

WOMEN AT THE WALL: A Study of Prisoners' Wives

Doing Time On the Outside

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
and Research in partial fulfillment of the degree Doctor
of Philosophy in Sociology.**

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ABSTRACT**WOMEN AT THE WALL: A STUDY OF PRISONERS'
WIVES DOING TIME ON THE OUTSIDE**

This thesis examines the social accommodations made by prisoners' wives as their husbands pass through various stages in the criminalization process. A combination of methods - in-depth interviews with wives, structured interviews with married prisoners, systematic examinations of prison records, summaries of womens' "rap sessions," and a variety of other sources of data - were used to construct an ethnographic account of the social worlds of thirty women married to men incarcerated in two prisons in Vermont.

Wives' accounts are quite consistent with other data sources. Prisoners' wives display considerable ingenuity in devising explanations and interpretations of their husbands' criminal behavior which allow their marriages to continue. The effect of these definitions is to "normalize" this behavior and to buffer the wives from external definitions of the situations in which they find themselves. While wives vary these interpretations - and the attendant normalization strategies they employ - depending on circumstances, five major techniques emerge: (1) nurturing, (2) "pain-in-the-ass" behavior, (3) passive distance, (4) co-deviance, and (5) reluctant co-deviance.

Cette these contient les resultats d'une enquete sur les ajustements (au niveau social) que doivent faire les femmes de prisonniers a chaque etape du processus de criminalisation. L'auteur s'est servie de

plusieurs moyens - interviews poussees avec les epouses, interviews structures avec les maris incarceres, examens systematiques des dossiers de prison, precis des seances de defoulement des epouses et autre sources de documentation - afin de construire une narration ethnographique de la dimension sociale de la vie de trente femmes mariees a des prisonniers de deux institutions vermontoises.

Le temoignage de ces femmes s'accorde de pres avec celui d'autres sources documentaires. Les femmes de prisonniers sont capables de grande ingeniosite lorsqu'elles doivent, afin de sauver leur mariage, justifier et interpreter le comportement criminel de leur mari. Les resultats de ces definitions sont de "normaliser" ce comportement et d'isoler les femmes des definitions etrangeres a leur milieu immediat. Quoique'il soit vrai que les femmes permutent ces interpretations - et les strategies de normalisation qui en resultent - selon les circonstances, les postures suivantes reviennent: 1) choyer le mari, (2) se rendre insupportable, (3) distanciation passive, (4) co-deviance, et (5) co-deviance a rebours.

Preface

Having a husband get "busted" and imprisoned is not an experience unique to the poor: not only working class wives, but a small number of middle class women wind up being at prison gates on visiting day. Too often I - a college teacher - wound up there, too.

I was struck by the stark contrast between prisoners and their families. The visitors' faces betrayed the kinds of troubles and anxieties that stem from dealing with too many daily responsibilities. The prisoners, by contrast, appeared relaxed, well rested, and energetic. I found myself wondering whether or not prison was a vacation from cares and responsibilities - a time to take it easy and not worry about food, clothing and housing and to get some exercise. Enmeshed as I was in the daily routine of teaching, child care, and domestic chores, prison began to have a certain siren-like appeal. I sometimes yearned to trade places with my husband. "Punishment" was being on the outside and having to cope with the business of living.

When I saw the other women in the visiting room, however, I wanted to know if my feelings and experiences were unique. The literature did not help. It was at this point, I think, that I began to lay the foundations for the present study and it is really to these other women that I owe a debt of gratitude for setting it in motion.

Thirty prisoners' wives, whose histories emerged in these pages, shared their lives with me with an extraordinary generosity. They taught

me how to see the humor in the pain, to persevere, and to be optimistic that painful circumstances can abate. I hope that I have succeeded in speaking for them as they wished. This manuscript is really theirs; any inaccuracies are mine.

The groundwork for actually deciding whether or not such a research effort was feasible must be attributed to Dr. James F. Short and Dr. James A. Davis who provided me with the basic methodological foundations for doing field research. Special recognition ought to go to Henry Lesieur, my teacher, colleague and friend, who enthusiastically spurred me on during the critical phases of this project.

Dr. Prudence Rains and Dr. Malcolm Spector, my dissertation advisors at McGill University, deserve my special thanks. Both were most generous with general advice and critical comments. Although I often rebelled, I am quite appreciative of their insistence that I not settle for a conventional piece of research.

Encouragement from my colleagues of the Sociology Department at the University of Vermont came in many forms. It is impossible to acknowledge by name every colleague to whom I am indebted for information, ideas, and encouragement. I owe a special intellectual debt to Gordon Lewis, Ronald Steffenhagen, Nicholas Danigelis, H. Gilman McCann, Robert Stanfield and Frank Sampson. While many contributed, I am especially grateful to Steve Berkowitz. He deserves my appreciation for helping to edit the manuscript, for providing me with crucial insights, and for effectively organizing the final printing of the manuscript. I also give special thanks for his emotional support: especially that provided at the times when I was struck by the blues. I am very grateful for the fact that my chairpersons, Jeannette Folta and Howard Nixon, provided me with a conducive working environment along with liberal use of office supplies, the telephone, xerox machine and the computer.

One colleague should receive special acknowledgement of my love. Beth Mintz has been a staunch colleague, ally, editor and friend. I am especially touched by her willingness to share her editorial skills, feminist thinking, and astute sense of strategy. Her support and encouragement was always proffered. Without her, the task of writing this book would have been onerous.

I would specifically like to mention Elaine Michaud, who was my work study assistant for two years. On a consistent basis, she offered dedication, valuable suggestions, and a willingness to share the bad times and the good.

Once I began the project, I was helped and encouraged by a network of people who offered critical, emotional and/or practical support. This monograph would not have been possible if not for Arlo Cote's (Imported Car Center) devoted attention to maintaining my car in top condition. It was he who made it possible for me to travel the lonely back roads of Vermont on my interviewing assignments.

Two people deserve special acknowledgement for reading and commenting on the manuscript: Lisa Alther and Marty Patry. Special thanks also go to a network of women who consistently reassured me that this study was worth doing. I am very grateful for their attempts to inspire me and to encourage me as I wearily pushed through to the final writing. These women include: Joyce Keeler, Susan Underhill, Jane Vitello, Marcia Goldberg and Anne Marie Curlin. I wish to single out Nancy Magnus, Sam Dietzel and Jean Lang for their nourishment of my spiritual life.

A great many more people must be acknowledged for making this work possible. I give special thanks to Terry Berkowitz who sensitively and gracefully provided excellent editorial work and advice regarding the manuscript's style and organization.

As a single parent, I now acknowledge those people who provided me with some degree of freedom and/or space to get my work done. Special appreciation goes to my baby-sitters who not only freed me from some child care responsibilities but from feelings of guilt about leaving my children. My deep thanks go to Linda Bloch Ayer who provided boundless love to my children and to me. I also bow in the direction of cleaning women, my garbage collector who saved me a smelly trip to the town dump, and to Mr. and Mrs. Marble of Marble's Grocery Store, who provided me with all kinds of little personal services, from check cashing to sufficient change for the tolls in Montreal. Within this context, I count among my most unflagging supporters my oldest friends, Jane and Edward Pinçus, who made it possible to finish this dissertation by providing me with encouragement and some financial resources.

A note of thanks is due to the people who banged away at the keyboards tirelessly and accurately. Special appreciation goes to Pat St. Amour, Sue Carol Shepardson, and Annie Pahud. I send a note of thanks to Joyce Keeler, who told me it was a joy to type the original manuscript; and to Audrey McCann who ceased swimming her laps in Lake Champlain to do some typing for me.

Special appreciation is to be given to the Vermont Department of Corrections for graciously providing me with access to the prison files and the correctional facilities. A debt is owed to the correctional superintendents and other prison personnel for assisting me in obtaining interviews with married prisoners.

Families always seem to be mentioned last. Although mentioned last, I want to assure my sons, Aryeh and Damian that they were one of the most important ingredients for making this work possible. Both almost grew up with this book. I especially thank them for providing me with the

motivation to wearily plod on to the last pages of the final manuscript by refusing to indulge my urges to give up the project. They always let me know they wanted more from me. Special appreciation is due them for assuming some household responsibilities when I was overwhelmed with finishing the manuscript, for enduring the dusty furniture, and for never complaining about the clacking of the typewriter keys as I typed, many times 'til the wee hours of the night.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: THEORY AND METHODS

Some women can't hack the game. Their sex lives go down the drain. They can't take the pressures, the loneliness, the feeling of isolation, and trying to communicate with their men through letters. And the prison sets up these rules for visiting. It's wrong to kiss your man. They tell you when you have the legal and moral right to be intimate with your man. And then your old man is continually saying that he doesn't want you to do this or that. You're continually pulled a thousand ways.
...A Prisoner's Wife

1.1 BACKGROUND

When prison doors shut behind married prisoners, their wives know that they are on the outside and that their men - whom they love and care for - are on the inside. With equal certainty, prisoners' wives know that there is nothing they can do about it. It is times like these - times of powerlessness, helplessness, and frustration - that become part of the everyday world of prisoners' wives as they go through such crisis-provoking events as the arrest, arraignment, trial, imprisonment, and release of their men.

The present research examines how some ordinary Vermont women accommodate not only to these dramatic moments, but also to the daily problems of living with their husbands' criminality and imprisonment. Its primary goals are to describe (1) how the criminalization process - arrest, trial, imprisonment and release - comes to bear upon the lives of prisoners' wives; (2) how prisoners' wives accommodate to each stage

in this process and to the loss of their husbands upon whom they have depended for emotional and material support; and (3) how the Vermont prison system structures contacts between wives and prisoners. In the course of doing this, we will explore some general issues with regard to the effects of the institutionalized assignment of deviant roles to persons other than the individuals so labelled.

