11 o'clock at night, he would go home, I would go home and it would be the

same thing every day. So I trained with him. It almost became our goal to get there . . . we were like a business team slash girlfriend boyfriend.

Another way women help their husbands is to attend training camp as an extra set of eyes, making observations about what is happening in practice, noting where their partners' skills are strong and where there is need for improvement. As Terri explains:

One thing that is fun about training camp is a lot of the girls go. Especially if they are in from out of town and they don't have jobs and they like to go hang out and see how their husband is doing. Or alternately the players say come to camp, "I want you to watch me, I want you to see if I'm doing this right or that right or here's my number. 41 and 48 are my greatest rivals tell me what you see with them." Because a lot of girls have a good grip on their husband's or boyfriend's skill set. Maybe husbands more so because that means you have been around longer. For a receiver he going out to catch passes, well he might not be able to watch what his teammate is doing but the wife can up in the stands and she could report back to him. It's not meant to be in a malice way, it's that you're an extra set of eyes for me [him].

Michelle's, Jessica's and Terri's stories make it clear that many football spouses invest time and energy into their partners' career long before the men make it to the professional level. Whether it is catching footballs, running laps by their side, strategizing or providing moral support, the women are part of the "team" supporting and contributing to their husbands' football careers. This explains why they consider "making it" to be as much their success as their partners' successes. To be a "real" football wife, then, means to be someone who is actively involved in football and a willingness to support his career choice and the demands football life places on their relationship.

In telling me about when they first met their partners, the women drew on three main accounts as a way to legitimize their relationship with a professional football player and define themselves positively as the ideal football wife. Next, I describe the daily activities and routines of the football season and what these commitments mean for

football spouses. I explore how these women become engulfed in the social world of professional football while simultaneously providing spousal support for their husbands.

LIFE REVOLVES AROUND FOOTBALL: ROLE ENGULFMENT

Once their partners sign a professional contract, football spouses realize that their everyday lives are going to revolve around their partners and their careers. They become engulfed in the role of the “football wife.” The concept of role engulfment was initially introduced by Schur (1971) to explain the process that occurs when someone who continually engages in deviant behaviours and internalizes these roles as a defining feature of self (i.e., secondary deviance). In their study of collegiate basketball players, Adler and Adler (1991) illustrated role engulfment by showing how the athletes’ sense of self became taken over by their athletic role through a combination of both external and internal forces: “the athletic role’s promise to fulfill players’ dreams, its ability to make them feel important and famous, and its larger-than-life media stature” (Adler and Adler 1991:226). Role engulfment not only involves the effects of external forces (e.g., labeling) but also the internalization of the role as a part of self. In other words, when an individual consistently plays an all-consuming role it can be difficult, and at times impossible, for the individual to play other roles (Adler and Adler 1991). Significantly, as Adler and Adler (1991) found, the athletic role became a stronger component in their definition of self and more dominant in the basketball players’ lives during their college careers. As a result, their academic and social roles were diminished and in some cases abandoned.

The football spouses I interviewed described similar processes of role engulfment wherein their priorities and senses of self became tied to performing the ideal football wife role. In the following section I describe how football becomes central to the daily lives of spouses and how they learn what it means to successfully perform the role of the football wife. Football spouses become engulfed by their roles as partners of men in professional sport and they often internalize this role to exclude other roles they might otherwise play.

Following Their Partners' Lead

Since many women met their partners prior to their professional career, they slowly learn the role during his career. To some extent football spouses take their cues from their partners as they are both socialized into the world professional sport. Terri's account provides insight to how she learned to be a football wife:

It is all trial by error or *trial by fire* is more to the point. I think every girl goes into a situation in a different way. Their previous experiences; perhaps their boyfriend and what kind of guy he is whether he embraced her with the team or keeps her at an arms distance. But for me I had no idea how to act, what to do, I was a football fan but that was as far as it went. I just learned a little at a time. It wasn't boom I'm a head coach's wife. I had the luck or the fortune to be exposed a little at a time. (Terri)

She illustrates that adopting the appropriate behaviour and actions of a football wife is a social process that takes time. She indicates that she has learned from her long-term experience in the league with her partner. They learn together what it means to perform their respective roles. Terri elaborates on this process:

I had the luck or the fortune to be exposed a little at a time. Jerry started at a very low level with football and he has worked his way up. So I had an opportunity to groom myself accordingly.

As Jerry proceeded through his career as a player and then into varying levels of coaching in the CFL, Terri followed his lead, taking cues from him on how she should be acting and learning the appropriate responses in different social situations.

This marital pattern matches Hochschild's concept of a career-dominated marriages where one spouse (usually the husband) performs a high-stress and sometimes high-profile occupational role (e.g., corporate executive, military officer, physician, entertainer, police officer, clergy member, or politician) in a male-dominated occupational world and the spouse submerges his/her own marital and personal needs to ensure the other's success (Hochschild 1969). Papanek (1973) called this type of marriage a "two-person career." More recently, Haas (1999) has referred to this process as "spousal career support," which is the "practical and emotional work individuals do that makes valuable contributions to their partners' careers or jobs" (p. 579).

Specific to the context of this discussion, Ortiz (2006) coined the term "sport marriage" as a type of career dominated marriage, where athletes' wives usually lead lives characterized by geographical mobility and instability and deal with their husband's being away for extended periods of times because of the demands of professional sport. Through marital socialization these women learn the appropriate roles to take in the household so that they can create a stress-free environment for their husbands at home. More importantly these women learn that their husbands' careers come first in the marriage (Fowlkes 1980; Ortiz 2006). In these cases, Hochschild (1969), Haas (1999) and

Ortiz (2006; 2011) suggest that the woman's priority is to be a good wife and mother in the most traditional sense. The following describes this socialization process by focusing on how the women come to learn the expectations attached to the role of the football wife.

Football Comes First

The football team is often accepted as one of the most important aspects of a football spouse's life. This is especially true for many women when football is the family's primary source of income. In situations where families are dependent on the income provided from professional football, football spouses quickly realize the importance of football to their family's livelihood. As such, they organize their lives and the family's schedule around football. Jasmine explains:

Honestly, our life revolved around football . . . life has always revolved around football. Football team came before everything and you know I would kind of do my own thing on games days and leave him alone. You know we were there for football, so everything focused around that . . . [l]ike I said everything is football, football pays the bills. We were in Canada for football so you know. You kind of get used to the life of football come first; football is everything.

The example highlights how football becomes a priority for football spouses, not just their husbands. These women learn to negotiate their daily schedules around their husbands' football schedules.

The situation of football spouses is similar to that of women who marry corporate executives, politicians and entertainers, relationships where the husband's career takes

priority in the relationship (Hochschild 1969, 1989, 2011). Katie echoes this sentiment when she explained her experience of being married to a professional football player:

[O]ur life revolved around football. During the season our lives were very much scheduled around the team whether it was practice or traveling. He would have practice in the morning, he would work out and then he would come home and spend a few hours watching game film or reading his playbook. Then he was gone three or four days at a time. So that made our day-to-day life very dependent on what was going on with the team. (Katie)

Pro football is scheduled and organized. Players are expected to prepare for the next game at home by watching film of the opposing team or reading their playbooks. Football spouses realize this commitment during the season and will work around their husbands' schedule.

Overwhelmingly, the player's career is the central aspect of their daily home lives. Many wives explain their lives revolve around football in terms of their husband's schedule. As Terri tells me:

There has really never been a balance in our house just because of what he does. . . . There is no such thing as a regular day. "9 to 5" is not even available so you have to quickly establish a routine that works around him. It's always about him, it can't be around anyone else, and it is around him.

As a new spouse, Terri quickly learned that her day-to-day life was dependent on her partner's football schedule. In this way, professional football is entrenched in the home, becoming a major aspect of all family matters. The all-encompassing nature of professional football obliges many of these women to take on traditionally feminine roles in the relationship and family. As a consequence, in an era of increasing dual-income households and greater parenting equity (Haas 1999), many football spouses choose to forego careers, at least during their husbands' playing years, to take on the primary

responsibility for housekeeping, house maintenance, and childcare tasks. Meanwhile, they are also managing the uncertainties inherent in professional football (trades and injuries).

The Role of the Football Wife

The everyday life of most football spouses is focused on helping her partner to be successful in professional football. In the quote below, Terri highlights the fact that the football wife needs to be prepared to manage the house and do everything “alone.”

Well I think the big thing is that you have to be prepared to do everything alone. Everything like going to weddings, convocations, I couldn't even tell you how many recitals Jerry has missed. Our kids were involved in music, piano, guitar, voice lessons, and they were in musical theater. There was time and time again he couldn't make those things because the football season was starting and the demands were as such. It's not like your regular job when you can say to your boss—gee I'm going to be gone from my job from 3 to 5 because I'm going to my kid's piano recital. No it doesn't work that way. So the first thing is—you are going to be alone, and you better make sure your strong enough to do everything you need to do—*alone* You are going to be alone a lot when your husband travels a lot. That is a really tough one I think for girls especially if they have come to a city to be with their boyfriend or husband. And then your boyfriend goes off. (Terri, *her emphasis*)

Her description of her life shows how Jerry's career dominates their day-to-day lives—it dictates when the couple can spend time with friends and family, when they can attend or plan significant life events, and when they can take a vacation as well as demanding flexibility for these plans if or when the football schedule changes. The football wife must be flexible, emotionally strong, and socially independent while simultaneously being subservient to the demands of their husband's professional football career.

CFL spouses describe assuming traditional female roles in their households and in their marriages. When describing their everyday life, daily schedules and the division of

labour in the household many describe their role as “running the household.” These daily activities include household chores, raising children, managing career instabilities, and supporting their spouses as they recover from injuries. Similar to Terri, the other participants perceive these activities to be part of the job of being a “football wife.”

Managing The Household

Football spouses are often left at home attending to the family and, in theory, ensuring a stress-free environment for their husbands. This means that they do perform a range of household activities such as cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, and laundry, and making sure the household is running smoothly.

You are limited in having your freedom because you are here manning the house, taking care of the kids, and make sure that everything is running smoothly because they are, it's a one track thinking, it's all football and sort of what helps them be successful as well, because they know that we are here taking care of everything so they don't have to worry about it. (Jessica)

Jessica provides insight into the dynamics of her home life. She emphasizes that her ability to take care of the house is what makes her husband successful.

Many of the women shared stories of the importance of keeping their husbands fed because the men needed to eat a lot for their jobs (in order to maintain specific weights). As Olivia shared, “I really like to cook so I felt like that was my role especially being a southerner, and I didn't have a job so my whole day was consisting of going to get groceries and cooking.” Or for example, Melanie discuss her household responsibilities in a way that helps her experience a sense of satisfaction in the mundane household activities they perform:

I would help him out. I would do laundry. I would cook for the guys, that was one of my favourite things to do even before we were married. . . . And also just keep Sean fed. He was an offensive linemen, he had to eat that was his job. But he was never really around; he was always working out that was his job. So I was bored I'm sitting at home by myself so basically I would keep myself busy by helping him out. Cook, clean, shop, get the groceries, do the wifey thing. (Melanie)

Football spouses took pride in managing the household so that their husband could prepare for his next football game. By controlling the domestic labour in the household these women feel they are fulfilling their role as a 'good' football wife.

Taking on the bulk of household work is common for all married women (Berhau et al. 2011). However, the domestic labour the football spouses performed usually went beyond normal expectations. In some cases, the husbands did nothing at home. For example, these women referred to their home life as "my show" or claimed, "I run the household." As Addison put it bluntly: "We always laugh. Once a football season is here, it's my show. I run the show. I run the house." Terri explains how she handled domestic life during the football season:

I did everything. I mean I feel so pleased that I have that kind of personality, be that I could just jump in and I was the yard keeper, grounds keeper, I fixed the dishwasher and I called in handymen, and made sure the roofers were there. When we had a house built, it was me that over saw it, it was me who negotiated when we put an addition on our basement . . . I have had always had to take the lead, but I have always been willing to take the lead. I am kind of a forward person in many ways. (Terri)

Being able to manage the multiple demands of the household gives these women a sense of pride. They do not complain about doing this work but refer to it as helping their partners focus on their football careers. In this way, by framing their household tasks as a major contribution to their husbands' career, they saw meaning in mundane domestic

work and were able to perceive themselves as playing an important role in his football successes. As can be seen in the next section, a similar pattern appeared in terms of parenting tasks and roles.

Raising Children

Once a couple has children, the football spouse learns she has sole responsibility for those children during the football season, which can last six months or beyond (depending on whether the team makes the playoffs). Jessica explains her role in raising children:

We got married and then we had our son, so it's always just been my job within the household as far as getting the kids up and ready, taking them to daycare, me going to work or school, picking them up. We share certain chores in the house, like cooking, but for the most part cleaning and the laundry stuff like that is mine. I get the kids ready for bed and pack lunches for the next day.

Unlike other couples, Jessica and Chris share at least some household chores, although childcare is completely Jessica's responsibility. Gabby shares her experience:

Well I think you are responsible for the raising of the children. Right. A lot of wives are responsible for their children. They are single parents every weekend, I mean I'm married to a (football) analyst now so I'm a single parent every weekend for six months every year and that's tough.

During the football season, it is often expected that football spouses will be doing most, if not all, of the parenting.

A career in professional sports means that the father is often absent during the season. For the mother, this means taking on the main role in parenting and looking after daily duties like getting children up and ready in the morning, getting them to daycare or school, arranging extracurricular activities, making meals, and attending to their daily

needs. This responsibility can, in turn, affect the football spouse's own career decisions and outside interests. Terri shares her experience raising kids:

We decided at a very early time in our life when we started to have our children that I would not go back to work if there was a way we could swing it. That I would stay at home, we would do that because we felt that it was important to have one constant factor and if it couldn't be dad it had to be mom. And our kids to this day, would say, "mom raised us" even when they have a challenge now they come to me first before they go to dad. Dad is kind of like a friend parent.

Terri did not go back to work once she and Jerry had children, she realized Jerry would be absent frequently and she would stay home to provide stability for the children.

In light of their partners' extended absences, football spouses have regrets on behalf of their children because they lose out on seeing and interacting with their fathers. Some of the women feel resentment towards their husbands' careers. They dislike seeing their children upset because "daddy cannot make" it to their school events, carnivals, sport events, recitals, and family functions. Addison and Melissa describe their emotions over their children "missing out" when they note:

I think because they are so young now, I mean they miss out, sometimes it's sad because, our kids are five and two, so they really are quite young. I know at our daughter's school they have a children's carnival every June. It is a nice family event. I'm the only one that is going because her dad is never around for those types of things. So sometimes I feel sad she doesn't have a regular family to go these family events. (Addison)

But there are birthdays that are missed you know there's games that they really want daddy to see but they miss. And you feel bad. You kind of get mad but you don't want to get mad because you know he can't do anything about it, he's doing what he can to support us. They're working hard. So it's kind of one of those things where you sometimes get frustrated. It's a whole new ballgame with children. (Melissa)

While the wives struggle with their parental responsibilities, at the same time, they realize that it can be difficult for their husbands as well. Jessica provides this insight into the problem of raising kids while involved in professional sport:

There is a lot of resentment because they [football players] don't view it the way we do, that they have all of this time even though they are working but they are still out being able to socialize, and they don't have little people to be taking care of. Whereas we do. For us, personally, it causes the most arguments in summer time during the season when they are not able to be there in the afternoon to take their kids to the park or do a family day because dad is at work, or has to work out, or he is resting before a football game. That's where it is hard, there are [sic] a lot of sacrificing and at the time you are frustrated and angry because you want them to be there and be involved, but you don't always stop and think that they are viewing that as a sacrifice as well. They are not enjoying that they can't take the kids to the park and to do all that kind of stuff. That is where it causes issues for us. (Jessica)

Jessica feels resentment at times when her husband is not around for their children, but she also realizes that he is sacrificing his time with his children to support the family by playing football.

As the spouses attest, raising a family in professional sport is difficult and requires sacrifices on the part of both partners for their family. As difficult as it may be for football spouses to manage things on the home front under normal circumstances, their role becomes that much more complicated and stressful given the possibility of their husband being traded or released. An additional component of the football wives' role, then, is to become experts at managing the uncertainties and instabilities inherent in their partners' careers in professional football. This dilemma is described in the next section.

Managing Instabilities in Uncertain Times

A career in professional sport, like the CFL, is precarious work (Fogel 2013), and only a few CFL players have guaranteed contracts. For most players, their income is short term and they do not have long-term health benefits. As Fogel (2013) points out, “players become commodities to be bought and sold by teams” (p. 112), which means that a player can be released or traded at any time. These occupational instabilities spill over into family life, and so when a player is released or traded, his spouse is left to deal with the social and familial consequences.

You’re often shown the door not even because you did something wrong. You just didn’t do it right, or at least right in the eyes of those who hold your fate in their hands. These changes can come with either players or coaches. The real truth is those breezes blow all the time in football families. . . . It usually happens so fast, you can hardly believe it. But sooner or later, you too become one of the victims. As much as you think you are ready for it, it sneaks up on you and smacks you in the face. It leaves you running for cover and to pick up the many pieces of your life that inevitably fall apart over night. (Sharron Higgins 2009)

On her blog, long time coach’s wife Sharron Higgins (2009) provides an excellent example of how family life can change in a second due to a trade, release or firing. She writes about how these changes are unexpected for families who are often deeply impacted by these football trades and releases.