1.1.1 Moral Careers and Deviant Identities

Goffman's essay "The Moral Career of A Mental Patient" provides an important point of departure for the research reported here.¹ Goffman is interested in the ways in which institutional settings - in particular, what he refers to as "total institutions"² - shape the identities of actors within them. He uses the term 'moral career' to refer to that sequence of experiences which transforms a mental patient's social identity and imagery for judging him or herself as he or she travels through "pre-patient," "in-patient," and "out-patient" phases. Goffman argues that the shape and content of this moral career ultimately depend on the organization and practices of mental hospitals. These, in turn, structure deviant identities for patients and create a framework for interpreting their behavior.

Blumberg's "The Moral Career of An Accused Person" provides a parallel description of the journey of an accused person through stages in the criminal justice system.³ In this case, if convicted, the accused

¹Goffman, 1959.

²A "total institution" is one which completely absorbs and structures the identities of actors within it. See Goffman, 1961.

³Blumberg, 1980.

changes status from "civilian" to "criminal" -- and eventually, in most cases to "ex-convict." During processing, the accused's public and private identities are subjected to attacks by various institutions and their agents, who often relate to him or her as a "criminal." This sets a dynamic in motion in which the accused often comes to accept this designation even when he or she is not willing to do so. Although a redefinition of self as "guilty" may alleviate an accused's identity crisis, it also enables the police and courts to process a case with a minimum of difficulty.

Both Goffman and Blumberg note that formally uninvolved parties may play important roles in supporting and sustaining stages in the moral careers of those becoming defined as deviant. Blumberg observes that relatives can, in effect, act as agents of the court system by appealing to the accused to "help himself," i.e., plead guilty. Goffman finds that patients often arrive at mental hospitals as a result of family action. Both the "mental patient" and the "accused" are subjected to frontal assaults by institutions, their personnel, and, frequently, by family members. When "mental patients" or "accuseds" accept the labels being applied to them, their social identities become transformed into deviant ones.

While this notion of a "moral career" has been explored in a variety of contexts,⁴ most research has been confined to examining the impact of institutional definition and redefinition on those actually being processed through a given system. Almost no work has explicitly dealt with the moral careers of persons formally outside the bounds of

⁴The following current research studies have contained the concepts of the moral career: Davis, 1972; Lesieur, 1977; Letkemann, 1973; Rosenbaum, 1981; Waldorf, 1973.

institutions but whose lives are strongly affected by them. The chapters which follow will attempt to contribute to a discussion of this question by examining the moral careers of prisoners' wives. I intend to show that the stages in their careers are largely defined by the criminalization process their husbands are undergoing. To the extent that prisoners' wives are emotionally and materially dependent on their husbands, then they too become caught up in the criminal justice system. Thus they share with their husbands the implications that each stage in the criminalization process holds for the self-conceptions of those being processed by it. The moral careers of prisoners' wives, I contend, consist of sequences of changes in how these wives conceive of themselves and their husbands which parallel the sequences of changes taking place in their husbands' identities.

1.1.2 The Criminalization Process

According to Harjen (1974), the criminalization process consists of a set of actions - beginning with apprehension by the police, through judicial handling, and then correctional handling - which result in the successful application of a label as a "criminal" to the individuals involved. Each step in this process confronts the affected individuals with drastic changes in their public identities. These changes, in turn, have important implications for the subsequent actions, private identities, and everyday lives of those labelled in this fashion.

Most work on criminalization has focused on the processes through which criminal identities are defined, affirmed and re-affirmed as a result of formal interactions between offenders and criminal justice agencies. However, Turk (1969) Harjen (1974) and others have suggested that informal judgements, formed and maintained in the course of face-to-face encounters, also play an important role in criminalization.

Since these types of informal interactions would not normally be confined to those being processed by the criminal justice system - but would include members of their families, as well - we would expect similar, if not identical, shifts to occur in the social identities of these closely related kin. Despite this, neither Turk nor Harjen has even speculated on how the criminalization process might affect the lives of relatives of the accused.

A number of researchers have explored the ways in which authorized agents of the justice system help create the conditions under which accuseds, in the course of being successfully labelled as "criminal," become stigmatized and therefore treated as "different." According to Goffman (1963), arrest, conviction, and incarceration carry with them so powerful a stigma that it is often difficult for families to avoid it. Thus, when one member of a family has been stigmatized in this fashion, others may face a loss of community respect and increased social hostility which parallels that of the person directly stigmatized. He refers to this as "courtesy stigma" attached to "...those regarded by others as having a spoiled identity because they share a web of affiliation with the stigmatized" (Goffman, 1963: 30). In the chapters which follow I will show that this "courtesy stigma" - the pall of blame that remains behind after the period of their husbands' arrest, conviction, and initial incarceration - often becomes one of the heaviest burdens that prisoners' wives must bear. For this reason, I argue, our notions of "criminalization" must be expanded to include its apparently "secondary" effects - such as, in this case, the transfer of stigma to persons not officially designated as part of the process.

1.1.3 Separation, Crisis, and Accommodation

Each stage in the criminalization process may be crisis-provoking for prisoners' families. As with accuseds, wives often undergo identity crises. Families almost always experience abrupt shocks. To some extent, events such as arrest, conviction, imprisonment and parole are probably inherently crisis-inducing because of their larger connotations. But, in another sense, the crises generated by stages in the criminalization process are theoretically similar to those experienced by families in other cases of enforced separation.

Hill's (1949) study of the effects on families of war-time separation provides us with an important set of theoretical tools for understanding these kinds of circumstances. Hill defines "crises" as "situations which create a sense of sharpened activity, or which block...usual patterns of action and call for new ones" (Hill, 1949:). He argues that three factors jointly determine whether or not a given event becomes a crisis for a given family: (1) the hardships of the situation itself, (2) the resources of the family, its role structure, flexibility, and previous history of dealing with crises, and (3) the way in which a family defines the event, that is, whether or not members treat it as a threat to their status, goals and objectives. Hill points out that the war-time separation of husbands from their families required new patterns of family action because customary patterns had been disrupted. Family adjustments, he observes, required shifts in members' activities and responsibilities in order to accommodate to the realities of separation. For families to hold together, their routines had to continue and positive relationships had to be maintained or established with friends and neighbors.

In these terms, then, enforced separation itself generates a series of

"crisis points" due to changes in the status and location of family members. At each point, family members must accommodate or adjust to altered circumstances by re-organizing their lives. Their ability to do this successfully depends, in the final analysis, on both external conditions and the internal resources of their family units.

The events which generate these crisis points are, of course, different in the case of prisoners' families from those faced by other families undergoing enforced separation. Courtesy stigma, the conditions placed on prison visitation, the special difficulties involved in preserving marital commitments, and a variety of other circumstances make the external conditions which occasion prisoners' family crises quite different from those which impinge on other separated families. But broad similarities remain at the level of the social processes which both types of families undergo and it is important to note where and why these occur.

As prisoners' wives pass through each of the points in the criminalization process, they are forced to assess and re-assess their husbands' criminal behavior and to employ accommodative techniques to assist in preserving their marriages and making their lives more bearable. I will examine two important strategies they use in some detail: manipulating definitions of their husbands' behavior and their own relationships to it and developing lifestyles which allow them to "normalize" their lives. Both strategies, I will show, are formed in the context of continuous interaction with their husbands and with social control agencies. As such, these forms of accommodation are contingent, in certain critical respects, on the subcultures out of which prisoners' wives are drawn, on the ways in which police and courts stage and carry out the earliest phases in the criminalization process, on the forms of interaction allowed between inmates and their wives, and on the

definitions and strategies employed by social control agencies, generally, in maintaining the system.

1.1.4 Living With Criminalization: The Everyday Lives of Prisoners'

Wives

While it is possible to construct an account of the relationships between prisoners' families and the criminalization process which only focuses on such dramatic moments as police arrests and courtroom encounters, my goal here is to present a more balanced view of how prisoners' wives live with troubles and with their husbands' criminal behavior on a daily basis. Since there is almost no detailed literature on how crime and social control specifically impinge on the ordinary lives of the wives of men being processed by the criminal justice system, we are forced to look to a number of closely related bodies of work for comparisons.

According to Jackson's (1962) work on family reactions to alcoholism and Yarrow et al.'s (1955) studies of family responses to mental illness, there is often a considerable delay between the time when potentially deviant behavior first appears and the time when families accept the definition of one of their members as mentally ill or alcoholic. Instead, these families frequently find ways of postponing this recognition by normalizing a member's disturbing behavior and thereby making their own lives more bearable. In many cases, as these studies note, we can observe a sequence of changes in families' interpretations of their members' difficulties - with redefinitions and new accommodations occurring as situations change or as a family member's behavior changes.

We will find a similar pattern here: prisoners' wives often devise a

range of strategies to aid in maintaining the outward appearance of smooth relationships with their husbands as well as with friends and families. Few of these patterns of accommodation are, however, permanent: they are usually modified in the course of wives' ongoing interactions with their husbands. Therefore, over the course of a wife's career we can observe distinct patterns in the accommodative strategies she employs at different stages in the criminalization process.

These patterns will provide the backdrop for much of the discussion of the ordinary lives and everyday worlds of prisoners' wives which is presented in the chapters which follow. While we will examine these worlds at each stage in the criminalization process, I will primarily focus on how a prison system - and the Vermont prison system, in particular - structures the kinds of interactions that can go on between wives and their incarcerated men.

According to wives' accounts, the Vermont correctional system does not conform to the conventional view of prisons as "closed systems" and, hence, "total institutions" (Goffman, 1963). "Closed" prison systems attempt to sever most ties between prisoners and their families, friends, and communities. Hence, the thick walls which surround such prisons are not only to keep prisoners in, but the outside world out. Here I will argue that the notion of a "total institution" is best thought of in relative terms: that all prisons make at least minimal arrangements for inmates to visit, correspond, and talk on the telephone with family and friends. From this base, some allow more extensive contacts with the outside world than others and some even seem oriented towards promoting prisoners' interactions with family and friends.

Given this, it is important in describing the everyday worlds of prisoners' wives to closely examine the mechanisms wives and their

incarcerated husbands use to maintain their relationships and how these may be reinforced by various types of prison systems. In the present context, we will be particularly attentive to the kinds of contacts that take place between husbands and wives during confinement and, eventually, parole, and how the way wives handle these contacts can influence their husbands' prison experience. Similarly, I will examine how the conduct of married prisoners can exert on-going influences on their spouses' lives on the outside.

Most of the current literature assumes that contacts between prisoners and their families - except for occasional visits - are minimal and that ties between inmates and the outside world are almost completely severed. The research reported here calls these assumptions into question and attempts to show, moreover, that it is the continuing nature of these contacts which can best explain the adjustments prisoners and their wives make to one another and to the situation in which they find themselves. In the sections below we will explore both theoretical and methodological reasons why these observations vary so markedly from those of many other researchers in the area.

1.2 THE LITERATURE

As noted earlier, the strong bias in the criminalization literature is towards studies of the official legal process: how criminal laws are created and enacted, the relationship between the law and the offender, and the kinds and quality of interaction between offenders and agents of the criminal justice system. Comparatively little attention has been paid to unofficial processes and, hence, to the impact of criminalization on those closely connected with the accused. Given this context, the studies that have been done of prisoners' wives have overwhelmingly tended to focus on incarceration as the single most

important crisis point in the relationship between husbands and wives and, hence, as the touchstone in the long-term development of their relationships.⁵

1.2.1 The Crisis of Separation School

There have been, however, a number of important exceptions to this orthodoxy. Following in Hill's (1949) tradition, a number of studies have attempted to integrate the multiplicity of factors involved in prisoners' families adjustments to enforced separation. While based on quantitative data gathered through questionnaires and/or highly structured interviews in the United States and Great Britain - and, hence, limited in certain ways with which I will deal later on - they have made important contributions to a broader understanding of the larger circumstances resulting from involuntary separation.

Blackwell (1959), for instance, was the first to apply Hill's (1949) "crisis of separation" model in this context. His major purpose was to uncover those factors which best predict how families will adjust to involuntary separation as a result of a husband's imprisonment. He found:

...high or relatively good adjustment...for wives who were

⁵However, in most prisoners' writings, the recurrent themes are the men's deep concern for the well being of their wives and families, their despair at enforced separation, and their resentment toward the justice system and society for imposing this separation. The sociological literature on prisoners' experiences has at least mentioned this facet of the men's prison experience. Nevertheless, the major direction of this literature has centered on developing a more systematic analysis of the "hardships" suffered by imprisoned men who are separated from the wives who are on the other side of this relationship. Prisoners' wives tend to be treated as marginal to this issue even though the effects of imprisonment may be as hard and punitive for women outside of prison as for their men inside of prison.

pregnant at time of marriage, who had not completed high school, who were living with husband at time of imprisonment, whose total family income before separation was relatively high, whose marital adjustment prior to separation was relatively good, whose social participation during the separation period has been relatively high, who have children by the inmates, who regard the separation as crisis, and those wives who tended to change their place of residence frequently before the separation. (Blackwell, 1959: 95)

Blackwell's second objective was to determine the significance of a family's perception - particularly the wife's - of involuntary separation as a factor relating to adjustment to separation. His major findings were that marital adjustment before imprisonment is significantly and positively related to marital adjustment during separation, and that wives who define enforced separation as a crisis become more highly adjusted than wives who do not.

A number of investigators have replicated Blackwell's research. Love (1970), for instance, has done further testing of hypotheses regarding families' adjustments to the crisis of involuntary separation. Although Struckhoff (1977) only sampled prisoners' wives, his approach remains consistent with the context provided by the "family separation crisis" model. Both studies conclude that the degree of family solidarity - as indexed by marital adjustment before the crisis experience - is highly related to the level of adjustment during the period.⁶

Two sets of results from the "crisis of separation" literature are especially relevant here. Struckhoff (1977) observes that wives' perceptions of crises bear directly on the kinds of adjustments they will eventually make to enforced separation. Their experience with

⁶Love (1970) also finds that marital adjustment during separation is unrelated to length of marriage, the presence of children from the marriage, or length of minimum sentence.

crises, moreover, is not cumulative. Morris (1965), in her study of the effects of involuntary separation on British prisoners' wives, finds that family relationships following conviction and imprisonment follow patterns established before these events occurred. Thus, where marital relationships were good before imprisonment, there is almost no likelihood of marriage breakdown during this period. Where marital relationships were seriously strained before imprisonment, marriages may break up, but even in this case the numbers are relatively small. Indeed, where strained relationships exist, imprisonment may lead to improvements in the situation.

These findings are consistent with observations, which we will explore in detail later on, that (1) imprisonment does not necessarily constitute a crisis for every wife, and (2) that crises are not cumulative and that, therefore, wives' experiences in coping with one crisis situation may not bear directly on how they deal with another.

1.2.2 Stigmatization

One particularly interesting aspect of Morris' (1965) work is her discussion of stigma and its transfer. Stigma and feelings of shame are almost exclusively reported by wives of first-time offenders, and then only during initial incarceration. Few wives of recidivists experience them. Instead, wives of repeat offenders have become inured to their husbands' arrests and imprisonments. Thus, the sense of shock experienced by these wives has to do with the physical absence of their husbands, rather than factors directly related to criminal behavior or imprisonment. Where wives do feel shame or disgrace, their reactions appear to be explained by the nature of their husbands' offenses: wives of sex offenders and white collar criminals tend to suffer shame, while wives whose husbands are imprisoned for other crimes tend not to do

this. In either case, wives' resentments are more likely to have to do with the fact that their husbands were caught and put in prison than with the criminal behavior that led to this situation.

Schneller (1978) elaborates on these findings. He argues that the extent to which women report shame and the consequences of stigmatization depends, in no small way, on the communities in which they reside. Hence, the management of stigma is not a great problem for the black families in his sample, given the types of neighborhoods in which these families normally reside and the fact that criminality and imprisonment are almost accepted as a part of life by community members. Stuckhoff's (1977) findings reinforce this emphasis on the social concomitants of the stigmatization process. He reports that stigma during separation is inversely related to marital adjustment to the experience of separation itself. He observes, moreover, that "stigma was not found to be cumulative in the sense that shame and disgrace becomes deeper and more severe" (Struckhoff, 1977: 92).

1.2.3 Conventional Social Psychology

These types of findings by researchers operating within the "crisis of separation" school are consistent with those reported by more conventional social psychologists. An important theme in this second body of work is the notion of the transfer of punishment. Swann (1981), for instance, observes that a number of wives believe that their husbands' punishments were directly imposed on their families; punishing not only the guilty, but the innocent as well. The form wives perceive this punishment as taking depends, in the first instance, upon the kinds of hardships they experience during involuntary separation. In this sense, Swann's (1981) research confirms earlier findings by Schneller (1978) and Morris (1965) that the majority of these perceived hardships

relate to financial status (too little money), to sexual-emotional effects - such as loneliness, depression, "nerves" or "emotions" - and to problems arising from child care or discipline. However, Swann (1981) also notes that there are not only costs but benefits to be derived from enforced separation: improved finances, peace of mind, being able to receive AFDC, freedom from husbands' drinking, and "peace and quiet."⁷ Temporary removal of husbands thus can enhance the quality of life for some families.

The chief difficulty with much of this literature is that, while it draws our attention to the impact of imprisonment on the remaining family members, it does not provide us with a very complete picture of their lives. Each study emphasizes certain important variables and ignores others. Each accounts for certain factors in the adjustment of families, but sidesteps others. What is needed, then, is a treatment of the area which can come to grips with the complex and interrelated nature of the reality experienced by prisoners' families, in general, and wives in particular.

It is this difficulty which I will attempt to remedy by grounding my work in the social world of prisoners' wives and by reflecting the views of these women themselves as they pass through crisis points generated by their husbands' arrests, convictions, incarcerations, and releases. Through in-depth interviews administered to prisoners' wives at different points in their husbands' careers, I intend to present wives' multi-dimensional worlds by (1) describing the extent to which stages in the criminal justice process are perceived as crisis-provoking by wives;

⁷Schneller had similar findings. He also reports that prisoners' wives derive some benefits from involuntary separation. See Schneller, 1978: 70.

(2) showing how their varying reactions to male criminality depend upon wives' social backgrounds and prior exposure to police, courts and prisons; and (3) demonstrating why the experience of courtesy stigma varies as a function of wives' social backgrounds, their relations to significant others, and the nature of the communities in which they live. In the interests of completeness, the present research explores both the kinds of hardships wives encounter and the hidden benefits derived from separation. It attempts, in other words, to present a holistic and, at the same time, detailed picture of how wives' social worlds change in response to changes in the form and content of their relationships to the criminal justice process.

1.2.4 The Accommodation Literature

From this point of view, there are important gaps in the literature. Virtually no attention has been paid, for instance, to how prisoners' wives accommodate to the entire range of stages in the criminalization process. Yet the shifts involved are enormously important to the daily lives of these women. Where researchers have examined the accommodations surrounding a particular stage, the interpersonal mechanisms and strategies used by wives have been largely ignored. Yet, as we will see later, prisoners' wives engage in consequential and often painful interpersonal negotiations about what is or is not acceptable behavior at different stages in the process.