When a player is traded or signs with a new team, he is required to join the new team immediately. When the trade occurs during the season, families face the decision of whether to move immediately with the player or stay behind in the short term. Some families opt to stay together. As a longtime quarterback told me, “for me it has always been about [family], as long as my family is together that is home. It’s not the building you live in or those things, as long as my family is together that is home.” When a couple

chooses to move immediately, the football spouse is left to orchestrate the details of the relocation since her partner will already have left as per his contractual agreement.

Michelle describes what happened when her husband Mike was released:

Okay, we are in [city], he gets released in the middle of the season and we are sitting there watching TV, *Fifth Wheel*, *Cheaters* and *Blind Date*. It's like three in morning, depressed that we are jobless, both of us. And I did my research again and I said I think [team] is going to call you. It's looking like they need a snapper just be ready. Anyways [team] called three weeks later. He has to go right away and I'm left with the apartment and all of the bills and everything. So now I'm packing everything, getting movers, getting everything to move up towards [city] . . . he was going to be playing in the game and he hadn't snapped really in three weeks so I flew up and caught his snaps all day Saturday in the hotel room, so we did in the hallway and hotel rooms, all day Saturday and Sunday he went to his game and played and then I flew back to [city] and finished packing up the stuff and moved. Isn't it exciting? (Michelle)

Michelle even took time out of organizing the move to help her husband adjust to his new team environment and sharpen the particular skills expected of him.

This precarious work and home environment provokes anxiety for most football spouses. Often, throughout the interviews, the women discussed the sense of worry and stress created by the fear that their partners would be traded. Many of them had developed strategies to try to distract themselves, which, unfortunately, did not always work. They worried in particular about the disruption a trade would mean for their home life and the instability this change created for their family. Katie explains her fear of a potential move:

I think always in the back of my mind I was fearful that I would get too settled and have the potential of moving. I think I never really invested myself at [certain job] because we would be moving to [place] next year or something. (Katie)

On the other hand, Melanie feared a trade because she knew she would not relocate with Sean to a new team. They had decided that she would stay in the area and finish out the school year if he was traded. In these situations, football spouses worry about being separated from their partners for the remainder of the season. Melanie shared why she dreaded Sean being traded:

Because you can't get settled in a house, you can't settle into a life. Your kids can't get settled in a school. If you do get settled then you are there and they are gone. It's like your husband is going overseas or something. They are gone. It's tough. You are always living paranoid because you are like, "when is it going to happen?" (Melanie)

The instability of professional sports usually means that players move many times over the course of their careers. After a while, their partners become accustomed to this pattern and even anticipate having to relocate.

The majority of the football spouses I interviewed had moved at least once during their husbands' careers and has experienced the disruption involved. They had experienced their fears come true with the reality of their husband moving to a new team. As such, part of the role of the football wife, is that she is to take charge of the household and carry out the responsibilities of moving when her partner is traded or signed with a new team. As will be seen in the next section, injuries add to the precarious nature of professional football employment.

Helping Recover from Injuries

Injuries, which to some extent are inevitable, also complicate the lives of football spouses. While the experience of being injured is painful, emotional, and, at times, devastating for the athlete (Young, White and McTeer 1994; Young 2004), he does not

experience this process alone. The majority of football spouses described how challenging it was to deal with their husbands' injuries. When their husbands are injured, these women help them in any way possible so that the men can return to the football field as quickly as possible. Olivia explains what she would do when her husband was injured:

I was always researching what I could feed him, what supplements I could buy him. We tried acupuncture. I was always trying to help him get better faster because he was so miserable when he couldn't play. Every guy wants to come off his injury and get back on the field. I just felt bad for him. (Olivia)

Football spouses, like Olivia, know that their husbands do not want to miss playing football, so they quickly adapt their spousal role to be more supportive and positive than usual.

The women also take on the role of "nurse" to help their husbands recover as quickly as possible. This extra caregiving duty places extra stress on them. Sara describes her experience when Jeff got injured:

It was difficult that he couldn't walk for sure. I think it was more difficult on me because I knew how much he wanted to be training and he was losing weight and he really shouldn't be losing weight because he has to keep a certain weight on. It was difficult on me, I was working every day and then I would come home and he couldn't stand up in the shower. I was bathing him at one point I believe. (Sara)

Other football spouses I interviewed described themselves as the main, and often, the only caregiver while their husbands were rehabilitating. Katie describes her role during her husband's first injury this way: "I was his sole caretaker for that injury." Caregiving usually consists of taking their husbands to and from the hospital and doctor appointments, taking on additional household duties (those for which their husbands had

responsibility, if any), helping out with rehabilitation, helping their partners to get around the house, and, as Sara points out, even bathing their partners. In another example, Melanie describes how she assisted her husband when he tore a knee muscle:

He came out on crutches. And I was like, “okay what’s going on,” and he said, “I need surgery, I’m done.” And Sean is always emotionless, he is always very calm and I was freaking out. What? And the funny thing is we had just got married. And this was my first duty as the wife. Okay great, now we are putting you in surgery. . . . He had major knee reconstruction and his ACL reconstruction and thank God I’m in Phys. Ed. and I know what was going on so I helped with rehab. (Melanie)

The football wives are willing to do whatever it takes and draw on any personal knowledge or resources to help their partners get better as quickly as possible.

Physical injuries create emotional difficulties for many football spouses, especially if they live far away from their family and friends. Helping their husbands with their needs becomes a top priority and extends beyond physical help. Many women reported engaging in emotional work to bolster their husbands’ confidence (Hochschild 1979). When injured, football players worry about losing their position on the team. Katie notes the sense of isolation and personal despair a football player may experience: “When you become injured you see the team doctor and you see the team trainers and you go to as many meetings as you can but you are not as much an active participant on the team anymore.” Knowing their partners as they do, these women understand how badly their partners want to regain playing status. The women interviewed discussed their role of caretaker in assisting their husbands to get better; but also providing the emotional support needed to help them adapt to this aspect of their football career. As Jessica explains: “I mean I don’t have to build his self-esteem but there are times where he has

had an injury and he is frustrated and you have to understand what they are saying... I think that's just a part of being partners.” Jessica points out that it is not a self-esteem issue but that injuries require a certain amount of emotional support to help in recovery. The majority of the football spouses suggested injuries presented certain difficulties from assisting their partners physically, mentally and/or emotionally.

The findings underscore that for married players, a career in professional sport engulfs both player and spouse. Participants described how their marriage and family roles were subsumed into the role of the football wife. The routine of their daily lives hinged on football, the needs of the football team and the demands of their husband's football schedule. Many women took over the bulk of family responsibilities and household tasks during the football season in an attempt to create a stress-free environment for their husbands and to support their successes. The next section describes the dilemmas football spouses face in developing an identity separate from that of the “football wife.”

MANAGING THE FOOTBALL WIFE IDENTITY

In the above sections, I discussed how being married to a pro football player affects the day-to-day activities of family life. A majority of football spouses dedicate their time and energy to their partners' careers and want to see them succeed. It is not surprising then that the sacrifices these women make can create problems in terms of their ability to foster a sense of self that is separate from their husband and the football profession. This section addresses these challenges, notably trying to have their own

careers, and explores how such limitations influences the football spouse's ability to form a separate identity.

Many of the women I interviewed held post-secondary degrees and some of them had earned graduate degrees. This level of education is not uncommon among athletes' wives and is consistent with findings in the literature (Binns-Terrill 2012; Thompson 1995). Thompson and Binns-Terrill are both married to professional athletes and while attending graduate school, they did their research on the social worlds they were a part of in the NHL and NFL, respectively. As already noted, many of the couples met while they were in college or university and these women had earned a diploma or a degree in a range of areas such as business, teaching, accounting and physiotherapy. Frequently in the interviews, most of the women mentioned having career aspirations beyond that of being a traditional housewife. In fact, only three of the women stated that they did not have career aspirations of their own. Unfortunately, for the rest of the women, a life in professional sport limited the possibility of careers of their own. In many cases, women postponed starting their own careers during their husbands' football years. In part, this postponement was due to the fact that they are cognizant that a football career is often short: in the CFL the average length is 3.2 years (Black 2011; Scott-Clarke 2012). In light of this, the women simply chose to delay pursuing their own career aspirations.

Believing they cannot "have it all," some football spouses decide to put their own career aspirations on hold:

I didn't have much of a career. I just finished grad school. I was just working down here and it was fine, but we decided we were going to focus on his career because football is short. We just decided we would do whatever we

had to do for him for a couple years and then I could focus on me later.
(Michelle)

I didn't ever really want to be a businessperson; I did want to be a teacher. But found that the lifestyle of moving back-and-forth, which, is what we agreed on, is probably not going to work for that because you don't stay in one place. I didn't want to be separated from Matt. So I do think that a lot of times that the wives just give up. (Olivia)

In these examples, Michelle and Olivia realize the sacrifices football spouses have to make to have their own careers. Both women ultimately decided to focus at least for the moment on their partners' careers. Even after attending graduate school, Michelle decided to put her career aspirations on hold with the understanding that a career in professional football is short. Many football spouses know that having their own career means the couple will have to live apart during the football season and for some women, like Olivia, living apart is not something they are willing to do.

Furthermore, the reality of sudden moves can create difficulties in obtaining a steady job and developing an extended career. Half of the women expressed frustration with moving around and how that affected their resumes and potential employment opportunities. In the following example, Addison shares her experience:

Well, basically my career has taken a hit. I went to school, I was always really motivated by school and learning and all that. I always assumed I would have some fancy high-profile job and I went through and got my Bachelor of Commerce honours degree, and went back and got my CIGC degree, so I'm a certified general accountant. But for me to be able to have, I can't have a high profile, impact type of career because I don't have the time. One of the things I quickly learnt as we moved around, you go and try to find a job and people would look at your resume, oh you worked here for three years and here for three years. "How come you move around so much"? My husband's job required me to move a lot. I may live somewhere for two years, I may live somewhere for five years, it's really hard to say. That's kind of the thing I've been battling with. It's actually at the forefront of my mind now. I've been talking about going back to work and the weird thing is that here people know

my last name. So the interviews I've had I almost doubt whether . . . are they bring me in to talk to me or are they bringing me because of who I am. It's crappy because the last couple of interviews I went on and the gentleman was asking me questions about Mitch and you know you're not even interviewing him, you are interviewing me. You know. So that's kind of the thing that cheeses me off a bit. (Addison)

Addison provides insight into the problems some football spouses face if they do have career aspirations: women can experience difficulty in explaining to potential employers why they move around frequently and why there are gaps in their resumes. Additionally, as Addison points out, once a prospective employer finds out about her husband, she wonders if she is being hired because of his status rather than because of her own skills and qualifications. This has led to a position in which Addison, who embraces the football wife identity in the majority of social situations, tries to conceal it in job interviews as she wants to be hired on her own merit.

For the American football wives living in Canada, the work situation is further complicated. The spouse of American player may choose to live in the city of her husband's team during the season, but keep their home in the U.S. to reside in during the off-season. This means that the spouses are only in Canada for limited periods at a time and may not feel it is worth applying for a visa, which is required for them to work in the country. For example, in the beginning of her husband's career, Olivia and her husband spent the season in Canada and the offseason in their hometown in the United States. She explains how this situation affected her career choices:

I didn't apply for a work visa because I didn't know what to do with myself. No one was going to hire me. It's hard for Americans because we still maintained our home in [place] and we weren't planning on living here [in Canada] year-round. So I didn't look for a job because I was only going to be here [in Canada] for six months. (Olivia)

Although, Michelle's situation is reversed, she provides insight into the problem football spouses face. Michelle reminisces about her partner's early professional career. He was first drafted in the NFL and, during that time, Michelle followed him to three NFL cities and then to Europe for two years before he signed with a CFL team. Throughout these travels, Michelle's primary role was to support her husband's career. She became engulfed in her football wife role, which made it difficult for her to forge her own career.

I always felt like Mike David's' girlfriend. I was never me. I was never Michelle. I didn't have my own identity. It was hard and I had no identity. Maybe part of my reason I love being in Canada is because I have my identity. I have myself. I go to work and people know me for who I am. And they say oh yeah you're married to him. It's not, oh you're just his wife, which is what I felt in the States a lot. Here it's not as bad because I've gone out of my way to make my own life here. Where I can see if it was an American wife coming up here [to Canada] might have the same issues I had when I was down in the States. It's just harder to get work. (Michelle)

Still, Michelle's example points out the difficulty football spouses, especially American women who travel to Canada, may experience in obtaining satisfactory employment and developing an alternative identity. However, her partner's stint in the NFL was short and soon found himself in the CFL. Luckily for Michelle, her husband was able to establish himself on a CFL team on a relatively stable basis, which allowed them to make a home in the city where the team is located. Michelle embraces the football wife identity and considers football a major feature of her life but the stability that came from her husband playing on the same team has allowed her to start her own career and develop an identity separate from football.

Despite the challenges, not all football spouses forgo paid employment. Three fourths of the women I interviewed worked hard to establish their own careers. Often they were motivated by the need to supplement their family's income. Unlike other professional sports leagues where players are paid more generously, CFL players average \$80,000 – \$85,000 a year (Scott-Clarke 2012). Consequently, some of the women feel they need to work. Whether they see a career as a need or a desire, the women who choose to work tend not to move around with their husbands.

In some cases, a few women already had a career before their husbands made it as a professional football player. In these cases, the couple sometimes decided to live apart during the football season:

I approached him and told him I really wanted to focus on my career and that I was concerned with moving again. It's not that I didn't think I could get a job, I had a lot of contacts at [university], but I kind of have decided I wanted to get out of the University world and further my own education. So we actually moved to [US city] for a year for me... so I could get more experience in that field. He was super supportive and after a year in [city] we made the decision to move closer to my family and being in this area we are closer to [city] and his family as well. I did get lucky in that he lets me do my thing and he gets to do his thing as well. (Katie)

Katie presents two perspectives in these comments. At the beginning of her husband's career she chose to follow him and work wherever they lived, a pattern typical of a more traditional sport marriage (Ortiz 2006). However, when faced with another possible move, Katie decided she wanted to have her own career. She discussed the matter with her husband and they compromised. However, Katie felt "lucky" in that he "lets her" have her own career, which is not the norm for typical football wife. She recognizes that

she is deviating from this traditional housewife role that is the standard within the social world of professional sport.

Another wife, Letisha, actively rejects the traditional football wife role and feels it is important to have her own career and develop her own sense of self. She and her husband are both from the United States. Her husband has played in the CFL for many years. However, she decided not move to Canada for the season. Instead she makes extended visits. She explains:

During his season I spend my summers in Canada with him (June-August), I typically work on my [own] businesses. This allows me time to do things other than sit in the house as a “housewife.” I have to stay active and have an avenue to express myself and make my own income. (Letisha)

Similar to Letisha, Gabby made the decision to work early in her life because, “I was never going to be taken care of; my dad left my mom and she had nothing and she gave up everything so I mentally was going to work and my career was very important to me.” Three of the women interviewed always had their own careers and sacrificed living with their partners during the season. These women found it important to have their own source of income and not rely on their partners to support them financially. Having their own career made them less reliant on their husbands and they could foster an identity separate from him and football.

To summarize, many football spouses set aside their career ambitions, at least in the short term. They realize that a career in professional football is short and they want to help their partners achieve success. In these cases, they assume the football wife role and voluntarily play a secondary supporting role to their husbands’ careers. In these

situations, women find it difficult to create a sense of self that is separate from football and their husbands. Other spouses manage to have a job or a career separate from football, however, more often than not, these women have to sacrifice living with their husbands to pursue their own interests (at least during the football season). The women still identify as football wives but they are able to develop a stronger sense of self that is not attached to their husbands' careers and successes.

Negotiating the Football Wife Identity

All but two women in this study proudly identify as a football wife. As discussed above, the majority of women become engulfed by the role of the traditional football wife and chose to postpone their own career in order embrace the life demanded of those involved in professional sport. In this section I demonstrate how women identify as football wives, describe the varying commitments to the identification and demonstrate that these women manage their football wife identity situationally, choosing who and where they will reveal it.

Football spouses tend to fall somewhere along a continuum in how much they are willing to embrace and accept the football wife identity. There are a few women, like Gabby, who take a different tact of resistance by concealing their football wife identity from others. Gabby has always worked and has never deferred to her husband's career, "I never defined myself as being married to a football player, quite frankly it's embarrassing to say." Gabby represents women who resist the "football wife" identity. In comparing herself to other football spouses, Gabby points to the more typical examples of football wives who defer to their husbands' careers:

I think sometimes that it can split a family unless you're that devoted of a wife—and I'm not that devoted of a wife. Some women were just hook, line and sinker. They were at home and for them and I was the other way, I get bored. Again, I'm not your stereotypical wife. So there are a lot of people that's what they live for. Danielle Greenfeed would have lived for Jeff. Or Jessica Lane would have lived for Teddy in those days. Or Frank Book's wife Elaine would have lived for Frank and raise their babies and not go out and not say anything and let their men go out at night and do their extracurricular things because that's the way they were. They are trophy wives. They were that way and I just never was. (Gabby)

Gabby's comments show two sides of the spectrum of being a football wife: on one side, there is the stereotypical football wife and the other side is a wife who is open to personal creativity and individual choice. She resists the stereotypical football wife identity and actively works at creating an identity separate from her husband.