There are, however, two areas which are treated in the literature on accommodation in some depth: (1) the ways in which lifestyles act as a form of accommodation to change; and (2) how definitions of husbands' criminal behavior and other coping strategies adopted by wives are used in making relations with husbands, families, and friends more bearable.

From wives' accounts we learn that accommodations are made within the context of their particular social milieux. Prisoners' wives are not only responding to social control agents, but also to stresses and strains which stem from their socio-cultural backgrounds. Hence, they are likely to draw upon culturally-specific notions in determining what they consider to be the most effective accommodations. The majority of prisoners' wives are from the working class. The kinds of accommodations they make to intermittent poverty as well as male criminality are ones suggested by working class environments.

Howell (1972) has developed a relevant typology of working class lifestyles in which he distinguishes between "hard living" and "settled living" patterns. "Hard living," he says, is evidenced by such things as (1) a preoccupation with the problems and drama of day-to-day life, particularly with personal relationships; (2) chaotic work histories, in which families experience recurrent employment and unemployment; (3) marital instability, in which family members have had at least one previous marriage and an unsteady current marriage; (4) general rootlessness, in that families rent their homes and tend to move frequently; (5) toughness, in which hard liners tend to use an abundance of profanity, talk about violence, and generally act tough; and (6) heavy drinking. By contrast, "settled living" families tend to be more conventional and moderate in their approach to life: (1) marriages tend to be long and stable; (2) there is a general sense of rootedness to their communities; (3) people tend to be cautious and conservative; (4) if people drink, they do so in moderation; (5) men are likely to be steadily employed, while their wives keep homes and children in shining order; and (6) settled liners consider themselves to be "respectable" members of their communities and to be concerned about how they are regarded by others.

This typology provides a useful starting point for discussions of the overall styles of accommodation prisoners' wives adopt towards the criminal justice system. Howell observes, for instance, that these lifestyles represent ends of a continuum and, as such, are highly unstable, easily upset by external events, etc. As we will see later on, prisoners' wives frequently shift their lifestyle orientations towards one or another of these patterns in response to changes in their social situations which are occasioned by changes in their husbands' statuses.

Some prisoners and their wives, of course, are drawn from the middle class. Hence, Irwin's (1970) archetype of middle class lifestyles, the "square john," is also relevant here. Based on Irwin's discussion, I have created a female counterpart, the "square jane," whose lifestyle is indexed by: (1) steady employment in white collar and/or skilled blue collar occupations; (2) strong ties to her community; (3) stable family life; (4) a position as an "upstanding" citizen; (5) the acquisition of the recognized symbols of middle class status; (6) moderate consumption of drugs and/or alcohol; and (7) participation in a middle class "round of life." As we will see presently, the square jane has, in some ways, the most difficulty in accommodating her lifestyle to the demands placed on her by the incarceration of her husband.

Beyond this focus on lifestyles, there has been relevant work on the accommodations prisoners' wives are able to make due to their ability to manipulate definitions of their husbands' activities. By the time they have been placed in prison, married inmates have undergone a process in which they have been labelled as "deviant" by social control agencies. At various stages in the course of their contact with the criminal justice system, however, the extent to which wives of prisoners also interpret their husbands' behavior as deviant is problematic. As we will see, whether or not prisoners' wives concur in the official definition,

the extent to which they believe their mens' behavior is amenable to change, and the likelihood that they assign to their husbands' abilities to live in a more conventional manner all influence wives' responses to their husbands and, by implication, the criminalization process.

Thus, in the chapters which follow we will spend a great deal of time dealing with what Scott and Lyman (1972) refer to as "accounts." Accounts are both justifications and excuses made by a social actor "to explain unanticipated and untoward behavior" (Lyman and Scott, 1972: 25) - whether that behavior is her own or others, and whether the proximate cause for the statement arises from the actor or from someone else. Justifications arise in situations, according to Lyman and Scott, in which an actor accepts responsibility for an act, or places responsibility for it on others, but seeks to have the specific instance in question defined as an "exception." Excuses, by contrast, occur when an actor attempts to relieve herself or others of responsibility for a deviant act or set of acts.

We know very little about the ways in which prisoners' wives' accounts vary in response to external events which impinge upon their lives. Here we will look not only at the accounts devised by these women, but how they relate to the general kinds of coping strategies they use in coming to grips with their husbands' careers. In particular, I will examine the extent to which these strategies are effective in assisting wives to preserve their marriages, deter male criminality, or support their husbands.

1.2.5 The Prison Literature

Much of the prison literature is not relevant here. However, a number of recent studies have specifically dealt with the kinds and qualities of relationships prisoners are able to sustain with family and friends on the outside. As a rule, these studies have tended to emphasize contacts maintained through visiting and/or letter writing, and to give less attention to other modes of communication, e.g., telephones, home visits, and work release. Despite this, research of this kind has begun to break down the monolithic image of prisons as "total" institutions, and to explore the influence contacts between inmates and their families and friends may have on the immediate adjustments prisoners make to prison and parole.

Holt and Miller (1972), for instance, raise several interesting issues. First, they document the extent to which prisoners' relations with their wives deteriorate over time. Contrary to what we might expect, prisoners' marital relations do not change abruptly following incarceration, but often fall apart over a considerable time period. While contacts with legally married wives of some first-term prisoners appear to decrease sharply after the first year, a hard core of wives continue the same level of contacts with their husbands throughout four years. Second, Holt and Miller observe that prison structure may both strengthen and undermine marital relations. Thus, as Freedman and Rice (1977) maintain, forms of contact such as prison visiting or telephone calls may be used to renew faith in marital relations or to set in motion events which will undermine them. Finally, they observe that the limited nature of most forms of communication available to prisoners and their wives, in themselves, may be a source of difficulty in that they may not be adequate and thus may be destructive of the relationships they are intended to strengthen.

These findings are echoed in Freedman and Rice (1977). When one spouse is imprisoned, they note, it sets the stage for a powerful emotional crisis for both partners. Both partners can then suffer acute emotional suffering due to their inability to support one another through the means of communication available to them. Brodsky (1975) goes beyond this to look at the kinds of marital relations which remain stale or deteriorate over time. He finds that men with poor pre-prison family relationships are most likely to view them as getting worse, whereas men with good pre-prison relationships are likely to report that they stayed the same or improved. Thus Brodsky concludes that while the widely-held belief that imprisonment leads to deterioration in prisoners' marital relationships may be true in some cases, the majority of prisoners are able to maintain their interpersonal relationships at about their pre-confinement levels.

Probably because it is the form of communication between prisoners and their wives which most readily comes to mind, the subject of in-prison visitation has come in for the most intensive scrutiny in the prison literature on inmates' ties to outsiders. While most studies stress the dual nature of these contacts - that they can either strengthen or weaken relationships - they do provide us with some insights into the factors that motivate wives to continue formal visits with their husbands. Holt and Miller (1972), for instance, observes that formal visitations can encourage couples to experience renewed courtship. This form of courtship, they discover, can, moreover, be satisfying for both parties. Because of this, visiting can become an important event to which wives can look forward. It can also, they note, fit in well with the so-called "service wife's syndrome" in which wives derive benefits from enforced separation - such as an increased ability to play out satisfying roles as mother and homemaker without the responsibilities attached to the role of wife.

Schwartz and Weintraub (1974) offer some insights into the interactional dynamics at work during prison visiting. On the basis of in-depth interviews administered to clients at a social work agency, they describe how couples reaffirm their marital ties during prison visiting by reinforcing their former roles as husbands and wives. Husbands, for instance, can reassert their authority over their wives and wives can defer decisions to their husbands. Schwartz and Weintraub also point out that, due in part to the dismal surroundings and lack of privacy in prison visiting rooms, wives and husbands are often unable to effectively communicate about other aspects of their roles as marital partners.

Burstein (1977) offers some possible clues as to how the structure of formal visiting contributes to or undermines marital stability. Prisoners who receive ordinary - not conjugal - visits are unlikely to report that these visits allow them to achieve stability in or enhance their marital relationships. Therefore, these prisoners are less likely to report such things as intimacy, increased understanding, emotional closeness, and so forth as outcomes of visits with their wives. These same prisoners seldom offer anything positive about the suitability of visiting places and are most likely to complain. On the basis of this, Burstein suggests that prisoners' attitudes towards visiting may be largely attributable to the very restricted conditions under which visits take place. Even with the best of intentions, intimacy, self-approval, and planning for the future are all but impossible.

1.2.6 Relevance

Each of these bodies of literature has contributed in important ways to the present study. The "crisis of separation" model, for example, provides an overarching paradigm for understanding the impact of separation, per se, on family ties independent of the legal connotations surrounding arrest and imprisonment. The extensions of Hill's basic model to enforced separation through imprisonment which have been made by other researchers have framed a set of problems involving crises and crisis management which I take up seriously later in this monograph. Work by Morris (1965), Schneller (1978), Struckhoff (1977) and others has set the stage for my own examination of the conditions under which stigmatization and transfer of stigma may occur and the consequences it may have for prisoners' wives. Conventional social psychological studies have provided insights into the emotional dynamics involved in the relationships wives develop to both their husbands and the criminalization process. The accommodation literature has been a rich source of insights into the strategies and coping mechanisms prisoners' wives use in coming to grips with criminalization and making their lives more bearable while it is going on. Work on lifestyles, such as Howell's, has sensitized us to the ultimate dependence of forms of accommodation on subcultural and cultural patterns drawn from the larger society. The prison literature has underscored the dual nature of contacts between prisoners and their wives, given the means of communication available to them for maintaining marital ties.

My own work will elaborate on many of these ideas and attempt to integrate them into a larger framework which stresses the stage-dependent nature of the forms of accommodation prisoners' wives adopt towards the criminal justice system and the ways that these influence and interact with their lifestyles, backgrounds, and adjustments to

separation. I will treat the nature of communication between husbands and wives as problematic and related, in integral ways, to the structure of prison systems and the opportunities they provide for visiting, telephoning, delivery of goods, etc. I will extend a number of ideas in the current literature in an effort to show the complexity of the interaction between prisoners and their wives and how this relates to their ability to sustain or resume components of their marital roles. In the course of doing this, I hope to go beyond the kind of fragmentary view of the social situations of prisoners' wives which can be inferred from questionnaire-based surveys to a more holistic image of their ordinary worlds and social adjustments. While I will deal with how they relate to the official institutional realm of jails, courts, and prisons, I also hope to provide insights into the informal and private dimensions of criminalization.

My research ultimately rests on a set of substantive results obtained from a small° study population geared to describe the accommodations of prisoners' wives to the criminalization process. My approach therefore offers an intensive description of the world of thirty prisoners' wives "doing their time on the outside." By highlighting the perspective of prisoners' wives in this way, I hope to raise new points of theoretical interest in the study of the criminalization process as a whole.

1.3 METHODS

1.3.1 Study Design and Data Gathering

The study reported here is based on material gathered about the lives of thirty women who: (1) had lived in common-law or as legally married with their men for at least six months prior to the time the latter were arrested; (2) were not divorced from these men at the time of their

arrest; (3) were connected with men who had served at least six months in prison; and (4) whose husbands had been incarcerated either at the St. Albans Correctional Facility or the Chittenden County Correctional Center (usually called the CCCC) at the time the study began. Both are located in the state of Vermont.

The majority of past studies of interactions between prisoners and their families have been based on data generated from questionnaires or structured interviews. These sorts of techniques are best applied in situations where (1) the conclusions to be drawn from the study in question are of the kind that can be easily summarized using conventional statistical tools, and (2) sampled populations can be clearly and unambiguously defined. It follows that these techniques are thus also (3) best able to reflect the attributes of a population, and least adapted to uncovering dimensions of the structural processes in which the actions of members of this population are embedded (Berkowitz, 1982).

For a variety of reasons, I have chosen to utilize a different set of approaches here. Questionnaire-based research and structured interviews tend to be relatively insensitive to nuances in the experiences of wives and their husbands as they confront stages in the criminalization process. Quantitative survey research lays stress on finding relationships between "variables." Since probability sampling demands the independence of sampled units, it is extremely difficult to capture interactions going on between members of a population using conventional survey sampling techniques.⁸ Consequently, survey research tends to

⁸In the period since I began my work, a range of techniques have been developed for sampling "networks." These, however, are still in the experimental stage. See Berkowitz, 1982.

reduce social interactions to variables ascribed to groups of independently sampled individuals and, as a result, to lose touch with the social processes affecting individuals. In this case, it can tell us little about the sequences of events which shape the patterns of accommodation wives make to the criminalization process, and even less about the situationally-specific responses they adopt to the multidimensional realities they face. Thus while the literature based on survey research techniques can provide broad, general insights into the ways in which the social backgrounds of prisoners and their wives impinge on their ability to adjust to enforced separation, and while it can supply some benchmarks for gauging where within the criminalization process family crises are likely to occur, it cannot tell us very much about how wives draw on their social backgrounds for accommodation strategies or how they actually go about making accommodations to each crisis.

In gathering information about the lives of these thirty women, then, I have primarily relied on in-depth interviews which I have corroborated with additional sources of data such as prison records, structured interviews with incarcerated husbands, summaries of meetings with small groups of prisoners' wives, and notes on telephone conversations. Not only have these additional sources of data generally corroborated information provided by wives during the interview situation, but they have helped to place it in context and have added depth to the insights gained from these more direct accounts. In the course of this, it became possible, by cross-checking these sources and following up on "leads," to illuminate the changes, both subjective and situational, which prisoners' wives undergo upon encountering the criminalization process. Thus, this combination of research methods has yielded a rich source of data with which to capture the fullness of the lives of these women and thereby contribute to our understanding of the ways they interpret and give meaning to their social worlds.

1.3.2 Selecting and Contacting the Study Group

Contrary to what one might expect, wives of prisoners are not an easily identifiable population. Both the sources and the consequences of the stigma they experience are hidden : nothing, at first glance, marks them off from the great mass of those in a social welfare agency, a local bar, or a middle class neighborhood. Thus, in order to make contact with them, it is necessary to begin with their husbands.

In the present case, I decided that the most expedient method was to first define the population of "married"⁹ men who were incarcerated in the Vermont prison system between October, 1977 and August, 1978. From this population I selected men who had not been estranged from their wives at the time of their arrest - since I wanted to study on-going relationships - and who had been in prison for a sufficiently long period of time to become adjusted to the situation.

In order to facilitate contacts with the wives of these men, I decided to focus on a study population which lived within two hour's drive of Burlington, Vermont, my research base. Two facilities - the St. Albans Correctional Facility and the Chittenden Community Correctional Center - were therefore chosen as the focus of my efforts since they were most likely to hold married men whose wives would live within the specified area. My sub-group of married prisoners, consequently, was restricted to men drawn from these two facilities.

In theoretical terms, the selection of these two centers was fortuitous. The St. Albans Correctional Facility is a traditional medium

⁹Note that this term is used here to refer to both men who are legally married and those living in common law arrangements.

security prison which was designed to hold about 80 offenders drawn from throughout the state. It maintains three kinds of programs: diagnostic work for the courts and the Vermont Department of Corrections; medium security incentive-based programs for sentenced offenders; and short-term higher security detention. St. Albans was considered the most "closed" prison in Vermont at the time the study was conducted. When prisoners in incentive-based programs have fulfilled their requirements, they are transferred to the community-based center nearest their home. Aside from visiting, emergency telephone use, and correspondence, St. Albans allows prisoners and their wives to make or receive unlimited telephone calls at specified times of the day, and, occasionally, to visit with one another off the prison grounds through the mechanism of supervised day passes. Thus, while relatively more "closed" than other Vermont institutions, St. Albans is by no means a "total institution" in the conventional mold.

As one of four community-based correctional facilities in Vermont,¹⁰ the Chittenden Community Correctional Center is structured somewhat differently. It holds, at any one time, approximately 132 men and women. Vermont's community correctional facilities are intended to "provide a bridge" for prisoners back into the free community. The CCCC is, therefore, charged not only with putting prisoners in touch with the educational, mental health and employment resources of their communities, but with including prisoners' families in the reintegration process. In order to achieve this second goal, prisoners are granted liberal visiting privileges, unlimited correspondence, and free access to the telephone. In order to encourage prisoners to gradually resume

¹⁰The others mentioned by the wives are the St. Johnsbury and Rutland Correctional Centers and Windsor Farms.

their relationships with their wives and families - as well as roles in the larger community - programs have been designed which include supervised day passes, unsupervised day passes, unsupervised weekend passes, work release, extended furlough and parole. As a community-based program, the CCCC services offenders who reside within Chittenden County so that they can be in a good position to maintain personal and work-related ties.

These two centers - the St. Albans Correctional Facility and the Chittenden Community Correctional Center - thus represent the range of variation in "openness" among Vermont prisons. At present, this range is obviously more restricted than in other states. In the last several years, the Vermont prison system as a whole has been informed by a "philosophy of corrections" which emphasizes the preservation of prisoners' family and social ties as a means of rehabilitating inmates and reintegrating them into their communities after release. Vermont's only nominally "maximum security" facility - Windsor prison - was closed in 1975.¹¹ It was a classic "closed" prison in which the routine and monotony of a prisoner's existence was heightened by strict surveillance of both correspondence and visitation. All other forms of contact with the outside were prohibited. With the implementation of the "new"

¹¹ Windsor held males drawn from all parts of the state.

philosophy, it was no longer needed.¹²

Thus, by using married prisoners drawn from these two facilities as the basis for the construction of my study population, I was able effectively to bracket the circumstances faced by the wives of the vast majority of Vermont prisoners at the time. The actual identification and selection of the group of wives took place in several stages between October and December, 1977, and then between July and August, 1978. With the cooperation of the Vermont Department of Corrections, I was able to make extensive use of all official records needed to ascertain which of the prisoners held within these two facilities were married, had received at least a six month sentence¹³, and had been living with their wives at the time of their arrest.

For the purposes of this study, prisoners were deemed to be "married" if they had been living consensually with a woman for at least six months prior to their arrest. Search of the relevant central prison records, and cross-checking these with Corrections personnel, disclosed that of the 147 male prisoners then held at St. Albans, 45 had fit this definition of "married" at the time they were convicted and sentenced. Of the 165 prisoners at the CCCC, 27 met these criteria. Since no official statistics were compiled on this basis, there was no way to determine if the ratio of married to non-married prisoners in these two facilities

¹²Those prisoners classified as too dangerous or too likely to escape to be held in the Vermont system are now shipped off to various Federal prisons throughout the country. The number involved is a small proportion of all those sentenced by Vermont courts. It is interesting to note that wives of Vermont prisoners view all such prisons as "closed" to them because (1) they are far from where wives reside; (2) Federal prisons tend tightly to supervise contacts; (3) the men are, in effect, "banished" from Vermont; and (4) most prisoners' wives do not have the resources for frequent visits and closer contact even if they were permitted.

was different from that in the Vermont prison population as a whole. There was, however, no reason to believe that it was.