Unlike women who reject and conceal their identity as a football, Terri embraces it and "wears it" proudly. She accepts that her identity is enmeshed with her husband's:

I can stand on my own because I'm my own person. I've had a great life because I've done lots of good things and I still have a long ways to go in what I want to accomplish *but there is no doubt I am Jerry Black's wife! He is not Terri Black's husband.* Does that make sense? And yet I'm not really bothered by it, it was my choice to marry him, didn't really know what I was I getting myself into. But it has been a great ride for us. So I tease him more than anything. (Terri, *her emphasis*)

Gabby's and Terri's quotes underscore contrasting varying experiences and identity management styles that the women had in terms of defining themselves as "football wives." Terri represents women who are proud of their courtesy identities as football wives, and who embrace a subservient football wife role. Gabby represents women who reject or conceal their football wife identity and work to develop an identity separate from their husbands, one that represents their own interest and activities.

The majority of the women fall in between the total acceptance exhibited by Terri and the rejection demonstrated by Gabby. In general, football wives manage their identity situationally depending on context and the presence of others. In Addison's narrative of finding work, she attempts to conceal her football wife identity when she is interviewing for a job. She wants to be assessed for who she is and for her knowledge and job skills, not because she is the wife of a prominent CFL football coach. In these situations women will downplay their football wife identity and present an identity that is detached from football.

This sense of discomfort with their husbands' professional standing and public profile led many of the women to consciously conceal their football wife identity when they are around people they do not know very well. As Jessica notes:

In my experience I generally don't talk about it [being a football wife] to a lot to people and when people asked me what my husband does I always, usually depending on how well I know this person I just say he is a teacher and certain people have said I totally understand why you do that. For us [her and her family] he is just a person but as soon as you say that he plays professional football and because we are Hometown people and plays for the team then all people want to know and ask all kinds of questions: what does he think about that? What does he think about this and what about this? It just becomes so overwhelming I generally just sort of, because you have to distance yourself, it's already so much of your life, that I just don't because then all of a sudden you're not you. You are so-and-so's wife and everything is about football after that. Sometimes I just tried to keep it quiet. (Jessica)

As Jessica points out, she does not want to dismiss her football wife identity outright but, depending upon the social situation, she will negotiate it. Thus, in some situations, rather than revealing that her husband plays professional football, she tries to avoid the subject. From past experiences, she found that once people know that she is married to professional football player, they will be only concerned with football and knowing more

about him and the team rather than knowing about her. In general, the football spouses in my study tended to wait until they knew someone more intimately before they revealed their husbands' identity. They wanted to ensure the person was being their friend because of who they are, not because of their husband.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an inside view into the private lives of football spouses, focusing on how these women achieve their identity as a football wife and manage this identity in the presence of others. The football wife identity emerged as one that these women continually develop, negotiate, and resist in their day-to-day life and their interactions with others. I argue that football spouses, as much as their husbands, have a career in professional sports. The majority of the football spouses met their partners' prior to their pro football career and gave a series of requirements and dispositions in defining the meaning of a 'real' football wife, women who are worthy of this identity and status.

Since the majority of women met their partner prior to his professional career, they are easily socialized into a sports marriage (Ortiz 2006). These women internalize the role requirements of a football wife, becoming immersed in their husbands' careers. A majority of the women assumed the bulk of family responsibilities and household tasks during the football season in an attempt to create a stress free environment for their partners and to help them succeed. This process of role engulfment made it difficult to create an identity separate from their husbands and football. Often these women defer to their husbands' careers and put their own career aspirations on hold. In these cases, the women found it difficult to create an independent sense of self, separate from football and

their husbands. Those who insist on pursuing their own careers and interests more often than not have to sacrifice living with their husband to do so, at least during the football season. Even though these women identify as football wives, they have some basis for forming an identity for themselves that does not involve football. In essence, I am arguing that the football wife identity emerges as a courtesy identity, that is an identity that these women adopt, not by virtue of their own status or activities, but as a consequence of their relationship with a professional athlete. In this study the women contended with football wife identity and negotiated its demands as they adapted to their husbands' career choices. This is not to say that spouses do not have other identities but whether they do or not, they must content with others seeing them in connection with their partners. The next chapter addresses the football spouse subculture and the ways in which the subculture both eases and complicates women's adjustments to having partners in professional football.

CHAPTER FOUR

JOINING THE SPOUSAL SUBCULTURE: NEGOTIATING THE FOOTBALL WIFE IDENTITY

Chapter Three focused on how football spouses defined a “real” football wife and how they managed their identity in that role. I argued that the football wife role becomes the primary way these women define themselves, seeing themselves as an essential part of their husband-wife football partnership. This chapter extends these relational ideas of identity to illustrate how football spouses become involved in the spousal subcultures around their husbands’ football team and how this involvement further shapes their identity as they interact with other football spouses.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, subcultures are groups of individuals who are connected to one another through their interactions and who have some sense of their distinctiveness within a larger social world (Fine and Kleinman 1979; Prus 1987; 1997). Williams (2011) describes subcultures as “culturally bounded, but not closed, networks of people who come to share the meaning of specific ideas, material objects, and practices through interaction” (p. 39). The emphasis is on shared meanings and how these meanings spread from one area to another through the flow of information across subculture boundaries. Subcultures are sites of socialization where members acquire the skills and knowledge of that subculture (Donnelly and Young 1988). In each subculture participants have the opportunity to create “paramount” or “operational” reality (Prus 1997). This means that members “learn to adopt the values and perspectives of the group, taking on new roles and modifying others, and thus establishing valuable new

identifications with the politics and symbols of the group” (Donnelly and Young 1988:225). The subcultures that CFL football spouses create provide them with mutual support and a place where others understand what life is like in professional football. It is within these specific spousal subcultures where football wives learn the values, norms, rules, and roles associated with being a “good” football wife.

Furthermore, as Fine and Kleinman (1979) argue, “subcultures and identification should be understood as dialectical processes, each of which is implicated in the construction and reconstruction of the other” (p. 13). Donnelly and Young (1988) illustrate this point in their study of rock climbers and rugby players where they found the athletes to be constructing and reconstructing appropriate subcultural identities through their subcultural participation. They also found that these athletes had their identity confirmed and reconfirmed by others in the subculture. For football spouses, then, their membership in the spousal subculture confirms their identity, and their participation in the subculture means they are continually engaging in identity work with other football spouses. Through these interactions, the women are reaffirming, reinforcing and refining their identities as football wives (and, especially, as “good” football wives).

This chapter explores how football spouses’ experience the spousal subcultures they form. I will examine three aspects of the spousal subculture that I identified in my study: (1) the properties and characteristics of the spousal subcultures; (2) women’s involvement in the spousal subcultures and the functions they serve; and (3) factors that destabilize these subcultures. The chapter concludes by arguing that these subcultures are

sites of socialization and social control, where traditional values are reinforced and uphold the normative expectations attached to being a “good” football wife.

PROPERTIES AND CHARACTERIES OF THE SPOUSAL SUBCULTURE

Most athletes’ spouses socialize and form subcultures around their partners’ sport teams (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997; Thompson 1995, 1999). Each team within a particular league can develop its own subculture. Thompson (1995, 1999) found that hockey wives belong to a subculture particular to their husbands’ team rather than to an overarching subculture of hockey wives. Similarly, CFL spouses form their own spousal subcultures based on teams, which is due to the fact that most of their interactions, especially during the season, occur with the spouses of their husbands’ teammates. Additionally, involvement in these spousal subcultures varies from team to team in the league. Some teams’ spousal subcultures are highly organized, while others will barely develop. For example, Olivia points out that every group of spouses is unique in the ways that they develop norms and rules. She reflects on being both a player’s and coach’s wife and the different teams she has been a part of:

Each team is different and I’ve been around some girls that are like, *oh my gosh, just crazy*. There are usually three or four normal ones around and some that are just crazy. It’s just like your high school class. I’ve been with amazing groups of wives who have bonded to help each other and are down to earth. And I’ve been with groups of wives that have no interest in getting together or have nothing in common with. Generally, this [current] group is amazing. They might be my favorite group ever. They’re down to earth, lovely, no pretense. It just depends what you’re into again. (Olivia)

Olivia’s experiences highlight the diversity that exists among groups of football spouses, and points out how each team exhibits its own spousal culture.

Many football wives have experienced multiple spousal subcultures as they move around with their partners when they are traded or sign with different teams. Reflecting on their experiences, both Jasmine and Terri explain the difference in how team spouses interact:

I'm not saying the same thing works for every team and every gal; everybody is a little bit different. You got to change it up and do different things. I think it also brought the uniqueness that the players felt their families were embraced. (Terri)

In [city], yes we did a lot of stuff. We did community events together, when Ralph James' wife, he was the head coach, and his wife was really good at getting us all together, we would have dinners at the beginning of the season so we could meet everyone and we [team] would have [a get together] after the games, they had a room downstairs where we could all go and socialize. In [city], not as much. There were never any dinners or anything and I felt like it was harder to meet the wives there. (Jasmine)

After years of being a head coach's wife, Terri recognizes that each season will bring a different group of women who possess a variety of personalities, interests and perspectives. Some teams may have a relatively young group of players, many of whom are not married, so there will be fewer wives and more girlfriends in their spousal subculture. Other teams will have older players with lots of young families. Jasmine's experiences illustrate how each spousal subculture develops differently. Often a stronger group of spouses will form if the head coach's wife facilitates the group or if the football team has a room or place for the team's family to meet and socialize during and after the football games.

The Role of the Head Coach's Wife

The head coach's wife often serves as the gatekeeper to the spousal subculture. She might organize an initial gathering for the women and hold other events throughout the year. Sara recalls how it is always the head coach's wife who will organize social events for the players' spouses.

It was always the coach's wife that would spearhead the family barbecue or whatever or something just for the wives. There are definitely a handful of events throughout the six months, probably three or four events that I got invited to for sure. (Sara)

This was confirmed by all of the head coach's wives interviewed, who all planned initial gathering and other events throughout the year for the spouses. Terri, having been a head coach's wife for over 20 years, explains her approach to this role:

In the beginning I always felt it was important to bring the girls together at the beginning of the year because I felt they maybe would make some friends and they could go off in their smaller groups. That's what would happen. The first night they would come and be pretty nervous, and I was nervous and I didn't know half of these people, I didn't even know who half the players let alone who their significant others are. The first time we get together we play some icebreaker games and hopefully they will feel more comfortable. In enough time they would break off into groups and it was great because then they were already [sic]—they were given the opportunity to form relationships in the big group and then break off. Maybe they were only here for the summer and let's get together with the kids, or you have a boy, I have a boy, or you are pregnant, I'm pregnant. Crazy things bring people together.

Terri provides a detailed description the initial gatherings she has organized for the spouses. She sees herself as having a "breaking the ice" role. Terri identifies the benefits of bringing the spouses together. She does not expect everyone to become friends, but hopes that each of the women will find someone in the group to connect with based on common interests and similar circumstances. Her goal is for the women to break off into

smaller groups, which might provide mutual support and understanding during the season. The role Terri describes is similar to the role that Thompson (1995, 1999) found NHL team captains' wives who are expected to take in NHL spousal subcultures. In both cases, the women are responsible for bringing the players' spouses together and ensuring, at least initially, that they experience a sense of welcome and belonging. These examples reveal coaches' wives often take on the responsibility of initiating the process through which spouses become members of the spousal subculture where they may develop close friendships and a support system.

Gaining Access

Membership in this subculture is restricted to women involved with players on a specific football team. If a football spouse's husband does not make the football team at the beginning of the season or is traded to another team, she can no longer belong to that team's subculture of spouses. While these women may know each other from being with different teams, in-season socializing with other spouses is predominantly with the spouses of their husbands' teammates. Access to these subcultures is dependent on her husband's contractual status with a football team, and the wife's primary loyalty and identification as a football wife are to the team for which he currently plays for, in a particular season (not to the friendships made when involved with another group of football spouses).

At the end of every June or beginning of every July, just before the football season officially starts, football spouses begin to form spousal subcultures around their husbands' football teams. However, this does not happen until the head coach has chosen

the final roster of players. At that point, his wife arranges an initial meet-and-greet for the spouses of the players. This event signals the start of the season for the football spouses and the first gathering of the team's spousal subculture for the year. All of the head coaches' wives interviewed agreed that it was their role to organize at least one event for the spouses. Olivia also hosts an initial gathering. She says to me in our interview, "Once the team was chosen I would get all the spouses together." Addison shares her approach to bringing all the women together:

So usually the first week of July I will have a get together for all the wives that are in town. [They] will come over and have a potluck and get to meet all the new wives of the players that are new to the team. (Addison)

Addison points out that the event brings all the spouses together, noting that some women will be new to the group because their husband has just joined the team. While membership in the subculture is contingent on their husbands being on the football team, Addison aims to be inclusive within her group. In planning her initial potluck, she asks her husband to share this invitation with the players.

I told my husband to tell the players we are having a potluck at our house. Please tell your significant other, it had to be their significant other, it could not be the girl you met last night at the bar type of thing. I don't want to meet those girls because those girls might be. [Pauses a minute to think]. I want to welcome someone into our group that is a significant other. I wouldn't care if she was a girlfriend or married. (Addison)

Notably, Addison uses the term "significant other" to define who she would like to see at the potluck. She does not want women whose relationship to a player is likely fleeting, as she wants to build a stable group of like-minded women.

Sandra would most likely be excluded from Addison's initial potluck. She was dating a player but they did not define their relationship as serious. She was never asked

to sit with other spouses or invited to any of their functions or events because the football community did not define her as a “significant other.” She acknowledges that to be included in the spousal subculture, you have to be “pretty serious,” as: “I know the girlfriends you have to be pretty serious to sit with the other wives. They have to be engaged or on that path to being engaged. You just don’t bring just anybody.” As Sandra notes, the division between subcultural insider and outsider is made according to how a couple defines their relationship. The women use terms such as “commitment” and “on the path to being engaged” to differentiate between which women are insiders and which women are not. The women’s identity claims, then, are initially assessed on the basis of their relationship status with their partners.

In Sandra’s case, she did not consider herself a serious girlfriend and was not insulted by being excluded. This is not always the case, however, as some women are offended when they are left out of the subculture. Because being in a “serious” relationship is an amorphous idea, some girlfriends are not invited to social events and, as such, are denied access to the spousal subculture even though, in their eyes, they are in a committed relationship with a player on the team. Unlike Sandra, Katie and her boyfriend had been in a serious relationship for over four years but had yet to marry. She explains how there is a stigma to being “only” a girlfriend:

When we were in (CFL team), we weren’t married yet. So it was hard because there is definitely this wife versus girlfriends and it’s difficult for serious girlfriends. We had been together four and half, almost five years, before John started in the CFL so I wasn’t just a girlfriend but we weren’t engaged or married at the time so there is definitely a stigma [of] girlfriend versus wife.
(Katie)

Although Katie identified their relationship as serious or “on the road to engagement” a requirement usually accepted for membership, she was denied full access to this spousal subculture (and to the supports that come with it). By denying Katie access, the other spouses challenged her claim to the social identity of a football wife. This denial left her feeling stigmatized for not being married even though she had been together with her partner for many years. Sara also explains this divide between girlfriends and wives when she observes:

Definitely there was kind of a wives club. I think there were a couple functions if you weren't married, you know [you were not invited] . . . I know my friend whose husband, fiancée, they just recently got engaged, I feel like she has mentioned before because they are not married she doesn't have all the same perks that the wives do. Not that there were a lot of perks for family, girlfriends, and wives. A few functions, I think, it was the wives were only invited or it was more favourable to be a wife.

These reflections show that, depending on the team culture, girlfriends may or may not be excluded from events. In this way, the influences of traditional values (i.e., what constitutes a “serious” relationship) make some women feel diminished by not having access to the group. Unlike Sandra, who has not claimed or internalized the football wife identity, Katie identifies as a football wife and has internalized this identity. By being excluded from the spousal subculture, Katie encounters challenges to her claim of the football wife identity.

All of these examples reveal that membership in the football wife subcultures is contingent on a woman's husband being on the football team and that their relationship has met an agreed upon status of commitment. Joining and being accepted into a spousal team subculture confirms the football wife identity. In this way, a spousal subculture is a

courtesy subculture that is derived from their husband's activities and status (i.e., husband makes the football team, football wife is afforded membership to the team's spousal subculture if she could demonstrate her bona fides as sufficiently committed).