After the final list of married prisoners¹³ was compiled for each center, I made arrangements with the prison staff to interview all the married prisoners. This was necessary because I had to: (1) inform them of the project; (2) request their informed consent as to what they might have seen as an invasion of their privacy; (3) ask their help in locating their women, and obtain their written consent to contact them; and (4) gather information about their offenses and sentences, and learn something about how they perceived their wives' accommodations to their criminality and imprisonment.

All the men who participated in this study did so voluntarily. They were assured of complete confidentiality. All interviews were administered in various private offices, meeting rooms, and empty cafeterias provided by prison personnel.¹³

At the start of each interview, I informed the prisoners about the broad goals of the study, about elements of my own history, and about my dual position as a university teacher and a graduate student working on a dissertation. All prisoners were therefore aware that I came to the interview situation with a "streetwise" familiarity with crimes and

¹³We can only speculate as to why they appeared so willing to cooperate. Most prisoners are quite accustomed to being "called up" to see a variety of people during a given day. They are rarely told why they are wanted. Thus, being "called up" to see me did not strike them as unusual. Moreover, apart from female staff, women are rarely seen in men's prisons. Thus, an interview with one probably helps to break the prisoners' routine and to give them a chance to "shoot the breeze" with a new "face."

prisons.¹⁴ I also explained that I came to this research in part as a consequence of my own experiences as the former wife of a white, Jewish prisoner. Thus, they could anticipate that I would share the world in which prisoners and their wives live to a greater extent than many university researchers.

Surprisingly, I found that the fact that I am a black woman did not seem to engender either hesitation or hostility. Rapport seemed good, and I have every reason to believe that the men viewed me as a legitimate type (university teacher, etc.) whose feet, nonetheless, remained in a world with which they were familiar. With the exception of nine men, all the prisoners agreed to be interviewed. Of these nine, seven were about to be granted extended furlough or parole, and one was about to be transferred to a Federal prison. In effect, only one of these nine could not be interviewed for reasons germane to the study.

Structured interviews were then administered to each prisoner. I conducted a majority of these interviews. However, I received some assistance in 15 cases from work study students at the University of Vermont who I trained for this purpose. These interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to over an hour. In addition to receiving permission to contact prisoners' wives - and, in many cases finding out how they could be contacted - I used these sessions to obtain information regarding the men's family backgrounds, prior arrests and convictions, and how they perceived their wives' abilities to cope with enforced separation. I also tried to determine whether or not they believed that their marriages had changed since incarceration.

¹⁴Most of my life, I have lived near the fringes of various criminal worlds and thus am quite familiar with the numbers racket, juvenile gangs, organized crime, drug dealers, prostitutes, and fences.

Sixty-five prisoners signed the agreement to participate and were able to provide men with their wives' addresses. Of the twenty-seven known married men at the CCCC, 24 agreed to cooperate in the second phase of the project. At St. Albans, 41 of 45 men elected to participate. Of the eight men who were eliminated at this point, seven felt that the study invaded their privacy or could not locate their wives - or a combination of these factors. Only one refused on the basis that he could see no direct benefits from it either for himself or his wife. Those who did participate seemed to accept the notion that indirect benefits might flow from it.

At this point, I began the process of contacting the wives. I initially did this by telephone. I began by informing them of the purposes of the study, assuring them anonymity, describing my own status as a university teacher and graduate student, and outlining some of my own background with respect to prisons, courts, etc. Of the 65 I tried to contact in this fashion, I could not locate 14. Some wives were extremely difficult to trace since they moved frequently. Five additional wives made appointments to be interviewed, but were not home at the designated time. I persisted three times and then considered these wives to be "non-contacts" as well.

The wives who were the most difficult to get in touch with were frequently what I have termed "hard-livers." Some were heavily involved in the drug subculture and a few had criminal records themselves. Seven non-contacts had left the state. I made only one attempt to contact one of these. Five wives refused to cooperate, largely due to the emotional stress dredging up unpleasant memories would entail. My final study population, therefore, consisted of thirty wives who were initially enthusiastic about the goals of the study and who readily agreed to be interviewed. These in-depth interviews were administered between January, 1978 and January, 1980.

1.3.3 Representativeness

In a small qualitative study of this kind, where random sampling methods are not used, the question of representativeness of the study population always arises. Although the term does not mean quite the same thing in this context as it does where quantitative methods are involved, it is still useful to explore the issue.

In comparing the women in the final study population to others, it is striking that, in what is considered to be a rural state,¹⁵ only four prisoners' wives lived in the more rural areas. Twenty-six resided in urban or suburban centers. This observed difference, however, was probably due to the fact that the study was situated in Chittenden County; one of the more heavily urbanized areas within Vermont.¹⁶

All wives were white. This is consistent with the composition of the population of the state which includes few minority groups. Most were wives of prisoners serving short sentences - on average, between six months and a year. The bulk of these sentences were for alcohol-related or petty property crimes. Few men had been convicted of crimes of violence, possession of heroin, or other more serious offenses. In this sense, these wives were not representative of women associated with men in the American prison population, generally. But, given the community-oriented correctional philosophy at work in Vermont, the experiences of these wives were probably representative of those women facing similar circumstances. The prevalence of alcohol-related offenses among married

¹⁵Until the 1980 census, Vermont was not considered to include even one Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

¹⁶Burlington and environs became an SMSA in 1980.

prisoners, for instance, is consistent with what we know about the Vermont prison population - and that in medium and minimum security prisons as a whole.

It could be argued that, given that participation in the study was voluntary, the final study population included more respectably and conservatively-oriented wives than one would find under other circumstances. It is probably true that the study group underrepresents prisoners' wives who are drug users or are, themselves, active participants in criminal activities. But this is probably a limitation inherent in all studies where participation is voluntary - whether the study populations are collected through random sampling techniques or not. At some future date, however, it would probably be useful to specifically study the reactions and adjustments of criminally-involved wives.

For present purposes, then, the study group seems quite adequately "representative." In a rural state, the wives appear to be more urban than others. But the majority of the U.S. population lives in urban or suburban centers and this is reflected in the composition of prison populations. While living in a major metropolitan center may not be quite the same thing as living in a metropolitan center in Vermont, we have no reason to believe that it is qualitatively different from the point of view of wives' experiences with the criminal justice system.¹⁷ While exclusively white, we have no reason to believe that their experiences are, in degree, different from those of black wives.

¹⁷In fact, as we will see later, respondents seem to have similar socio-demographic characteristics to those wives of prisoners in other urban and rural areas throughout the country.

The Vermont prison system, of course, is not representative of all prisons in that inmates who are considered "security risks" are placed elsewhere or transferred out. It also probably contains proportionately fewer prisoners incarcerated for drug or drug-related offenses than other prison systems in the United States. In this sense, it is not representative of the closed, maximum security systems which are usually used to house populations of this kind - and which are probably more typical of those with which prisoners' wives most often have to deal. But my study may well be representative of prisoners' wives who live outside the nation's major cities in states which have established community-based prison systems. This is a population about which little is known, but we have no reason to believe that, in fundamental respects, the experiences of these wives with crime, arrests, courtrooms, and prisons are markedly or systematically different from those of other prisoners wives in similar situations.

1.3.4 Data Collection

In order to best represent the processes whereby prisoners' wives accommodate to the circumstances surrounding their husbands' arrests and imprisonments, I have attempted to integrate data collected from a variety of different vantage points using a number of different methodologies. In many cases, this has allowed me to engage in what Denzin (1978) refers to as "triangulation": deriving the "best" overall interpretation of a social situation from a series of overlapping measurements or observations. As a result, I have been able to cross-check and re-examine data in the interests of improving their reliability and validity.

For example, I have integrated data drawn from in-depth interviews of prisoners' wives with those obtained through structured interviews with

their husbands and with data extracted from summaries of prisoners' wives' "rap" sessions. All of these data, in turn, have been compared to pertinent information concerning married prisoners' socio-demographic backgrounds, conviction records, etc., which were gathered from prison records.

Since this study is, in no small measure, concerned with respondents' subjective perceptions and assessments of their experiences with their husbands' criminal activities, in-depth interviews were considered the single most important data source. While research based on responses to questionnaires or structured interviews allows analysts to reach large numbers of respondents relatively quickly and easily, it does not, typically, allow for the kind of subtle probing needed to represent individuals as evolving and changing - both subjectively and situationally - through time. Thus, there is broad agreement that only in-depth interviewing can provide the wealth of data needed to address subtle issues of this kind.

In the present case, while the interviews I conducted with prisoners' wives followed no rigid or fixed sequence, an interview guide was used to make sure that, while sequences might vary, the same basic topics were raised with each respondent. Nine areas were covered: family life prior to arrest; husbands' and wives' history of illegal activities; arrests and convictions; managing stigma; husbands' adjustments to prison; accessibility of husbands by means of telephone calls, prison visits, and home leave; "managing alone"; marital relationships during separation; and reunion. While the gross outlines of this guide remained unchanged, specific topics were added or deleted as I discovered more about the wives' experiences. Moreover, as the field research progressed, closure was achieved in several areas and these were de-emphasized in the remaining interviews. Thus, the use of an interview

guide allowed me to retain control over the interviewing process but, at the same time, facilitated the spontaneous and uninhibited expression of the wives' perspectives and feelings.

All interviews were focused, in-depth discussions lasting no less than three - and often as many as ten - hours and sometimes required more than one visit. All thirty women were interviewed at least once. However, there was considerable variation in the number of sessions. Thirteen wives were interviewed from three to as many as seven times; twelve wives were interviewed twice; and five wives only once.¹⁸ Repeated contacts with respondents made it possible for me to resurrect previous topics and to resolve, if possible, contradictions. All told, this phase of the research involved some 85 separate sessions.

Most interviews were conducted in wives' homes. Only a few were held in my office. During each interview, I was able to take notes without apparently disturbing the wives. Every effort was made to conduct interviews in private. However, privacy was not always possible. If wives had children, it was sometimes impossible to prevent them from being present during at least part of the interview. Usually we tried to arrange interviews during times when children were not at home. Where wives lived with their parents, one parent was sometimes present during part of a session. When husbands had been paroled, they sometimes dropped in as well. This was also true of friends. I recognized that information about marital relations given on some of these occasions could be unreliable since it might reflect what wives knew their

¹⁸Three factors appear to have determined the frequency and duration of interviews: the willingness of wives to share aspects of their lives with me; how close they lived to the research base; and whether or not they were hospitalized during the research period.

husbands and/or relatives and/or friends might want them to say. Where I felt this might be the case, I was able to verify much of this information in subsequent interviews or through telephone conversations.

My general impression is that, throughout these in-depth interviews, rapport between myself and prisoners' wives was quite good. The majority welcomed me with warmth, curiosity and enthusiasm. In turn, I felt comfortable working with them. There were several factors, alone or in combination, which seemed to explain their openness in dealing with me. First, in many cases husbands told their wives to expect that I would get in touch with them. Hence, possible confusions about my intentions, etc. were minimized from the outset. Second, I had been married to a man who had been incarcerated in various Federal penitentiaries, I shared certain common feelings, reactions, and so on with them. Wives repeatedly told me how rare it was that they could relate their reactions to someone who could appreciate the "uniqueness" of their experiences. Finally, since I was a university teacher, many felt that I would be in a good position to interpret these experiences to the conventional world and, perhaps, help others in a similar position. Many participants greeted me by saying words to the effect, "thank God somebody has discovered us! Everybody pays attention to the men. I feel that no one knows we're here and suffering too!" Endless cups of coffee, whole packs of cigarettes, lots of talking, laughing, weeping and sharing what is on women's minds - this captures the texture of the interviews. Talking for many hours with women makes the kind of rapport possible that allowed me to delve into places generally hidden from public view. Most wives felt that they had shared a deep part of their lives - their anguish, pain, joys, and boredom - with me. I came to like these women and they knew it. And I think they came to regard me, first, as the wife of a prisoner who wanted to know more about the experiences of other prisoners' wives, and only second as a woman writing about these experiences.

Given the development of this rapport, it would have been extremely difficult - perhaps impossible - for me to maintain the role of a completely "objective," detached observer. Many wives expected that, as a university teacher, I would be in a good position to mobilize societal resources on their behalf. I, in turn, tried to learn more about the availability of certain kinds of community aid and, on occasion, I was able to act as an intermediary between various agencies and those wives in need. Sometimes I lent them emotional support, visited them in the hospital, or attended funerals, celebrations, their husbands' court appearances, or accompanied them on prison visits.

Despite apparent reliability and face-validity of the information I gathered from these in-depth interviews, they were not, of course, my only source of data. Large portions of wives' accounts could be, and were, corroborated with prison records and information gathered through structured interviews with prisoners themselves. These records included information about the men's previous convictions, how they interacted with their wives, and how they perceived their wives as managing on their own. In addition, the prison records sometimes included assessments made by probation and parole officers, pre-sentence investigations, and observations made by psychologists and other prison personnel. Such materials were very often highly subjective and unsystematic.

Another source of data evolved out of my initial contacts with respondents. After I began my research, groups of wives began to meet irregularly over the period of a year and a half to share common experiences and feelings. These meetings included from three to eight women and took place over their kitchen tables, in their living rooms, and in my department's offices. All told, ten meetings took place. Those wives who lived closest to the Burlington area were most likely to attend.

As it evolved, my role at these meetings was to provide refreshments, lead discussions, and to keep records of what was discussed. Often these "rap" sessions began with wives' complaints about their status as single-yet-married women, about their husbands, or about the prison system. In the course of a session they might share specific information about the prison system, provide emotional support for one another, or simply air their feelings. Conducting these sessions was especially useful in that they provided me with opportunities to discover which issues or problems were most salient to wives and to revise and reformulate my impressions accordingly.

Although less systematic, telephone calls were another important source of information. After each interview, I left wives with my telephone number and suggested that, if they wanted to talk further, I was always available. Twelve wives responded by contacting me at least every two weeks. These telephone conversations typically lasted from 15 minutes to an hour; during which I kept careful notes. Sometimes wives simply treated these calls as an opportunity to "sound off" to a sympathetic listener. At other times they were seeking help in solving particular problems, trying to mobilize resources, etc.. Although I made less systematic use of information gathered in this way than others, often these conversations helped me to get a sense of the texture and tempo of the experiences through which wives were going.

1.3.5 Making Use of the Data

In larger perspective, the study reported here can best be thought of as an ethnography of prisoners' wives and their encounters with the criminal justice system. In this sense, it follows in the larger tradition of "grounded theory" articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1965). In constructing this ethnography, I have drawn on a variety of sources.

Information from all of these sources have been subjected to rigorous comparisons, cross-checking, and validation with respect to the experiential frame and lifespace of the prisoners' wives, themselves. In doing this, I have followed the "constant comparative" method of analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1965). This method involves juxtaposing categories of data and searching for similarities and differences. In this fashion, "old timers"¹⁹ have been compared to "first timers," wives with children to wives without children, "hard-livers" to "settled" wives and "square janes," divorced wives to those who retained their marital ties, and wives of property offenders to wives of personal offenders. Other comparisons also have been made along a variety of dimensions.

In order to accomplish these comparisons most effectively, interview transcripts, telephone conversations, and notes on women's "rap" sessions were transcribed and coded according to a series of general categories. These categories continually evolved, since they were based on what seemed to be the most salient aspects of the data. In the course of the research, for instance, general categories were divided into sub-categories based on topics mentioned by respondents, e.g., "prison visiting" was divided into "prison rules and regulations for visiting," "treatment by guards," "strip searching," "contraband," "sex in the visiting room," "conversations," "future plans," "difficulties in visiting" and so on. These categories then served as a guide for information used in comparisons. By making these comparisons, for instance, I found out that neophytes has special problems not encountered by old timers, and that some crimes committed by husbands were more easily justified by wives than others.

¹⁹The term "old timers" refers to those wives who have experienced enforced separation more than once. "Neophytes" are those wives who were experiencing enforced separation for the first time.

In creating an overall image or representation of the reality depicted in the data, more-or-less finely-cut categories and sub-categories were rearranged so as to assemble together material relevant to each topic. New patterns appeared and older ones disappeared in the process of determining the final array. Thus, much of the analysis of how prisoners' wives accommodate to their husbands' criminalization which is presented in the pages which follow is a product of the continual refinement and reformulation of a series of themes and comparisons implicit in the categories and sub-categories.

The social world of prisoners' wives emerge in the chapters which follow. This representation is derived from a distillation of over eighty-five interviews, ten women's "rap" sessions, and innumerable telephone conversations. The image which emerges will attack many cherished myths about the women that criminals marry, while at the same time upholding other beliefs. This monograph, however, attempts to be true to all women "doing their time on the outside."

Chapter 2

WOMEN'S INTERPRETATIONS OF CRIMINALITY BEFORE MARRIAGE

I, myself, go for the underdog. I feel that everyone should have a chance and that there is good in everyone and this good will come out if given a chance...

2.1 BACKGROUND

Most women who later become prisoners' wives meet, court, and decide to marry their prospective mates within a working class milieu. During courtship, almost all of the women in the study population came to know about their men's criminal records or activities. Here we will deal with how they accommodate to these facts prior to their marriages.

In order to understand how it is possible for this process of accommodation to occur, it is first necessary to come to grips with what it means to grow up in environments where exposure to crime, jails and prisons is commonplace. In the chapter which follows we will explore this issue with particular reference to the influence that peer group associations and peripheral involvement in crime exert on these women's subsequent careers. The argument here is that the women who later become prisoners' wives are, for the most part, neither naive nor unsuspecting about crime and criminality but come from backgrounds in which criminal involvement, if not totally acceptable, is at least common.

There has been relatively little written on women's early exposure to crime and the criminal justice system. Researchers who gather background

data on prison populations note that a significant proportion of male inmates come from families characterized by marital instability.¹ This appears to be true of prisoners' wives as well. But, in itself, this observation may be misleading: marital instability is common in the social environments from which prisoners and their wives are drawn, but all people from these backgrounds do not become involved in criminal activity. For this reason, it is necessary to look below the surface and to examine which elements of the social histories of people growing up in these environments predispose them towards later involvement with crime and the criminal justice system. Only in this fashion will it be possible to fully understand why it is that the women who later become prisoners' wives are able to accommodate to their husbands' entanglements with crime, courts, and prisons.

2.2 GROWING UP

The women who later become prisoners' wives usually learn about their prospective mates' social backgrounds during courtship. In many respects, these tend to be consistent with their own. However, a higher proportion of the men come from homes that had been broken by desertion, separation, divorce or death of one parent than the wives. Half of the wives (15) in the study population reported that, for them and their men, family life had tended to be unstable, uncertain, and unpredictable. However, insofar as having two parents married and living together can be taken as a measure of stability, the other half of the wives grew up under relatively stable circumstances. But of 29 men, only seven came from intact homes: twenty-one came from families broken by

¹See, for instance, Blackwell, 1959; Love, 1970.

divorce, separation, desertion or death.²

Despite these differences in family stability, most women and men come from families which share a common theme of struggles with poverty. Most women reported that they and their husbands came from families in which periods of employment alternated with unemployment or receipt of government assistance. Family violence, alcoholism and crime had been prevalent in both the women's and men's lives. Seventeen women and 22 men had lived with at least one family member who had consumed alcohol heavily. At best, alcoholism means poverty and unemployment in these families. At worst it can lead to the total disruption of family life. Alcoholism, moreover, can be devastating to the lives of women since violent episodes often erupt following heavy consumption of alcohol by one or more family members. Seven women reported that they had been the targets of violent, alcohol-related attacks and incest. Eight of the men had been periodically subject to violent abuse. One woman described how her man had been abused by an alcoholic father:

When Nelson's father was mad he used his fist. He had a cat o' nine tails that he usually kept close to him. He used this cat o' nine tails constantly on the kids. The beatings those kids got! There was absolutely no talking back to his father. He would sit at the dinner table and if a kid didn't like the food, he beat the child unconscious...