This section has illustrated how football spouses form a spousal subculture, which is often facilitated by the wife of the team's head coach. I focused on how the agreed on relationship status of the couple is a defining feature, determining whether a partner or girlfriend is invited into the subculture. In the next section, I will focus on the experiences of being involved in this subculture and how such involvement reaffirms a woman's football wife identity and reinforces the traditional values and expectations encompassed by this identity.

INVOLVEMENT IN THE SPOUSAL SUBCULTURE

Belonging to these spousal subcultures provides these women with a social network, companionship, help with children, and a place where they can share common interests and also fears about the problems that arise from a career in professional sport (e.g., career mobility and job insecurity). Olivia works hard to foster a subculture for the football spouses of her husband's football team, she explains:

Olivia: They [other head coaches' wives] taught me so much about caring for the wives and children. So they don't feel alone. I really think that makes a huge difference in the atmosphere of the football team. If these players are coming home to these bitching wives, who are like "where have you been?" "I don't have any friends," "I hate it here," "take these kids," you know. If you don't have an environment where they feel like they are just as important as their husband and they are just as loved and will do what they need. I think that helps the team succeed. And if you don't have that it could be really [she pauses] . . . It's just a better environment.

Deana: It almost sounds like you're building a football family?

Olivia: And that's what we believe in! You got to build a family environment. Because we all are just trying to get through life together life. . . . Life is hard no matter who you are. Nobody's got it figured out.

She discusses how other head coach's wives have taught her the importance of including family in football. She wants to provide a supportive environment for the other football spouses throughout the season as she feels it is not only beneficial for the women but also for the team. In fact, when the spouses feel supported, Olivia believes the team will be more successful.

Many football spouses realize the value of becoming friends with other players' spouses. Melissa shares her perspective:

You go through things and if you don't have each other. . . . You don't want to bitch to your husband but you sure can complain to each other and it feels so much better. You do form a bond. It's like it's your other family because you're usually so far from your family you don't get to choose where you live like most people and they [other spouses] want to live near their families [but they] you don't have that. So they become your family.

Melissa highlights the significance of membership in the subculture for women who are often in a foreign city or county, away from their friends and family. The experience of moving from team to team is common, and few players, coaches, and general managers spend their entire career on one team. Having access to the spousal subculture helps these women fill in the gap of loneliness in having no family or friends that occurs after a trade, and it provides the support needed to overcome moving to a strange environment.

Spouses who relocate often find it difficult to establish a social network and friendships outside of football, especially when they are unsure of how long they will be

in a certain city. As such, these women come to rely on the other spouses for friendship and support during the season, and this spousal subculture provides an instant support system. Addison explains:

For the most part you are in a foreign city, you don't have any friends, you have to begin the quest to find a new hairdresser, doctor, find new everything, find new friends. . . . A lot of times it's hard because you are moving to a new community and people already have established groups of friends and it is hard to break into and meet people and stuff like that. So often times the people on the team really become your friends, like the other wives often become your friends.

The network of social support that the spousal subculture provides especially benefits the football spouses who move frequently to cities where they do not have any friends or family to support them.

Children's play dates also serve as an avenue for socializing among the football wives. Jessica has been on the same team in the CFL for over ten years (a rarity in professional football). When her children were younger, she would spend a lot of time with other football wives and their children:

There was a time when all of our kids were babies. So we did a lot of play dates where at home, whether, I mean I worked a little bit, but when you're on maternity leave a lot of the wives don't work, so if you don't work and you got kids it's really easy to get together all the time. So up until the kids were of school age and having their extracurricular activities, then they're on different schedules, we always work together and our kids are all very close, so it's harder now to keep them together but that's what we've always done.
(Jessica)

As a head coach's wife, because Terri recognized that many football spouses are young mothers, she always tried to arrange events that would cater to their needs:

We did all kinds of things, things with the kids, set up times to go to the zoo and get passes for families. We would try and do things when the guys were

out of town that involved the children so moms didn't have to get babysitters.
(Terri)

The head coach's wives interviewed all agree that it was important to arrange kid friendly activities for the spouses knowing these women are the primary caretakers.

While organizing activities for children was important, some head coach's wives also realized the value of having time just for the spouses when their partners could look after the children. Olivia is always planning events for children but also events without them so that the women can have an evening without parental responsibilities. During her interview, while discussing the group of spouses she is currently with she said, "So we had our wives' dinner last week..." Terri confirms these dinners and explains how she sees these spouses' only dinner as a benefit. She explains how she works with her husband to find the best time to coordinate all the spouses:

I love to plan things . . . [w]e would plan woman evenings when the guys weren't away so they could leave the kids behind as a recharge. I would always ask Jerry when it was a good night, could it be on . . . I don't know if you are familiar with day 1, 2, 3, and 4 of a practice week. So we would always look at the schedule and try and figure what nights would be better. So we would have suppers, we arrange to go to restaurants for chocolate fondue.

Both Terri and Olivia illustrate the range of activities that occur in a CFL spousal subculture particularly for the benefit of the mothers in the group. Both head coaches' wives realize the importance to organize events for the football spouses where they could leave their children at home (knowing it is a good night for their husbands' to take care of them) and have a relaxing and re-energizing evening.

These activities focus on bringing the women and children together and providing a support network during the football season. Some spousal subcultures had weekly or biweekly bible study. This activity brings women together for a social outing but also provides them with an opportunity to pray together for the safety of their husbands and the team. The majority of the women mentioned attending or having attended a bible study.

The most common reason football spouses gave for forming a relationship with other football spouses was to share their daily experiences with someone who could understand and sympathize with their concerns. Often times, outsiders believe “football wives” live glamorous lifestyles and should have nothing to complain about. As Addison explains, “I think some of your friendships that you have had outside of football suffer. Only people that really know what you are going through are other wives.” This makes the spousal subculture a valuable resource in the women’s lives:

It’s a huge benefit for us because, the wives and girlfriends, we have a lot of things in common and it’s nice to have those kind of relationships with people that understand and live the same sort of lifestyle that you have. Because you relate to one another and you can be there for each other so it’s a benefit.
(Jessica)

Football spouses shared that having an absentee husband during the season and having to manage the household alone, while dealing with career instabilities are stressors that only those in similar situations are likely to understand. As illustrated in the last chapter, many women manage and maintain a stress-free home environment so their husband can focus on performing on the football field. Being able to commiserate about the frustrations brought on by professional football with other spouses who are in similar situations and

who, in consequence, are more likely to understand them, is an important form of validation for these women.

The spousal subculture can also be seen as a form of social control, keeping football spouses in line with maintaining the football team's major goal—winning. To reiterate a statement above, Olivia explains, “If you don't have an environment where they [football spouses] feel like they are just as important as their husband and they are just as loved and will do what they need... I think that helps the team succeed,” that is, making the football spouses feel welcome and supportive will help ensure success of the football team because these women will be less likely to complain to their husband. Terri believes in this ideology as well:

It sounds corny, but if your wife is happy, the player is going to be happy. In the big picture, we, as in Jerry and I, always felt it was important for them [football spouses] to have a feeling of being wanted.

In order to create this sense of “being wanted,” both Olivia and Terri gather the spouses together at the beginning of the season, and organize prayer sessions and family events in support of the coach's (i.e., her husband's) goal of keeping the player happy by keeping his wife happy. In subsuming their lives in service of their husbands, the spouses continually reaffirm and reinforce each other's identity as a football wife. Those women whose identities are more closely bound to their husbands (e.g., those who leave jobs, families and routines behind) are more invested in these spousal subcultures than those who lead more independent lives. In other words, membership in the spousal subculture can create a situation where a football spouse begins to rely on other members of the

subculture, thereby giving it more influence on how she perceives herself and organizes her social world.

FACTORS OF DESTABILIZATION IN THE SPOUSAL SUBCULTURE

Thus far this chapter has focused on the ways football spouses are involved in spousal subcultures and the benefits of their involvement (if they are accepted into the group). Despite being a subculture of support, there are limitations and barriers to building intimate rapport among these women. Football spouses come to identify with each other from the perspective of the football team and, as such, they manage their relationships with other spouses in this light. These barriers and limitations also work to reinforce traditional gender and family values in ways that can make the women feel at times diminished.

Some women revealed that they did not make friends with other football spouses—Gabby pointedly remarked, “I don’t hang out with any of their wives or girlfriends!”—and others found it difficult to connect with other spouses. Similar to most work organizations, spouses may have little or no common interests other than sharing the experience of having husbands who work together. Additionally, the football team’s power and status structure are factors that spill over into the spousal subculture and can inhibit these women from fostering meaningful friendships. Below, I focus on four factors of destabilization that strain relationships within the spousal subcultures: (1) team competition; (2) career mobility; (3) the “man code;” and (4) the spousal subculture status hierarchy.

Team Competition

A distinct characteristic of professional sports is its inherent competitiveness. Beyond the organization's goal of winning football games there is intense pressure to make team, stay on the team, and to be in the starting line-up. No player is safe from being replaced by another player who is performing better. This extreme competition in professional sports can trickle down into the group of spouses. Many football spouses interpret the competition on the football team and competition between spouses as analogous. Katie told me how another wife on the team took issue with such friendships:

I'm a good friend with another wife whose husband happens to play the same position as my husband. My husband got hurt and her husband took over. We were out shopping, we had lunch, we were having fun and we ran into other girl that I hadn't met and she [my friend] introduced me and said this is Mike's wife, and I shook her hand and everything and she is looking at me really funny. [Katie said to the women] "Oh, maybe you don't know who my husband is, that's okay." And she is like, "No, I know who your husband is. But I just read an article that said your husband is hurt and her husband took over his job, so why you all hanging out?" Like she literally couldn't understand why we were hanging out. To us we were like, why wouldn't we, we are friends, we know each other, we are friends. So I definitely think amongst some women there is some concern that that person is trying to take my husband job and what not. To me it is silly but it does exist. (Katie)

While, Katie did not care that her friend's husband had replaced her husband, her story demonstrates that there is a sense among some women that their husbands' careers should come before any social relationships with other spouses. This can create a sense of confusion among some football wives who prioritize their husbands' careers over their own personal life.

Rivalries can occur between spouses, which can lead to conflict. Olivia shared a situation when another player's wife said something negative about her husband: "I've

gotten into arguments with a wife who dogged my husband in front of me but it was stupid. It just depends on a person's personality. You can have someone who is a selfish person, obviously they're going to, or someone who just likes to stir up crap." Olivia recognizes it is not a good thing when spouses get into conflict but verifies that it happens. Both Katie's and Olivia's narratives illustrate how some women come to see each other more as an extension of their partners (than as an individual) and will treat each other competitively. Both stories also highlight the courtesy identity of football wives and how some football spouses interact with each on the basis of who their husbands are rather than as autonomous women.

Career Mobility

Usually the trailing spouses said that career mobility was an important reason for fostering relationships with other football spouses, although others claimed career mobility was a reason for avoiding such relationships. Among the latter group, not wanting to foster a relationship with someone whose husband could be traded or released was based on anticipation that it would be emotionally difficult to build relationships with someone who might be gone the next year. As Michelle observed, "[if] you're close friends with another person whose husband's job has been so volatile and they could be gone, you build this whole relationship with someone who could be gone the next year. It's hard." Unlike the majority of football spouses, Michelle has had the luxury of living in one city for the last nine years. Over time she has learned to distance herself from some spouses, especially those whose partners' positions on the team are marginal. As such, Michelle only selectively invests time in building relationships with other spouses.

In contrast, Katie has made many good friends but points to career instability as a factor in limiting connections among spouses. When I asked her if she became friends with other spouses, she replied:

Yes and no. I did become friends with a lot of other wives but the hard thing I found with that is one you have a big group of women with different personalities so you don't always connect with everyone and then it's hard because it's an unstable situation. So you have these friendships you establish and then you have friends that are picking up and moving to other places when their husbands get released or traded or they're not married and they split up. So there are all of these different situations and instability and you are trying to make friendships but in the back of your mind you're thinking, this person could be gone next season or next week. So I did make a few really good friends that I still keep in touch with now even though we are no longer there but that's not super common. You have your good friends, you're friendly with everyone but you may become good friends with a few. (Katie)

Katie's insight into the relationships formed among these women illustrates how the unpredictability and instability of professional football spills into their relationships with other spouses. Many wives become leery about over investing in relationships that may be transient.

The narratives offered above demonstrate the complexities of the inter-relationships between football spouses. This is not say that spouses do not remain friends once their husbands are no longer part of the same football team; however, it does become difficult to maintain the relationship once they are not in the same city and when their friend becomes part of a rival team's subculture of spouses. As demonstrated above, for most football wives, their loyalty is to their husband, his career and the team he plays for. So if a woman's husband is traded to another football team, she too is traded, in a sense, to another spousal subculture. As such, deep, intimate friendships with other football spouses are often tempered and involve less meaning and require less investment

of self than might occur for women with husbands in other occupations. It does, however, increase the significance of football spouse's membership in a spousal subculture when, on moving to a new team, she is able to access other women who can provide information on her new residence and a readily accessible sense of sociability. It also sustains her loyalty to the football player and his overall career success because they move as unit from residence to residence and football team to football team.

The Man Code

The notion of “man code” was another factor that emerged in the women's understanding of why they found it difficult to form true and long lasting friendships with other spouses. It refers to knowing personal information that affects another spouse's life situation, but not being able to share that information because it will affect their own husband's relationships on the team. Often the intimate conversations occurring between a couple reveal information about what is happening on the team and the difficulties existing for certain players from injuries, marital problems or poor finances. However, it is imperative that these women do not tell each other what they have learned from their partners because disclosure of this information may cause problems for that player as well as for their husbands and the football team.

The concept of the “man code” was emphasized most strongly when the women discussed extra-marital affairs. Some teams are known more than other teams to have a party atmosphere where some players engage in extra-marital affairs. One wife told me she could count on the fingers of one hand the number of players she personally knew who were faithful to their partner. These infidelities appeared to be overly accepted by a

player's teammates who tended to disregard and/or condone such indiscretions. The man code maintains that sexual desire is something all virile men experience, especially since women "throw themselves" at professional football players.

Many of the spouses interviewed, especially those who have been around the league for some time, reported knowing players who have been unfaithful. Many also said the man code meant that spouses had to keep this knowledge secret. This situation caused some of them to avoid forming friendships with other women. For example, when I asked Michelle if she made friends with other spouses, she responded:

The answer is *no*! One of the reasons is you just know too much and I'm not a hypocrite so for me, if [she's] my good friend and her husband is cheating on her I would be like, "dude your husband is cheating, get the fuck away" but unfortunately you can't be like that with a friend you met on a football team because there is *man code* and if you screw your husband over by divulging information, then your husband is ostracized. So you have to go against all of your morals, self, moral ideas and just shut your mouth. If I'm friends with someone and I'm shutting my mouth, then I would be a hypocrite, so I rather just not be friends with them. So if I'm not friends then I'm not expected to divulge any information. It's crazy isn't it? (Michelle, *her emphasis*)

Michelle takes a strong stance against marital infidelity and refuses to get to know any other spouses in case she learns of such actions and must censor herself. Her husband is open to discussing these matters with her and so she guards this information to protect him from being "ostracized" by the team or suffering other consequences.

Having to keep such secrets from other spouses was a common factor inhibiting close relationships among the women. During Katie's interview she divulged a personal example of knowing about an affair and having to keep quiet and how following the "man code" impacted her sense of self:

And I think the challenging part of that for a wife is it is not only a fear that your husband will do that but you know of other husbands and players that do it and you can't say anything. . . . I had a good friend that was very well known across the team that he [her husband] was not faithful to her but I could not say anything to her. Which from a moral standpoint is really hard because I'm a pretty honest person. So it is pretty hard for me to know that and not being able to say anything. To be perfectly honest, when I left and moved out here it was almost a relief that I don't have to stay up on the drama, I don't have to care.

When football spouses learn about an affair or other important team secrets, it often causes them a moral dilemma and compromises their integrity and sense of self because they cannot be honest with someone they are close with and trust. In fact, when Katie and her husband made the decision to live apart, she felt relieved in that she did not have to keep secrets from other spouses. Outside of the football wife subculture, she could be her “authentic self,” which, for her, is “a pretty honest person.” As such, the man code creates barriers between these women, making it less likely for them to form meaningful relationships with other women who understand the football way of life.

The Spousal Subculture Status Hierarchy

The status hierarchy that takes shape among athletes' spouses is often a reflection of their partner's sport team (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997; Thompson 1995). In professional baseball, for instance, the baseball wives' status hierarchy reflects the team's male status hierarchy, and baseball wives achieve their status by accumulated “time” in the league, amount of time on a particular team, and their husband's salary (Ortiz 1997). In my research, the status hierarchy that emerged in spousal subculture reflected the football team's status hierarchy based on three key features that include: (1) relationship status, (2) partner's role on the team, and (3) partner's on-field performance. This section

illustrates how football spouses achieve their status and social location in relation to other members of the subculture.

Relationship Status

As noted earlier, relationship status—girlfriend, fiancée, or wife—often determines a woman’s access into the spousal subculture. The highest status is reserved for women who are “married” and “married with children.” Children often elevate one’s status because football wives frequently bond over shared experiences of raising children. Having children generates invitations to more and different social events, which gives the women who are mothers a better chance to form strong relationships. Football spouses who were not married or childless occupy a lower status and are often excluded from certain activities. Sara and Gabby explain these differences by drawing on their own experiences of being girlfriends and how others treated them differently once they became wives:

Definitely there was kind of a wives club. I think there were a couple of functions if you weren’t married, you know [you were not invited], we would go to functions where the wives were paid for. I know my friend who husband, fiancée now they recently got engaged, I feel like she has mentioned before because they are not married she doesn’t have all the same perks that the wives do. Not that there were a lot of perks for family, girlfriends, and wives. A few functions I think it was the wives were only invited or it was more favourable to be a wife. (Sara)

There would be this wife lounge that all the wives and girlfriends would go to after the games. And I call it the princess lounge, no one would talk to me and it would be so full and so packed with babies and wives and mothers and fathers and I have my own table and no one would talk to me. And then the second I got a ring on my finger and then everyone is your friend. There was a real culture of that. (Gabby)

Being married or engaged is an important status booster in the hierarchy of football spouses. As Gabby points out the ring on the finger is an important status indicator among these women, which facilitates acceptance into the spousal subculture.

Being a “serious” girlfriend is ranked lower in the status hierarchy. As Terri simply put it, “You know a wife is on the field and a girlfriend is still on the periphery.” The analogy demonstrates how these statuses are viewed within the subculture: wives are “in the game” but girlfriends are still on the sidelines waiting to be “subbed into the game.” Girlfriends, as a result, are often frustrated when they do not receive the same treatment as wives. During our interview, Melanie explained how she and another girlfriend felt mistreated and excluded from the subculture. She was frustrated with how she was excluded from events even though she viewed her relationship as serious. She exclaimed in the interview, “we are wives but we weren’t wives,” meaning that she and her partner were in a “serious relationship” but that the other wives did not treat her as such. In this case, without a traditional sign of commitment (i.e., marriage), other football wives rejected Melanie’s claim to the football wife identity.

Katie had a similar experience to Melanie and describes how she felt stigmatized for “not being married” even though her and her partner had been in a committed relationship for five years:

When we were in [CFL team], we weren’t married yet. So it was hard because there is definitely this wife versus girlfriends, and it’s difficult for serious girlfriends. We had been together four and half, almost five years before John started in the CFL so I wasn’t just a girlfriend but we weren’t engaged or married at the time so there is definitely a stigma—girlfriend versus wife. Even within the team, in [CFL Team] there was a family room but it was basically a wives’ room. So basically it is a room that if it is inclement

weather or you have children you can have access to this room. And they were very particular to who got the passes to get into the room.

Katie's provides insights into the limited status of long-term girlfriend. She illustrates the status hierarchy among spouses and how this hierarchy serves as a way for these women to identify with one another within their subculture. In this way, it also works to put boundaries around who is a football wife. Women who are married tend to have more advantages (e.g., access to the family room) than those who are not married, and wives tend to be treated more seriously and given more respect than women who hold the title of girlfriend. The latter feel diminished, not full members of the group.

Role on the Team

The role which the women's partners' (as coach or player) play on the team influences how others interact with them. A coach's or player's role within the team is often a key component determining the status of his spouse. Being a head coach, defensive coordinator, quarterback, or wide receiver, for example, all have their own cache. This means that the women in relationships with these men are identified less by their individual qualities or talents but more by the position on the team occupied by their husband. As such, the subculture creates a pecking order among spouses that replicates the hierarchy within the football organization. Below, I discuss in detail the impact of organizational hierarchy on the positional assigned to those football spouses.

In most organizations there is a division between management and employees, and this is true in professional sport. Members of a CFL organization are ranked by being an owner, manager, coach, or player, with team management and coaches holding a higher

status than players. Given the impact of courtesy identity, this hierarchy is reflected within the spousal subculture. Jessica describes the difference between coaches and players:

There is a restriction there in what you can say and talk about because you are not on the same level playing field. It's not a bad thing. I think. If you were somebody and your status is higher, a coach's wife, you would be harder [sic]. You would be restricted or not be able to say anything or you're just not as free in your conversation in what you can talk about.

Jessica points out the boundaries between employees in management or coaching roles and players, emphasizing that there are restrictions on what can be discussed amongst each group. Players' spouses are hesitant, therefore, to speak to a coach's wife as they do not want to mistakenly say anything that could impact their partners' career. Similarly, coaches' wives cautiously interact with players' spouses because they are often privy to confidential information. For example, a coach's wife might know about a possible trade or some other facts that may impact a player's career. This division restricts the flow of information and places limits on how supportive and close women with different statuses can be with each other.

A husband's position on the field often becomes incorporated into the wife's identity within the spousal subculture. Whether their partner is a quarterback or a kicker, or plays offense, defense or special teams, affects the status of his spouse. In football, topping the status hierarchy of players is the quarterback. The quarterback leads the offence and is the most prestigious player on the football team. Relatedly, his spouse enjoys a higher status amongst spouses. As Sara explains: "definitely the quarterbacks' wives are the ones that have more status and [their husbands'] get paid more, they tend to

have better seats in the stadium, seem to get more tickets for sure, things like that.” Many spouses made similar comments to Gabby who suggests, “[t]here was an entourage, the quarterback’s wife picked her friends and then there was a status. It was a ladder thing.” Gabby’s analogy of a “ladder thing” points out the vertical arrangement of spouses in a hierarchy through which wives are ranked similarly to their husband’s ranking. This process is similar to what Olivia described when she referred to the subculture being “like your high school class.” There is a social hierarchy and a pecking order among the women, with some women receiving more prestige due to the position that their husband occupies on the football team.

In a similar fashion, women with husbands who play a secondary or marginal position on the football team are nearer the bottom of this social hierarchy. Michelle, whose husband is part of the kicking team (special team), describes the hierarchy as “totem pole” when discussing her status within the spousal subculture and how the social hierarchy of the football team seeps into the subculture of spouses:

[It] trickles down to the wives. Let’s say a player is a big name quarterback. The community would give them a lot more free stuff or come to my restaurant and do this. When you’re at the bottom of the totem pole no one really cares to ask you to do stuff. Maybe the wives of these bigger time players have more opportunities. (Michelle)

In this example, Michelle sees herself as holding lower status than some of the other wives. She identifies matters of status through the perks players and their wives receive from outsiders. She also sees the lesser treatment of the other wives as a reflection of their relative low status within the subculture.

In sum, football spouses locate themselves and other spouses in terms of their husband's status on the football team. Terri confirms this social arrangement and points out how it affects how spouses come to identify themselves: "Definitely it can be like that. I don't think it happens all the time. But yes, positions on the field definitely can result in the girl and how she feels." In addition to having a generalized courtesy identity, the football wife also has a specified status within the spousal subculture.

On-Field Performance

The on-field performance of her husband can also elevate a football spouse's status and her sense of identity. On every professional sport team there usually are a few star players. These players are more skilled than other players on the team, for which they are more highly paid and attract more attention. In talking about this "fact," a few women pointed out how "star" players' wives acquire more fame in the public realm. As Jasmine notes,

I think there were a couple whose husbands were plastered on every bulletin board and commercial. They walked with their noses a little bit higher than others. I guess you get caught up in "my husband's well known." It's like when you go to the grocery store and people know who your husband is and they are asking for autographs. I would say there was a little bit of that between the wives and probably more so between the wives than the guys that were actually playing. (Jasmine)

Jasmine's highlights how this status distinction is internalized within the group to the extent that this status elevation tends to be more important to the wives than to the players themselves. For the players, the man code demands team mentality and public modesty, but the wives are less constrained. As Jasmine points out, some spouses internalize their husband's prestige and "walk with their noses a little bit higher."

Terri's career as a football wife has exposed her to many situations and people. During the interview, she remembers how some women acted differently when their husbands had a stellar game and enjoyed the notoriety that it came with. She explains how a player's performance in one game can affect his spouse:

The other thing in a smaller incident. What kind of game he [the player] has? If that player has an unbelievable game and gets unbelievable notoriety for something great he did or the whole game [sic]. Yeah, that girl can all of a sudden [see] her status elevated as well. I have also seen it in a bad way [where] coaches' wives can let that go to their head. How can I say that? They think they are more than what they actually are. And really, all we are is just the wife. It doesn't really matter. (Terri)

Terri has seen how some players' wives embraced this sudden boost in prestige and acted on it (and suggests maybe too much so). More importantly, her narrative shows that women can internalize their husbands' actions and accomplishments and incorporate them into their own identity. In this way, among football spouses, it is not just that someone is a "football wife" but that they are the "head coach's wife" or the "quarterback's wife" or "the star's wife." For these women, their husbands' status on the football team influences how they perceive themselves in relation to other football spouses.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the subcultures that football spouses become a part of by virtue of having a partner in the CFL. Football spouses internalize their husbands' activities, actions, and accomplishments and incorporate them into their own identities. Through their participation in the spousal subculture and their interaction with other football spouses, these women learn the mannerisms, attitudes, norms and behaviours

associated with being a “good” football wife. The degree to which a particular spouse embraces that role varies. Some football spouses will be active in the subculture and attend many of its social events; others will avoid their fellow spouses.

Involvement in the subculture plays an important role in these women’s day-to-day experiences. The spousal subcultures become instant support networks for women who find themselves in a strange city without any friends. Many women benefit from this particular support system because of their shared understanding of a career in professional football. While many women benefit from this subculture, they are also pushed toward traditional gender behaviours and expectations in order to be a “good” football wife. This is apparent in the rules about inclusivity/exclusivity to the activities and discussions that go on among the women and in the informal status divisions characterized of the subcultures. Taken from this perspective, the spousal subculture can be seen as a mechanism for keeping football spouses in line with maintaining a supportively subservient role in the relationship. In this way the subculture acts as a mechanism of both socialization and social control. The next chapter explores these themes of socialization and social control by examining the rules of being a football wife in public.

CHAPTER FIVE

MANAGING HIS CELEBRITY STATUS: DEVELOPMENT OF A COURTESY IDENTITY AND PRESENTATION OF SELF AS A FOOTBALL WIFE

The scholarship around celebrity and fame tends to be framed in reference to the experiences of major movie or television stars, politicians, musicians and athletes (Adler and Adler 1991; Anderson and Jackson 2001; Ferris 2007, 2010; Forsyth and Thompson 2007; Gmelch and San Antonio 1998). Scant attention has focused on the ways spouses of celebrities experience fame.¹² In the past, athletes' wives tended to be hidden in the shadows of their famous husbands. Today, however, athletes' spouses are frequently seen as an extension of their partners, and people monitor their appearance and activities in order to look for clues about their celebrity partners' identity (Binns-Terrill 2012). Television cameras focus on these women at games, they are asked to participate in community and charity events, and their daily activities are sometimes chronicled (there are reality television shows featuring the lives of women married to professional athletes). In addition, the rise of social media and social networking sites has increased these women's general visibility in the public sphere. As such, the spouses of high-profile athletes must learn to manage this celebrity status.

There are no manuals or memos sent out to football spouses explaining how "football wives" should act in public. These women have to learn how to conduct themselves in public situations as a "football wife." They learn in the context of their

¹² There are no studies that focus exclusively on how partners of athletes experience the celebrity side. Ortiz (2001, 2011) discusses celebrity status in terms of how these women have to appear in public and their loss of privacy. Clayton and Harris (2004) discuss how some athlete's wives are celebrities in their own right (e.g., Victoria Beckham, singer, model and fashion designer, is married to former English soccer star David Beckham) than how other spouses experience this celebrity.

marriages (Chapter Three) and within the spousal subcultures (Chapter Four). The majority of the women in my study discussed learning their role as their husbands' careers progressed or by taking cues and advice from veteran football wives and coaches' wives. Through marital and subcultural socialization these women learn that there are rules to being a football wife in public spaces that extend to their online activities, specifically the use of social networking and media sites such as Twitter.

This chapter extends the discussion on the football wife identity to examine how these women manage their public identities. I begin by presenting the concept of celebrity and arguing that football spouses must manage their husbands' celebrity status as a part of their football wife identity. Next, I illustrate the informal rules of conduct these women learn in presenting the identity of "good" football wife and the consequences they face for breaking these rules. As will be demonstrated, when a football spouse breaks one of these agreed on rules, her actions reflect negatively on her husband, the football team and even the league. Her partner's career can be prejudiced by her public behaviour and so many football spouses effectively self-censor in order to not draw negative attention to their partner and/or his team. Being attached to a famous football player or coach means the football wife must sacrifice a degree of privacy. For this reason, I will discuss the personal costs of being to a football wife and the challenges these women face in interacting with the media, football fans and groupies.

CELEBRITY AS A LIVED EXPERIENCE

Drawing on Ferris' (2010) definition, celebrities are highly visible, well-known individuals who may or may not have some special quality, talent, or skill, and who are

widely recognizable on either an international, national, regional, local or hyper-local level (p. 393). Unlike other camps in sociology, which define celebrity as pathological or celebrity as a commodity (see Ferris 2007 for further discussion), Ferris (2007) opts for a meaning-centered approach that focuses on the “lived experiences of celebrity from the point of view of celebrities themselves” (p. 392). Similar to Giles (2001), Ferris (2010) argues for an approach to celebrity that conceptualizes fame and celebrity as a dynamic process rather than a fixed state. Ferris (2010) suggests that one way this can be done is by studying regional, local or “hyper-local” celebrities in their specific context. Hills (2003) uses the term “subcultural celebrity” to define a narrower version of celebrity when people are “treated as famous only by and for their fan audiences” (p. 61). By this definition, the majority of CFL players and coaches are local or subcultural celebrities, although a few may gain national and international repute. As I will discuss in the following pages, football spouses experience similar processes of celebrity as an extension of their partners’ fame.

The majority of football spouses discussed varying experiences when dealing with the media and fans and with managing the celebrity side of professional sports. For example, Olivia recounts her first experiences in the CFL:

I get to [city] and it’s like nothing I’ve ever seen before, I don’t have any friends, I know no one and it’s on the news. I’m like watching the television and it’s on the news that he got married and I’m like, “what the hell?” Then I dropped him off at training camp so I could keep the car and they [the team] take the bus. And there’s news cameras there and I’m like what have I done? . . . It was a really difficult the first year I really struggled with it. Our life in [other city] was so not like that. We were kind of under the microscope, people would come up to me at the grocery store and go, “Are you Matt’s wife?” And they knew the names of our dogs so I became a little bit freaked out by it. (Olivia)

Taken aback by all of the attention she was getting when she first arrived in Canada, Olivia admits her struggle with the celebrity side of professional sport. Unnerved at first, Olivia found herself in “exposed positions” (Adler and Adler 1991; Goffman 1963a), which are situations where she could not avoid interactions or engagement with strangers because of her husband’s public profile. Like other wives in her situation, she had to learn to manage this celebrity status.

The concept of “basking in reflected glory” (BIRG) provides some insight into the attention football spouses receive (Adler and Adler 1989; Burger 1985; Cialdini et al. 1976; Sigelman 1986). Originally the concept was developed to explain how students from major universities were more likely to wear clothing with their schools’ logo on Mondays after Saturday football victories, especially decisive wins, than on Mondays after ties or losses (Cialdini et al. 1976; Sigelman 1986). Adler and Adler (1989, 1991) illustrated how boosters, the financial supporters of the team, often basked in the reflected glory of college basketball stars and derived social status from associating with them. In a similar fashion, football spouses bask in the reflected glory of their partners’ celebrity status. However, unlike fans or boosters who can conceal and dismiss the team or players in the event of a loss, spouses cannot dissociate themselves from their partners. In fact, the better known the player is, the better known his spouse becomes. Take Terri’s experience:

It is like I walked into a celebrity status, as much as a celebrity you can be in the CFL. It is pretty hard not to get wrapped up in it. I think you have to be careful too, you don’t want to let it get too big. Be more than what it actually is. There are some great perks but really at the end of the day, you could be there today and gone next week. So you don’t want to get too high on

something. I wouldn't, I tried to roll with the punches and sometimes I got punched for sure. (Terri)

Part of her football wife identity, Terri indicates that she receives celebrity status because she is married to a professional athlete. She points out that there is a positive and negative side to celebrity, warning both herself and others not to get wrapped up in it because it can be gone the next day.

It is important to point out that the verb “basking” in reflected glory may not always be appropriate in the case of football spouses. Celebrity can be positive and negative and people accord status and recognition for both fame and notoriety (Adler and Adler 1991). The verb basking, therefore, suggests that the women are seeking celebrity or that they are, as Michelle described them, “status diggers.” In fact, many women have to come to manage both the negative as well as the positive aspects of their husbands’ reflected glory in their everyday lives. As both Olivia and Terri point out above, being attached to a celebrity means managing his celebrity status as part of their football wife identity and continually engaging in a process of situational negotiation whereby they must judge public expectations and modify their behaviour accordingly. I argue that football spouses must “manage” rather than “bask in” the reflected glory of their local celebrity partners. In the next section, I describe the rules football wives come to learn in managing this celebrity status in the presence of others.

THE RULES TO BEING A FOOTBALL WIFE

The overarching and most important rule football spouses come to learn is: you are your partner’s representative, and, as such, you must not do anything that casts a negative

light on your husband, the football team, or the CFL. Over many years of the football life, Jessica has observed the importance of maintaining professionalism both for players and their spouses:

This is a community-owned team and *you have to maintain your professionalism at all times*. So no matter where you are you have to be conducting yourself as such. And we have had issues and it happens sometimes people get into trouble or you get into a fight or you say something to somebody that maybe you shouldn't have. And those are dealt with depending on the severity of it. Absolutely, you can't, you have to be careful of what you say because just as much as they represent you, you represent them. So you can easily get a name for yourself and it happens and you have to be very careful. (*her emphasis*)

Jessica has seen how some women can get a bad reputation, which, in turn, can affect their husbands' reputation and career. Her insights highlight the need for football spouses to follow the rules. This primary and overarching rule can be broken down into two more specific rules: (1) maintaining the ideal image of football wife and (2) keeping quiet. These two rules will be examined in the following section followed by a discussion of the consequences football spouses face when they break one of these rules.

The Ideal Image of the Football Wife

Physical appearance is an important element of the presentation of self as the ideal football wife. Goffman (1959) highlights the importance of dress and physical appearance for the presentation of self and identity performance. Identities are socially situated and involve actors making announcements about who they are and about how others interpreting those announcements. Stone (1990) enhanced that analysis in his demonstration of how clothing and expectations of appropriate dress can be used to

enhance or detract from one's physical appearance and sense of social acceptability. The clothing and personal appearance of football spouses is one way that they make an identity "announcements." Jasmine explains:

I felt like since these guys have some celebrity status that people expect something from the wife. I always felt like I needed to show up and look good at the games, smile and wear his jersey. *Playing the role of the football wife.* (Jasmine, *my emphasis*)

Jasmine points to the fame that goes along with being married to a CFL player and notes how it influences her actions in public, especially in the choices of clothing she wears. Showing up for football games wearing one's partner's jersey is an expectation for football spouses. The jersey is a symbol: it announces who they are and differentiates them from the other spouses on their own team, the opposing team, the fans and the general public. The act of wearing one's spouse's jersey makes an identity claim in public. Football spouses bask, or at least pretend to bask, in their husbands' reflected glory.

Melanie describes the presentation of self as a football wife as going beyond just wearing a football jersey. For Melanie, it is an embodied performance:

I guess be the part. It was almost as if you had to be an actress, be the part. Be the football wife. Keep your mouth shut, walk in and smile, look pretty and that's that. . . . In other words, you wouldn't be at a party doing funnels with fans. . . . But when you are out in public you had to be a certain way, have a certain persona and be afraid of what you would say. (Melanie)

Melanie details other aspects of public presentation of self as a football wife. She notes the emphasis on appearance, but also speaks about general demeanor and poise when she says spouses must "look the part" by smiling and keeping quiet. The example distinguishes between insider and outsider behaviour by stating that football spouses

cannot act like fans at a football game. They must show proper decorum, and not do anything inappropriate (like yelling profanities at the referees, players and fans), especially not engage in “fan” behaviour.

The data analysis also revealed that many football spouses have adopted new communication technologies, especially social media and social networking sites where they also had to learn how to manage their online presentation of self as a football wife. For example, Facebook and Twitter have given fans the ability to connect directly with athletes, coaches, reporters and their family members. Many of these social networking sites allow fans to send direct messages to athletes and their family members (if they are identified) without any filter. This increased exposure of football spouses online has created new challenges in managing their courtesy identity.

Some football wives have embraced this online exposure. For example, many of them proudly announce their identity as a “football wife” on Twitter. One Twitter profile reads (as cited earlier): “Mom of 3 amazing boys, 13yr CFL wife, [school] grad ’99-OT@FMC, [type] instructor. I (heart) Volleyball & Football; Can’t live without chocolate.” Another account belongs to a CFL coach’s wife with the description: “Football wife of [husband’s twitter handle] & mom of 3 great kiddies. CPA, CGA & GM for the [Last name] team. #P90x instructor, #21 Dayfix devotee & [team] fan (AGAIN!)” In both examples the football connections (football wife and mother) appear as the first descriptors revealing the primacy that the women give their identities. While they may also be instructors, being “X’s wife” comes first. As such, these women present their football wife identity in a way that upholds the ideal standard that such women

should put their husband's career first, take on most parenting responsibilities, and downplay their career aspirations. In taking such action, however, they also demonstrate their role in maintaining their husband's success and their right to the courtesy identity they hold as a football wife.

Having an online presence comes with new dilemmas for these women because anything they post online has a chance of resurfacing in the future. Melissa provides insight into the constancy with which they need to attend to how they come across:

I'm a reflection of my husband. So anything I put down, even if it is in the past, he is being considered for a job now, you don't know [what they will see], put anything like that down. You sit and think! You need to think it through, not of what can happen now, but what could happen in three years from now. (Melissa)

Melissa stresses the importance of thinking about what you say, do, or post online. Even if there are no immediate consequences to what is said, there may be future consequences. Again, professional football is a precarious work environment so players and coaches are frequently on the job market. As such, football spouses learn to be ever mindful as to how presentation of self might affect their partners' careers.

Keeping Quiet: Football Related Information is Confidential

Beyond upholding an ideal presentation of the self as a football wife, these women learn is it best to remain quiet, especially about football related matters. Melanie makes references to this theme twice when she said "keep your mouth shut" and "be afraid of what you would say" when I asked how they are expected to act in public. Football spouses learn that they do not have "freedom of speech" as Michelle puts it. A football spouse is not free to voice her opinions or discuss her partner even if it is something as

simple as how he is recovering from an injury. Although some spouses are tempted to share information of this nature with their family and friends, they understand that there is the danger other football teams can use this information to their advantage. Take, for example, Katie and Rob, who, like other couples in the CFL, confide in each other, share information about what is happening at work, and discuss their friendships and their feelings. However, as Katie explains:

I don't post things about Rob's injury or about the team; I don't post that on any social media like Facebook or Twitter. You have to be very careful what information you say. When you are married to someone they tell you a lot of things about the team, and that's not public knowledge.

Football spouses can also be privy to sensitive football-related information depending on how much their partners' share with them. Work-related communication is not uncommon to many married couples in any walk of life (Berger and Kellner 1964).

However, football spouses must be diligent in protecting confidential information about the football team because, as Katie notes, if she says something to the wrong person, and it gets back to the football team, her husband will be penalized for her behaviour.

Anything related to the football team and players must be kept private. This includes the inner working of the football team, what happened at practice, information about teammates, injury status of players, team gossip, and any possible problems in the locker room. Melissa underscores this point when she told me, "anything that John tells me I don't repeat . . . I don't repeat it or put anything down anything that has to do with football."

As part of the learning the rules for being a football wife, these women find that the team plays a major factor in how they self-present as well as in how they are expected to

behave. For example, one football wife explains she was a football fan long before she met her husband. She had an online profile and enjoyed fan banter and voicing her opinion. Frustrated by being called out by the media and some members of the CFL for saying something about the team in public, she said to me, “just because now I’m married to a coach I can’t have opinion on some things now.” The backlash from one of her postings made her realize she can no longer post freely, and she subsequently silenced herself and softened her opinions. In a similar fashion, Letisha explains how she is limited in what she can express on social media and social networking sites:

At times I would like to voice an opinion on a certain things, such as a play that was called, who is in the game, questioning moves within the organization. Things that a normal “fan” would tweet or question, but again this is a business you have to know when to voice your opinion or bite your tongue. . . . I look at social media as a business. You don’t write anything that can jeopardize your name, career, team, or family. (Letisha)

These women have learned that they have to censor their online presence to protect their husbands’ careers. Michelle explains, “On Facebook I don’t comment on anything controversial, I can’t even if I wanted to. Maybe the day he retires. I’ll be more exciting then.” This process of self-silencing tends to be taken for granted by football spouses.

Supporting and protecting her partner’s career means accepting rules of behaviour that require them to silence themselves and accept behaviour of team members that they may find distasteful and problematic. Specifically, when the football spouse combines the football rules of silence with the man code (as discussed in Chapter Four), she often finds her own personal integrity can be compromised and her ability to present her authentic self can be impaired. Often, to avoid conflict, the women avoid intimate friendships with

other football wives who might be able to support them. This process can lead to a sense of personal isolation whereby her husband can become her main source of validation and support. As such, his perspective of her and his career goals becomes a significant constraint in her ability to present herself as she would like. The next section describes what can happen when a football spouse's actions reflect negatively on her husband's celebrity status as a member of a professional football team.

CONSEQUENCES FOR MISBEHAVING FOOTBALL WIVES

I've seen it be really sour in a couple of incident where the wife brings down her husband because she gets a bad rap. Rightfully so, whether it is being inebriated at football games and not handing herself well, or tweeting silly things. It is such a small league when incidents like that happen things travel very quickly throughout the league on the inside and as you know it can go beyond that and to me it makes us [the league] look cheap. (Terri)

Terri stresses the fact that word travels quickly in a league of nine teams. She believes that football spouses should be careful of their actions in public and remember they are not only presenting themselves but they are also representing their husbands, their football teams and the CFL. I encountered many descriptions of situations where football spouses had made a mistake and failed to present the appropriate image of a football wife. During Olivia's interview I asked, "Are there any unwritten rules on how to act in public?" She replied, "Ha-ha ha. We are all just doing our best. I've gotten into big trouble. Yeah. I've learned as I've gotten older but I've had a couple incidents where I felt that things were inappropriate but it's always about fairness." The responses revealed a sense of powerlessness in not always knowing what might happen socially and how others might interpret their behaviour. In Olivia's case, her past experiences taught her

what football spouses can and cannot do in public. She has been in situations where she had made a mistake and learned a lesson the hard way.

Embarrassment for the football spouse is one outcome of making a mistake. They learn that drawing negative attention to themselves (for example, drinking excessively during a game, or saying something inappropriate about a player or wife in the league) means bringing negative attention to their partner and the football team. This veteran football wife had an embarrassing experience early on in her husband's career when, during a football game, she remembers having too much to drink. She explains:

When you are young, you get overboard, and I remember when I was young. Me and all my friends, we would go to the football game and we would be drinking and doing stuff and [being] rowdy, it's like *oh right*, that's a little bit embarrassing and you realize. It comes with maturity and growth and learning how things work. (her emphasis)

She had been much younger and inexperienced as a football wife and she did not realize the social etiquette for football wives attending their husbands' game. In this example, it was inappropriate to be drunk at her husband's games. Her story is typical, as other spouses had also experienced embarrassment by a failed identity performance.

Situations where the football wife missteps can become even more embarrassing if their husbands or the football team become aware of them. Jessica describes what can happen:

You don't want to embarrass them and you don't want to be yelling at people in the stands, you don't want to be saying I'm such-and-such's wife or whatever. You don't abuse those things and you learn them quickly. And if it's not a coach telling you, it's usually your husband that says you can't do that. You learn.

In the next example, a veteran wife shares an embarrassing story that occurred during a playoff football game. She felt something was unfair and confronted a member of the opposing team's management. Unbeknownst to this football wife, a newspaper journalist was sitting close by heard the argument and reported it in the paper. The football wife explains the situation:

So I may have called him a few choice words and there was a reporter from the [newspaper] who just happened to be sitting there and it was in the [newspaper] the next day. It said [name's] wife has choice words for Jack Frost. Every coaches' wife I know has a story of this [or that] where they got into trouble, but actually nobody got mad at me for that because people didn't like this man, so all the people were like, good job. But it was embarrassing.

Although the consequences in this situation were minimal for the wife and her husband's career, she was embarrassed that her impulsive comments appeared in the newspaper the next day.

Sanctions for inappropriately using social media and networking sites have taken on different forms. There have been a few situations in the CFL where a football spouse's online activities have been called into question. The following example was discussed or mentioned by at least half of the football spouses interviewed. It serves as a lesson to all football spouses about inappropriate online activities. During a football game, a football wife tweeted out about player and his actions on the football field. This player was not on her husband's football team and many people frowned on her tweet. She shared the story:

I just happened to make a comment on Twitter and it was a funny comment and it was in every media outlet about how coach [name]'s wife was getting into it and coach's wives are rarely seen or heard and all of this. That I've thrust (sic) my name into the spot light kind of thing. I thought it was so ridiculous. Here's me, I'm involved in football too and I was a fan of football before I even met him, but for some reason I can't have an opinion on it because I'm his wife. It was so silly.

Although she made light of the situation, others subjected her to criticism. This situation served as a lesson for many spouses who referred to this incident in discussing their own fear of using social media. Some women agreed with this football wife and thought the issue was overblown. For example, one wife said, “[S]he has been in trouble from using Twitter . . . she is not a wall flower that one. And that’s why I like her.” Another wife agreed, when she observed,

I can understand now not wanting the guys to tweet anything because it can be a liability, I guess for the team. As far as the wife goes who cares! They [the football team and media] don’t care about our opinions any other time. It is kind of silly that we are supposed; we can’t have an opinion, why can’t we have an opinion.

These comments show how that sometimes spouses learn from what happens to others who transgress. In these cases, while some wives thought the comment was funny, others felt she stepped out of line.

In discussing the consequences of using social media inappropriately, another wife made reference to the same Twitter incident:

If they’re not afraid of it, they should be afraid of it. I think that social media is a fantastic phenomenon for communication but I think it is on the verge of going too far with communication. I’m referring to football people [and they need to] realize how detrimental it can be . . . I think that it is something that they feel is very innocent until it comes back to them and then it’s like, back peddle, back peddle and they can’t get out of it. Nothing [is] kept secret nowadays. So that’s why I say girls need to be very, very careful [in] what they say and, yes, it could jeopardize the future of their player.

Many spouses had firsthand knowledge of incidents that have occurred on Twitter, including the situation described above. These incidents not only served a lesson for the one spouse but they revealed the standard by which football spouses judge both their own and other spouses’ behaviour. The example also shows how technology has created new dilemmas for these women

in managing their courtesy identity. They must always be aware of, and careful about, how their actions may affect the celebrity status of their partners, the team, and the CFL. The increase in exposure provided by social media means the women have a more immediate, public environment by which their behaviour can be called into question. Many of the women I interviewed perceived this part of being a football wife as a form of monitoring by others and they realized they no longer had the freedom of speech and privacy that they had when they were “ordinary” women.

The next example describes the serious personal impact of another comment made by a football wife on Twitter about her husband and the football team. In this example, the football wife thinks she may be the reason her husband’s career ended prematurely. She explains:

I feel like it might be part of the reason he didn’t get signed the next year. Because I feel like between his reputation and the trouble he got in for being so dirty, and then me and my big mouth, that teams probably thought it wasn’t worth it to bring him in. So sometimes I feel guilty about that.

This situation supports Terri’s observation that learning the extent to which one’s comments can affect one’s spouse’s career can be a “trial by fire.” Whether or not this woman was in fact responsible for the end of her husband’s career, she believed her actions were, at least, part of the reason he was dismissed. Football spouses worry a great deal about the potential consequences of inadvertently breaking the rules in a way that can be detrimental to their partners’ career. Their courtesy identity means that making even a minor mistake can carry enormous costs. For this reason, football spouses give up their privacy and freedom of speech to carefully manage their public image and avoid making mistakes. As discussed in the section below, this identity management process can entail great personal costs to the football spouse and her marital relationship.

THE PERSONAL COST OF BEING A FOOTBALL WIFE

Being a football wife was not without personal costs for many women in the sample. Managing the reflected glory from being attached to a celebrity player demands personal sacrifices. This section provides an analysis of the costs of having to deal with: (1) the media, (2) angry fans, and (3) advances from groupies.

The Media

In the process of learning the rules of being a football wife, many women become leery of the media, especially sport reporters who are often critical and negative in commenting on the team, coaches, and players. The football spouses in my study are aware that their husbands are constantly in the media's spotlight and being judged on an ongoing basis for their on- and off-field performances. Many of the women perceive the media to be intrusive. Katie explains how dealing with the media can be tough:

Yeah it's hard. He's not into the social media but he had teammates that are. It's amazing how the media will just harp on one thing that gets said and then it becomes a total distraction for the team as a whole. I guess the biggest experience we had with it was his last year in [city], they were doing awful and everything was in the media. You couldn't get away from it so were just very wary of what we said and people would ask questions about what's really going on and you can't say what's really going on even though you really want to.

Katie's words demonstrate some of the difficulties spouses face when the media distracts her partner and the team and keeps them from playing effectively. She also highlights the pervasiveness of the media, how it pays detailed attention to every aspect of the team, and indicates her sense of powerlessness in the face of such critical media. She remembers a time when there was a lot of negative commentary about her husband's football team. She

felt the coverage was unfair and there was more to the story than what was being reported. However, given her position as a football wife who was expected to adhere to the rule of silence, she was unable to express her opinions to the media.

Another football wife describes a situation where a reporter from a local newspaper was interviewing her. She shares how a simple slip of the tongue caused public humiliation for both herself and her husband:

[Husband] had blown his knee out and the [local newspaper] did this big almost full page article about him playing football and then about us and our relationship and they talked to my parents and my parents gave them a picture, so they had our engagement photo and it's us smattered across the front page and this guy caught me off guard and called me. This is where you have to be wary of the English language because I totally used the wrong word and I said, I wanted to say, "I'm being his nurse and attending to all of his needs," but I said, "I'm being his wet nurse attending all of his needs." Wet nurse is a woman who breast feeds other women's babies. So the guy took it to another level and basically talked about how I'm servicing him and his needs. It was the most embarrassing moment of my life. And [husband's name] was reading the article and was like "[name of wife]," I'm like seriously [husband's name]. One wrong word. So it screws up everything. So that made me realize that when you are talking to someone and I knew you were coming, I was like don't do the wet nurse thing, right, don't screw this up again. Because you just never know because you never know how the media will twist your words.

This football wife's interaction with the reporter did not go as planned and she was utterly shocked when she read the story in print. This situation caused embarrassment to both her and her husband, but, luckily, did not have further ramifications. She was able to save face and did not tarnish her husband's reputation. However, she became more cautious in future media encounters and began warning other spouses about how the media can "twist your words."

Football spouses feel the media can be invasive, inaccurate, and misinformed in their reporting of the football team, their partners and themselves. Often they will read stories that they see as unfounded and portray their partners or the football team in an unfairly negative light. Unfortunately, they cannot respond or retaliate. As these women observe, they give up their “freedom of speech” and are forced to monitor their communications with media people.

Angry Football Fans

CFL spouses must also become accustomed to dealing with fans. The CFL prides itself on being a fan-friendly league and there is an expectation that members of the CFL should maintain positive relationships with the community. Players are often involved in the community and volunteer their time in schools, youth football leagues, and violence prevention programs. Many players take the time to sign autographs and meet their fans. As an extension of their partner’s celebrity, football spouses are expected to be courteous to fans. When the player attends community fundraising events with his spouse, most of the attention will be on him. Fans will usually ask for an autograph, take a picture with the player and maybe ask a few questions. Typically, these interactions with fans are pleasant because fans are generally excited to meet a professional football player. In such situations spouses are expected to smile pleasantly on the sidelines.

The majority football spouses shared some negative experiences with fans. These varied from minor annoyances of sitting in the crowd and having “drunken fans be falling on you and throwing beer on you,” as Melanie put it, to more serious confrontations. For example, at the beginning of her husband’s career, Katie avoided wearing her husband’s

jersey to games because she was afraid of what fans might say to her about his performance. She observed:

There are a lot of women who wear their husband's jersey and I do now further into Rob's career, but I didn't initially because I was honestly weary of fans, and I sat through games with women where fans didn't know who they were bad mouthing their husband the whole game. So for me I always wanted to be anonymous until I grew thicker skin where it didn't bother me. This is the point I'm at now. But I would say that going to a game and having your spouse playing and having them make a mistake or something happen, having the fans turn on them and having to know what that feels like and you want to defend them but you can't, you can't say a word. So I would say that is definitely [something] I wasn't expecting to have to deal with. And generally you have to be very careful what you say.

Katie highlights the fact that some spouses try to remain anonymous to avoid comments from fans. Knowing they are expected to follow the normative standards of silence required of football culture and not confront the fan's behaviour, some women avoid wearing the football jersey and conceal their football wife identity.

While most interactions between fans and football spouses are not problematic, some fan encounters are disturbing. Melissa described a scary moment when a fan turned on her:

I'm sitting there and the fans started screaming how my husband needs to be fired and my daughter, who is seven maybe at the time, said to me, "Mommy why are they saying this?" And the fans turned around and said, "You're the coach's wife?" and I said, "Yeah, and you need to back off. I'm going to leave," and they stood in front of me and would not let me leave. I wanted to get my daughter out of there.

Fortunately for Melissa a security guard arrived to intervene so that she could take her daughter out of the situation. The example is important because it points to the fact that fans will often treat these women as extensions of their partners. When a team is underperforming or playing badly, or if a player has a bad game, some fans can quickly

turn their adoration into anger. They can be confrontational and aggressive towards players and coaches as well as their spouses and children. During these situations football spouses are expected to take the high road and walk away, as Melissa did.

Fans also post hurtful messages online. While many women choose not to read Internet commentary, some spouses do read what people post about their partners. In the next example, Jasmine shares a personal story about when her husband's reputation was called into question by the media and the fans. Her husband was involved in a play that seriously hurt another player. She explained that he did not mean to hurt the player but others interpreted the act as intentional and made hurtful comments about him online. She shares her painful experience:

I felt like I had to defend him constantly because I knew my husband and he has a public image that didn't match his real image at all. The hardest thing probably was to read [what people wrote] on the chat boards, they wrote horrible things about him. That he should be kicked out of the country. Sit him. I mean ridiculous things. You never have even met this man and because of one football play you are saying all of these horrible things about him. I remember one person said something like, "I can't believe he has kids" [and] "what are his kids going to be like?" It got really personal. This is not just a football player; this is my husband, the father of my kids.

For these women, their husband is just not "some football player," but the person they love and know intimately, and so an attack on his character feels like an attack on them. In this example, Jasmine read the nasty comments and had to refrain from responding. She knew she could not go online to defend her husband because football wives are required to remain silent.

Dealing with unwelcome comments online has become a growing problem for many football spouses. Gabby told me: "we [referring to her and her husband] won't let

our son get on Twitter. He wants to be on Twitter. Because they [her children] are going to read things that are mean about their mom and dad because people are mean.” In many cases, football players’ and coaches’ children get caught up as well with the hurtful and negative comments. Couples try to shield their children from what others are saying but they are not always successful. As such, dealing with abusive fans is often a personal cost attached to being a football wife who must protect her children as well as monitor herself with minimal support or resources for taking such actions.

Advances from Groupies

Groupies are a particular type of fan with the potential to disrupt a football spouse’s everyday life as well as her relationship with her partner. Groupies are women who pursue elite sportsmen with the goal of developing an intimate relationship with them (Wedgwood 2008). These women often make sexual advances to football players, hoping to sleep with, date, or marry them. Addison describes how groupies can affect a couple’s marital relationship when she notes:

[T]here are woman who try to throw themselves at them because they are football players. You might have the best husband in the world but then you have some floozy girl throwing herself at your husband. Of course, every woman would worry about that.

Groupies pose a real challenge for these women. In the following example, Jasmine discusses how intrusive and persistent groupies can be:

I remember at the end of a game they opened the field up for autographs and I was standing with one of the wives and the player and Charlie wasn’t there. But the other player was there and his wife and we were standing around talking. And a female fan walked up and said something about kissing him and he said, “No thank you, I’m married,” and she said, “I don’t care if you’re married.” And he was like, “Well my wife is standing right there,” and she

said something like, “Well once your wife is gone maybe you can call me later.” You’ve got to be kidding, we were standing right there! I feel like, other people don’t really [get] that the guys are married.

In this situation, the player announced that he was married but the woman completely disregarded his comment and ignored his wife’s presence. For women who are not married to professional athletes, this might seem to be an unusual situation, but it is a common occurrence for football spouses.

Groupies tend to disregard and ignore the presence of football wives. Melanie shared one particular experience in dealing with groupies:

We would be at bars and girls would be all over these guys right in front of us, you know. Sean would always grab my arm and introduce me as his girlfriend, and they go, “Oh really,” and these girls just didn’t care. And Sean would say nice talking with you and then turn around and thank God he paid attention to me.

In both Jasmine’s and Melanie’s situations, despite the fact that the football players in question signaled that they were involved and faithful, the groupies did not care about the presence of the football spouses. Even in these personally trying situations, the spouses were expected to remain composed and not respond. While Melanie and Jasmine had the kinds of relationship with their husbands that allowed them to continue to feel secure in these situations, other football spouses experience groupies as a threat, especially since they are aware of the high level of infidelity among football players and the code of silence surrounding such behaviour. Jasmine makes the remark about threat of other women and infidelity, “It’s always there. I hear a lot of stories and I think that it affects people constantly. . .” The silence demanded of them, even in these situations, makes

many football wives feel powerless and vulnerable when it comes to protecting their relationships.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examines how football spouses manage their partners' celebrity status and the presentation of the football wife identity in public, including in their online activities. I introduced the concept of "basking in reflected glory" to explain how football spouses receive glory from their husbands' celebrity. While there are times football spouses enjoy the reflected glory, there are many situations where these women downplayed or concealed it. In this way, I argue that these football spouses continually engage in a process of situational negotiations whereby they must judge public expectations and modify their behavior accordingly to 'manage' the reflected glory they receive from their husbands' celebrity. This is part of how having a courtesy identity impacts one's day-to-day interactions.

I focused on the overarching and most important rule football wives come to learn: that football spouses are an extension of their husbands and, as such, they must not do anything that casts a negative light on them, the football team and/or the CFL. These women learn to adapt their presentation of self to portray the "good" football wife in both online and face-to-face interactions. If they make a mistake, at best they are embarrassed, and at worst both they and their partners have their reputations tarnished in a way that might threaten their partners' football careers. As such, football spouses realize they do not have the freedom of speech possessed by outsiders of the social world of professional sport. This process of self-censoring tends to be generally accepted and followed by the

spouses. They learn to suppress their opinions and views and follow the rules when it comes to commenting publically and interacting with other football spouses, the media, fans, and groupies. However, doing so comes at a cost. In cases where these women want to speak up but cannot, they feel they are sacrificing their integrity and being inauthentic. They do not feel “real.” This can lead to experiences of feeling powerless and vulnerable.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the day-to-day life of football spouses from the CFL, focusing on the construction of the football wife identity. I described how these women participate in supporting their husbands' careers, their involvement in the spousal subcultures, and how they deal with the celebrity side of professional football. Using a symbolic interactionist perspective, I illustrated how football spouses experienced, handled, and negotiated the highs and lows, the excitement and frustrations and the perks and limitations associated with their husbands' professional football career. In this concluding chapter, I will: (1) summarize the contributions of this work, and (2) suggest future research directions.

CONTRIBUTIONS

In Chapter One, I explained the ways the CFL was different from other professional sports leagues (NFL, NHL, MLB and NBA) in North America: the salary of CFL players is much lower; the league places requirements on nationality; and they have fewer employment opportunities because the CFL is a relatively small league. Given these differences, one could expect the experiences of football spouses from the CFL to be different from the spouses in the other professional leagues. However, I found these women had similar lived experiences to those of other athletes' wives as described in the literature (Binns-Terrill 2012; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; Ortiz 1997, 2002, 2006, 2011; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995).

The life of a CFL spouse is characterized by geographic mobility and instabilities connected to her partner's football career, just as in the case of other athletes' wives (McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2002, 2006; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995). Most CFL spouses are part of a traditional sport marriage (Ortiz 2002), which means assuming responsibility for the domestic labour, involved in raising children and managing the household. In other words, they become a "football wife" and face the kinds dilemmas in establishing their own identity that have been documented in the research literature (Cronson and Mitchell 1987; Gmelch and San Antonio 2001; McKenzie 1999; Ortiz 2002, 2006, 2011; Roderick 2012; Thompson 1995, 1999). Establishing the similarity of their experiences is itself a contribution. However, this dissertation further contributes to the literature on athletes' wives by examining the social processes involved in how football spouses learn, negotiate and manage their identity as a football wife.

The first analysis chapter explored how football spouses achieved their identity as a "football wife" by focusing on how they actively construct and establish their identity (instead of viewing the identity as something that is uncritically accepted). To legitimize their relationships, the majority of football spouses drew on a series of accounts to define themselves as a "real" football wife. These accounts reveal how these women came to construct themselves positively as the ideal football wife, women who became involved with football by virtue of their love for their partners as individuals, and women who, motivated by that love, were prepared to commit to the career partnership that their husbands' occupation demanded of them.

This commitment to and early involvement in their partners' professional careers caused many football spouses to experience a process of role engulfment. They learned to defer to their partners' careers and provide the domestic labour for the family, which made it difficult for some football spouses to have a career of their own. Being consumed by the role of the football wife can create problems in fostering an identity separate from their partners and from football. These women acknowledged their partners' career presents obstacles for them in this regard. As such, many women chose to defer to their partners' careers and put their own career aspirations on hold until their husbands' careers were over. In these cases, the women found it difficult to create an independent sense of self, separate from football and their husbands.

While, some spouses pursued their own careers, more often than not, they had to sacrifice living with their husband during the football season to do so. It is important to note that these women still identify as football wives. But having their own career gave them some basis for constructing a separate identity for themselves which did not involve football. While these women generally identify proudly with their football wife role, they also at times downplay or conceal the identity, for example, at their partners' football games, in job interviews, or in the company of football outsiders. In this way, the football wife identity was negotiated differently according to the social situation in which they interacted with both insiders and outsiders of the social world of the CFL.

The second analysis chapter focused on the spousal subcultures that form in the CFL. Consistent with earlier findings on athletes' wives, most socializing during the season occurs within the team subculture, membership is assessed on the couples'

relationship status, a status hierarchy forms that reflects the team, and the social leadership role is usually reserved for the head coach's wife or the team captain's wife (Binns-Terrill 2012; Ortiz 1997; Thompson 1995). I extended the work done on spousal subcultures by examining football spouses' involvements in spousal subcultural and how it relates to the construction of the football wife identity.

Through their subcultural participation, football spouses were negotiating their identities on an ongoing basis with other spouses. Being granted access to the subculture is a legitimization process where football spouses either had their identities confirmed or denied by the head coach's wife and other football spouses. As these women interacted with each other, they continually engaged in identity reconstruction as they treated and related to each other, at times, as reflections of their husbands rather than as unique individuals. For example, women who were married tend to have more advantages (e.g., access to the family room, invitations to special events) than those who are not married. As well, wives tend to be treated more seriously and given more respect than women who hold the title of girlfriend.

I also examined how football team-related incidents, such as in-team competition, and the "man code" can spill into the spousal subculture and create friction between these women. For example, the status hierarchy that forms among players serves as pecking order among the women, with some women receiving more prestige due to the position that their husbands occupy on the football team. In this way, these spouses both perceive and value each other as an extension of their husbands rather than as women in their own right. In other words, these women become known as "so-and-so's wife" or "the

quarterback's wife." It is this social identification that contributes to the process of developing and maintaining the courtesy identity of "football wife" and which supports their commitment to their husband's football career and his team.

The chapter also contributes to the literature by illustrating how participation in these spousal subcultures becomes an instant support system for these women where they can sympathize and commiserate about what life is like in professional sport. For example, the women come together by planning play dates with children, bible study groups, dinners at restaurant, zoo trips or beach days. By engaging in the spousal subculture, football spouses come to learn the values, norms, rules associated with being married to a professional athlete and adopt the perspective that a "good" football wife plays her part to ensure the success of the football team. In this way, the spousal subculture also serves as a form of social control where gender stereotypes and normative expectations are reinforced among the women. For example, the majority of women believe adhering to the man code is crucial and breaking this rule would discredit their partners' credibility among his teammates who may, in turn, ostracize him for his spouse's actions. As such, these women are also engaging in micro-processes of social control that reinforce the ideal football wife identity, one that is passive and supportive of her husband's career, even if it puts her in a moral bind and compromises her integrity and sense of self because she cannot be honest with someone whom she is close and trusts.

The final analysis chapter draws on themes of socialization and social control by focusing on how football spouses come to manage their presentation of self as a football

wife in public, including their online activities. This chapter contributes to a better understanding of how athletes' wives experience the celebrity side of professional sport. With the proliferation of social media, social networking sites, and reality television shows featuring athletes' wives, these women are frequently and voyeuristically monitored by others who seek to get closer to athletes through knowledge of their spouses (Binns-Terrill 2012; Clayton and Harris 2004). This research contributes to this area of study by focusing on how football spouses experience the celebrity side of professional football, both the positive and negative aspects of public attention.

This research also contributes to a limited and growing body of academic literature on the lived experiences of being attached to a celebrity (Ferris 2010). In demonstrating how football spouses manage their husbands' celebrity, I introduced the concept basking in reflected glory (BIRG) (Adler and Adler 1989; Burger 1985; Cialdini et al. 1976; Sigelman 1986) to explain their experiences. I problematized, however, the verb "basking" because, unlike fans who can conceal and dismiss their preferred team or players in the event of a loss, spouses cannot dissociate themselves from their husbands. This means in some situations that they have to "manage" the reflected stigma (notoriety) as well as glory (fame). Being attached to a celebrity means that these football spouses continually engaged in a process of managing public expectations and modifying their behaviours accordingly. As part of being attached to a celebrity, football spouses had to learn that there are rules to being a football wife in public, including rules around their online activities. Football spouses felt they needed to show up at their husbands' games and "play the part." Many of the women perceived this part of being a football wife as a

form of monitoring by others. They realized they no longer had the freedom of speech that “ordinary” women took for granted.

When football spouses did break the rules they realized the consequences not only for themselves, but also for their husbands and their careers. While some football spouses expressed only embarrassment for a failed identity performance, a few wives believed their actions damaged their husbands’ careers. In this way, the reflected glory that stems from being attached to a celebrity demands personal sacrifices, especially in terms of the loss of one’s privacy. I highlighted the difficulties football spouses faced when dealing with the media, angry football fans and groupies, arguing that while the silence demanded of them in these situations makes them feel powerless and vulnerable, the women learn it is best to “keep quiet” in order to support and protect their husbands’ careers. This means accepting the rules that require football spouses to self-censor and accept behaviour of team members and other football spouses that they may find distasteful and problematic. This process of self-censoring tends to be accepted as necessary and normal.

This dissertation highlights the complexities in both achieving and maintaining the football wife identity and the ways these women managed to foster their own identity. I argue that the football spouse is an active agent who negotiates just how much she is willing to transform herself to meet the demands of the football life. Like any other identity, the football wife identity is one that is learned and continually negotiated and managed in her day-to-day life and interactions with others. In fact, there are times when these women identify proudly with their football wife role and other times when they try to downplay or conceal that identity. Accepting the identity of football wife means

engaging in a constant process of identity management. In other words, her identity as a football wife is always emerging, changing, adapting to and struggling with the messages she receives about being a football wife during her interactions with others (both insiders and outsiders of the social world of the CFL).

In conducting my analysis, I relied on a variety of sensitizing concepts that demonstrated the broader applicability of these concepts (Becker 1990; 2014; Lofland 1970; McLuhan et al. 2014; Prus 1987; 1996; 1999; Schwalbe et al. 2000; Strauss 1970; van den Hoonaard 1997). As Strauss (1970) contends: “if we do not practice such modes of extending grounded theories [sensitizing concepts, generic social processes], then we relegate them, as now, mainly to the status of respected little islands of knowledge, separated from others” (p. 53). In this way, I relied on many sensitizing concepts to help explain the social processes involved in developing, managing and negotiating the football wife identity. These concepts included: accounts (Scott and Lyman 1968); role engulfment (Adler and Adler 1991; Schur 1971); emotional work (Hochschild 1979); subcultures and subcultural involvements (Fine and Kleinman 1979; Prus 1997; Williams 2011); celebrity (Ferris 2007, 2010); basking in reflected glory (Adler and Adler 1989; Burger 1985; Cialdini et al. 1976; Sigelman 1986); and presentation of self (Goffman 1959). In doing so, I illustrate another social context—football spouses and the social world of professional sport—where these concepts are applicable, with the goal of providing a stronger conceptual base for connecting to seemingly different life worlds.

In attending to the more generic aspects of the football wife identity, I developed the concept of courtesy identity. I defined courtesy identity as an identity that is attributed

to an individual (i.e., wife, husband, child, sibling, parent, friend) by virtue of their connection to a high-profile individual (e.g., athlete, politician, musician), who is socially valued and/or respected. I propose that a courtesy identity can be an all-encompassing identity (in personal, social, and situational spheres) that is externally applied by others and that becomes internalized as a major feature in defining self. Those possessing a courtesy identity may become an integral part of their significant other's career and its attendant expectations. Those possessing this courtesy identity may have to negotiate the identity situationally as they encounter others (both insiders and outsiders to the social world being examined). The courtesy identity may connect them to a courtesy subculture which may help them negotiate the demands of their identity, but also present challenges of its own.

Finally, a courtesy identity means that an individual has to manage the celebrity status of an intimate partner or, in some cases, the celebrity that they themselves are accorded because of their connection to that partner. For example, others may hold them up to greater scrutiny and/or higher standards. They find themselves needing to be careful not to embarrass or draw negative attention to themselves. The individual may have to be constantly vigilant about his or her own actions, activities and points of view. While I developed the concept in relation to the football wife identity, a courtesy identity may be applicable to similar occupations and social worlds (such as those of politicians or entertainers) where the high profile nature of the work and possible celebrity status of the incumbent has identity implications for their partner.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Research on the broader applicability of the “courtesy identity” concept would contribute to a growing body of sensitizing concepts that examine the transsituational elements of situations and interactions (Becker 1990, 2014; Lofland 1970; McLuhan et al. 2014; Prus 1987, 1996, 1999; Strauss 1970; van den Hoonaard 1997). Comparative studies would contribute to more formal theorizing around courtesy identities, and encourage what Snow et al. (2003) refer to theoretical refinement as a method to increase a concept’s conceptualization by highlighting other characteristics and properties in another social context. For example, do spouses of musicians, actors or politicians have courtesy identities? If so, how is it similar or different? Do their children manage courtesy identities?

As a further example, in considering the social world of academia, it appears that many children of famous academics also deal with the dilemma of having a courtesy identity. For instance, Alice Goffman, daughter of famous sociologist Erving Goffman, published her dissertation research in a book called *On the Run*. In the methodological notes, she writes:

In fact, I had more privilege than whiteness, education, and wealth: my father was a prominent sociologist and fieldworker. Though he died when I was an infant, his ideas hung in the air of my childhood household, and I had read some of his books by the time I entered college. . . . The shadow of my late father may have pushed me to go further than was safe or expected. (Goffman 2014:343)

Goffman appreciates the advantages that come from being the daughter a famous sociologist. She also describes the extra pressures she felt in completing her field research. Her account suggests she has a courtesy identity and has to manage the reflected

glory of her father. Other sociologists, who I know as colleagues – Lisa-Jo van den Scott, (daughter of Will and Deborah van den Hoonard); Michele Donnelly (daughter of Peter Donnelly); and Arthur McLuhan (grandson of Marshall McLuhan) to name a few – describe similar experiences. As I reflect on my interactions with these individuals, it appears that they too could have a courtesy identity that they continually have to negotiate, especially in academic situations.

Finally, the concept of courtesy identity may have applicability in more micro-settings without the presence of a celebrity status, where individuals become known through their family relationships. For example, when children attend the schools their parents or older siblings attended, often times they become known as “so-and-so’s brother” or “so-and-so’s son.”¹³ A closer examination of cases such as these may shed light on what it is like to be defined to a greater or lesser extent by the associations one has with others.

Lastly, the body of literature on athletes’ wives is growing and we are starting to understand the many complexities and difficulties these women face in supporting their husbands’ careers. Nevertheless, there is still much to know about this topic and the ways professional sport is implicated in family life. I suggest there are three fruitful areas of investigation: (1) how football spouses experience their partners’ retirement from sport; (2) how are children affected by a parent’s professional sport career and; (3) how concussions have affected families of professional athletes.

¹³ This example comes from a conversation that occurred over the 2016 Qualitative Conference with Steven Kleinknecht, who suggested the courtesy identity had more applicability in other situations. He shared how he became known as his dad’s son rather than as Steve.

Most women who participated in this study had partners who were still active in the league. A few spouses' husbands had retired but were re-involved in the league in a different capacity (e.g., management or coaching roles). Those wives who had experienced their husbands' retirement shared some sense of loss. This makes sense considering how much of their everyday life was consumed by supporting their husbands' career, managing the household, raising children and managing the career instabilities and uncertainties. In doing so, these women grew accustomed to the daily grind that a career in professional sport can bring on. This experience of loss and despair seems only natural. Not only does their day-to-day life completely change, these women often find themselves as outsiders of the spousal subculture without the social support they use to have. Divorce is also commonly linked to a professional athlete's retirement. In my first interaction with Melanie, she referred to herself as a "veteran" football wife, meaning she stayed married after football. She suggested to me that many couples get divorced once professional football is over. While there was no current statistics for the divorce rate of retired CFL players, many online newspaper articles have suggested that divorce rate for NFL players is been 60-80 percent, which is much higher than the general population (Bishop 2009; Kelly 2010; Lariviere 2014; Satter 2014).

More research is needed in the area of sport retirement and the ways spouses experience it. What are the difficulties and frustrations brought on by their partners' retirement? What are the emotions involved? What happens to the football wife identity? What happens to their relationships with other wives? How do they handle the disappearance of the celebrity side of professional sport? What happens to the football

wives whose marriages end in divorce? Examining how athletes' spouses experience their partners' retirement would contribute to the extensive sociological literature on role exit and disengagement (Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Ebaugh 1988; Hochschild, 1974; Wacquant, 1990). Most existing studies have focused on voluntary departures in role exit and disinvolvement processes (Adler 1992; Ebaugh 1988; Matza 1964; Quinnan 1997; San Giovanni 1978; Shaffir 1997; Vaughan 1986). Less frequently, studies have considered involuntary disinvolvement with the exception of ex-politicians (Shaffir and Kleinknecht 2005) and high-performance athletes (Ball 1976; Beamon 2012; Coakley 1983; Dietz 1994; Drahota and Eitzen 1998; Rosenberg 1984; Sinclair 1990; Werthner and Orlick 1986). Whether voluntary or involuntary, however, the emphasis has been on the perspective of the individuals who are experiencing the role exit or disinvolvement process. There needs to be greater attention paid to the spouses of these individuals and how they are affected by their partners' process of disinvolvement. Do spouses' experience a disinvolvement process? If so, how do they experience this involuntary disinvolvement?

In a similar fashion, children are often implicated in their fathers' careers. The research would benefit from a deeper understanding on how children are affected by a parent's career in professional sport. While I did not focus on children in my study, they emerged in the data in many important ways. The women I interviewed shared stories that their children often missed their fathers and his absences were difficult for them. Many of the spouses thought their sons and daughters' experienced differences when explaining how sons got to spend time in the locker room with their fathers, and, during summer

vacation, some sons had the opportunity to be the football team's ball boy, whereas daughters miss out on these bonding opportunities. Having a father who is a professional athlete means that some children will experience situations where fans and media may say positive, negative and, at times, hurtful, things about their father. There is limited information on athlete's children.¹⁴ Research would benefit from interviewing children on their lived experiences of being a child of a professional athlete.

During the time of this study, concussion in sport dominated mainstream media. Both former NFL, NHL, and CFL players and their families have launched lawsuits against the leagues. The field of medicine, specifically sport medicine have dominated the research on concussions that examine the neurological symptoms of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE) focusing on the short and long term physical symptoms (Hazrati et al. 2013; McKee et al. 2013; Omalu et al. 2005; Viano, Casson and Pellman 2007). Less frequent, research has explored the lived experiences of suffering from concussions (Caron et al. 2013; Moreau, Langdon and Buckley 2014). Caron et al. (2013) explored how players interpreted and experienced multiple concussions in their careers. This research found many that players experienced debilitating headaches, visual impairments, symptoms of anxiety, depression and diminished quality of life from sustaining multiple concussion throughout their careers (Caron et al., 2013).

When I entered the field, I could feel the anxiety and uneasiness that surrounded the discussion. In a few of the interviews some of the spouses opened up about being worried and fearful about the concussions their husbands' experienced and the possible

¹⁴ There were no academic studies that focused on children of professional athletes. Children are usually only discussed in relation to the athlete's wife.

long term effects. One wife attributed the collapse of her marriage to a concussion and described how she and her partner spent years trying to rebuild their relationship. My data indicates that football spouses experience their husbands' concussions in many ways and this can create difficulties in the household, in their marriage, and in their emotional and physical wellbeing. Examining how athletes' spouses experience their husbands' concussion(s) can contribute to this important area of study and shed light on how concussions affect the player's family.

After completing this project, I now find myself conflicted when watching sports. The excitement in watching football has evaporated. When I hear about one football player being signed to a team, I realize this means that there is another player who just lost his job. When a player goes down in the game and the crowd is cheering with excitement, I cringe. My mind instantly goes to his spouse, children, and family who have to watch someone they love lay on the ground sick with worry about him. When I hear about a player suffering a concussion, I hope and pray that he and his family are not deeply and forever changed by the head injury. To me, this is no longer just a game that entertains millions of people. I now watch with a heightened awareness of how professional football implicates entire families in everything that career involves.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview Questions for Football Spouses

Early Life

When did you first meet your husband/boyfriend?

What were your initial feelings about getting involved with a football player?

Did you experience any difficulties?

When did you move in together or get married?

Day-to-Day Home Life

What were your day-to-day routines during the season? Offseason?

Are there any limitations on your life? Career? Because of professional football?

Do or did you worry about infidelity?

Did you feel isolated or alone?

Have you had children? How did that change your life? Are there challenges to raising children?

Are there any unwritten rules or things you just know about how to act when in public?

At a game?

Being Traded or Released

Has your partner experienced a trade or release, what was that like for you?

What changed?

What are some of the frustrations you faced?

Other football spouses

Are you friends with other players wives or girlfriends?

Do you social as a group with other couples?

Do football spouses have their own social events?

Do you think there is a difference among wives and girlfriends? Are girlfriends not treated the same as wives?

Are there difference statuses between wives according to their husband's position or status on the team?

Is there competition between wives? Or do wives treat each other well or do they treat each other badly?

Injuries

Has your spouse suffered any injuries? If so, can you explain them? What was your initial reaction to the injury? How did you feel?

What was the recovery time like? Was it frustrating? Did it disrupt your day to day lives?

How so? Would you consider this a stressful time?

Do you worry about your spouse getting seriously injured?

Do you worry about future problems because of the injuries suffered?

Is your spouse incapacitated in any way from football? If yes, can you explain? How does that make you feel? How has it changed your daily lives? Knowing what you know now would you still support a professional football career?

Social Media

Do you or your spouse use social media? (Facebook, twitter etc).

Were you ever afraid of tweeting something that might jeopardize your spouse's career?

Are there unwritten rules or written rules about what you can say on social media?

Retirement

Have you and your spouse talked about retirement? If yes, explain and talk about.

Do you have a plan once football is over?

Retired already

How did your spouse's professional career end? What factors led to his leaving football?

Did you or your spouse prepare in any way for retirement and if so, in what ways?

What was that first year after football like? Were there any frustrations, difficulties? How did your family spend its time?

Has the adjustment away from football been easy or difficult for your family? Explain.

Do you still keep up your contacts with other families connected to the CFL?

Did you miss it? And what do you miss about it?

Final Question – Is there anything else I didn't ask about that you think is important to consider in this research? Have I overlooked a certain area of professional sports?

APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INFORMATION / CONSENT

A Study on the Lived Experiences of Professional Football Players from the CFL

Principal Investigator: Deana Simonetto
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Purpose of the Study

I am a PhD student conducting a study on the lived experiences of professional football players in the CFL (Canadian Football League). I am interested in the rewards and challenges of such a career as well as its impact on family life. I am also interested in what it is like to retire from a career in football. I will be interviewing both former and retired players. I will also be interviewing family members, coaches, and staff members, and reporters who may have insights into the lives and careers of professional CFL players.

Procedures involved in the Research

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be participating in an interview that should last no longer than 60 minutes. The interview will be conversational in nature. I will raise questions about your significant partners/father's career and retirement and your relationships with him. I will ask you about the physical side of your significant partner/fathers' career and any injuries he may have experienced. I will also ask about what impact you feel his career is having (has had) on your family. Please see the Interview Guide for a more detailed listing of the kinds of questions I will be asking.

I would like to audio-tape the interview, but will do so only with your permission. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon location.

Potential Harms, Risks or Discomforts:

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. Some of the questions may get into areas that you find frustrating or stressful. You may also worry about how others will react to what you say. However, you do not need to answer questions that you do not want to answer or that make you feel uncomfortable. And you can withdraw (stop taking part) at any time. I describe below the steps I am taking to protect your privacy.

Potential Benefits

The research will not benefit you directly. I hope to learn more about the experience of playing professional football within a Canadian context. I will be using what I learn to write scholarly papers about career paths and identities. The results of my study may also be useful to professional sports organizations.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made to protect your confidentiality and privacy. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified. However, we are often identifiable through the stories we tell. Since the football community is relatively small, others may be able to identify you on the basis of references you make. Please keep this in mind in deciding what to tell me.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is your choice to be part of the study or not. If you decide to be part of the study, you can decide to stop (withdraw), at any time, even after signing the consent form or part-way through the study. If you decide to withdraw, there will be no consequences to you. In cases of withdrawal, any data you have provided will be destroyed unless you indicate otherwise. If you do not want to answer some of the questions you do not have to, but you can still be in the study.

Information about the Study Results

I expect to have this study completed by the spring of 2014. If you would like a brief summary of the results, please let me know how you would like it sent to you

Questions about the Study

If you have questions or require more information about the study itself, please contact me.

This study has been reviewed by the McMaster University Research Ethics Board and received ethics clearance.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant or about the way the study is conducted, please contact:

McMaster Research Ethics Secretariat
Telephone: (905) 525-9140 ext. 23142
c/o Office of Research Services

E-mail: ethicsoffice@mcmaster.ca

CONSENT

I have read the information presented in the information letter about a study being conducted by Deana Simonetto (PhD student), of McMaster University. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about my involvement in this study and to receive additional details I requested. I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I may withdraw from the study at any time. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Name of Participant (Printed) _____:

1. I agree that the interview can be audio/video recorded.

Yes

No

2. Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the study's results. Please send them to this email address _____ or to this mailing address

_____.

No, I do not want to receive a summary of the study's results.