His father went on binges. No one ever knew when he was likely to go out on these binges. Then he would come home drunk and ready to fight viciously.

The histories of the women reveal a common exposure to criminal enterprises; for some, dating back to childhood. Twenty-one women come

²My finding is consistent with Blackwell's, 1959. He shows that 77.5 percent of the men in his study were products of broken homes, in contrast to 64.6 percent of the wives.

from families in which at least one member had spent time in jails or prisons. Nine women indicated that more than one family member had spent some time there. Only nine women reported that no family member had ever served a jail or prison sentence.

Much of this crime could be described as alcohol or drug-related and, typically, male-centered. Some fathers, male siblings and other male relatives tended to be involved in "disorganized," petty, irregular or haphazard crime. In a few cases this was true of all male family members. None of the respondents' families, however, could be characterized as criminally-oriented in the classic sense of the term: some family members would be periodically or episodically involved in crime, while others would not. Nevertheless, it was within their families that the majority of women became acquainted with both illegal activities and socially disapproved patterns of behavior. Hence, it was also there that they formulated important aspects of their notions about crime, police, courts and jails.

The women reported that a high proportion of their men came from families in which criminal activities were endemic. Six had been raised in families where only one member had been criminally involved, whereas 18 had grown up in families where more than one member had. Criminal enterprises also tended to be initiated by male members. Siblings and other male relatives were most often involved in such "disorganized" crimes as aggravated assaults, burglaries, bar brawls, taking and driving away cars, armed robberies of gas stations and grocery stores, and so forth. A high percentage of these crimes were directly related to alcoholism. One woman described the kinds of crimes her man's family had committed:

His stepfather was in Windsor Prison in 1974 for armed robbery. His family deals in drugs. You name it, they got it.

They're involved in stolen goods, they drive without licenses and they do B & Es...His brother stabbed two kids and is always beating up someone.

As the women reported, they and their men had hard years growing up - punctuated by family crises, unemployment, crime, violence and alcoholism. Only nine women did not report such difficulties while they were being raised. This was true of only seven men. Most of the families of both the women and men who did not grow up under hard conditions appeared to have been oriented toward a settled working class round of life. Only three women and two men had come from families which were obviously middle class. All of these were well-rooted in their communities, contained at least one member who had been steadily employed, consumed alcohol moderately, and were built around stable marriages. No family members had been involved in criminal activities or had been in trouble with the law. Hence, these families could best be characterized as pursuing lifestyles in which the work ethic and roots in a community were highly valued.

2.2.1 Peer Group Associations and Criminal Behavior

Not only do most prisoners' wives have family backgrounds similar to those of their men, but in their early adult years they were also likely to have established similar kinds of friendships. Thus most women were likely to have been exposed to crime through peer associations.

When I asked women which of their friends had been involved in criminal activities and/or had been arrested, 17 reported that more than one of their friends fell into this category. There was, however, no obvious pattern to the types of offenses involved. Their friends, the women reported, had drifted into the kinds of petty, disorganized crimes which involve little planning or skill. As with their families, the

women reported that these friends were most likely to have been under the influence of alcohol or drugs when their offenses occurred.

Similarly, the women reported that a higher proportion of their men's friends had been involved in criminal offenses - and, consequently, with jails and prisons - than their own. According to the women, 24 men had more than one friend who had been in trouble with the law and had subsequently been incarcerated. Moreover, the majority of men seem to have had a wide network of friends who had participated in petty disorganized crimes. Many men with previous convictions had met some of their "old friends" while in prison and had renewed these friendships. Although both the women and men had had criminal associates, only a small fraction tended to "hang out" exclusively with them. Most also had friends who led stable, conventional lives.

Those women and men in the study population who, themselves, were generally oriented towards conventional lifestyles were likely to have had few friends who had previous experience with crime, jails, and prisons. Those few women and men from the middle classes were unlikely to have friends involved in serious crimes; although many of their friends had occasionally deviated within the boundaries set for "respectable deviance," e.g., recreational use of psychedelic drugs.

In all, a little more than half the women and men in the study population were familiar with variegated criminal activity. Through their friends, they had learned about crimes, courts and prisons. A number of women, and most of the men, had visited friends in jails and prisons. Thus for the women in which we are primarily interested, criminalization and its consequences were not shocking. Moreover, throughout much of their recent lives, these women had been associated with men who, to an observable degree, had had more direct experience with criminal activity than they did.

2.2.2. The Women and Criminal Behavior

The current literature pays scant attention to the extent to which prisoners' wives own histories involved criminal activities. Here we will look primarily at their own involvements with adolescent and, less frequently, adult crime.

The women in the study population were most likely to have been directly involved in criminal enterprises during their adolescent and early adult years. Twenty-four women had been involved in at least one form of delinquent or criminal behavior such as running away from home, truancy, sexual delinquency and occasional shoplifting. Only six admitted to committing such misdemeanors as driving without a license, disturbing the peace, or loitering. Seven women, however, had participated in serious felonies such as property crimes, armed robberies, grand larcenies, burglaries and check forging. As a rule, however, the women's participation - either in delinquency or adult criminality - had been sporadic, impulsive and experimental. It had not been sustained over a long period of time.

Many women reported that it had been easy for them to act on impulse, or at the instigation of their peers, to relieve the boredom of "having nothing to do." Thus, regardless of the official labels applied to them, the majority of the activities in which the women in the study population had participated had been unskilled or careless crimes. Only one woman had been involved in crimes from which she derived some form of monetary gain (she claimed to have been directly involved in several armed robberies and burglaries in order to alleviate financial problems).

The contrast between the majority of working class women in the study population - most of whom had had at least a passing acquaintance with

petty or disorganized crime - and the eight women from settled working class and middle class backgrounds was striking. None of the latter had ever been arrested. All claimed to have been committed to the conventional world of family, school and/or work, and to have had little inclination to threaten their ties to these institutions.

A considerable proportion of the women from both types of backgrounds, however, had, at one time or another, consumed both illegal drugs and alcohol. In all, 22 of 30 women - including four of the eight women pursuing middle class lifestyles - had used drugs. Marijuana was the most popular. Only two women had used "hard" drugs such as heroin or amphetamines. This should not be a surprising pattern given that many of the women in the study population lived in communities where drugs were accessible and the recreational consumption of alcohol and marijuana was an integral part of leisure-time activities. Only six women had been active members of drug-oriented groups prior to their marriages. Four had been heavily involved in the "head" subculture, i.e., they had been heavy users of "psychedelics" such as marijuana, cocaine and LSD. Two had been connected with the "dope fiend" subculture which centers around heroin use.

Despite the varied histories of the women in the study population, only five had ever been arrested and only three had gone to either juvenile or adult court. Only one woman had been sent to one of the state's juvenile facilities. None had ever been convicted of felonies.

From wives' reports, it can be gathered that many lived in communities in which criminal activities were present and moderately acceptable. Many, as we noted earlier, had had friends and relatives who had been ready to become involved in crime or deviance. It was, of course, within these communities that they met the men whom they eventually married.

2.2.3 Experience with Male Criminality

Crime, then, was not foreign to the women in the study population and they were not shocked to discover that it played a role in their men's backgrounds. At the time they met their wives, all 22 men who had previous criminal records had immediately acknowledged their criminal backgrounds. Ten had informed their women not only about their past criminal behavior, but about their current status with the criminal justice system. Two had indicated that they had been released from jail on bail. Six others had been released from prison on temporary furlough, on work release, or on parole. One had informed his future wife that he had escaped from a correctional institution. Another was avoiding the police who held a warrant for his arrest.

Most women were young when they met their men - some were still in high school or were recent high school graduates. Others, not as young, had been previously married. Almost all met their prospective spouses within their own communities. Twenty-three had initially come in contact with their men through relatives, friends, schools, community dances, or neighborhood bars. The remaining seven women had met their men in prisons. Among these, three had married their men there.

Interestingly, these seven women reported that they saw correctional facilities as alternatives to the standard set of social opportunities available to single people: they allow single women and prisoners to socialize and they provide a setting in which to begin relationships that may become permanent.

All seven of these women traveled to prisons on visiting days, often accompanied by female friends and relatives. According to their reports, these women first attended visiting days simply because they wanted to "have a good time." They met their prospective spouses inadvertently and

began courting. Romance, courting, and intimacy flourished during visiting days: there was the excitement of exchanging letters, looking forward to the next telephone conversation, and visiting new-found "boyfriends" in prison. It appears from wives' reports that the men cultivated intense courting in the same way that they might participate in weight-lifting or "mind building," i.e., education. All three activities were seen as ways to get by while "doing time."

Courting, then, can ease the "pains of imprisonment" for incarcerated men. And the women, naturally, were flattered by the attention they received, pursued these men with enthusiasm, and quickly wanted to build relationships leading to marriage. One woman, married fourteen years, recalled how she met her husband while he was in prison:

I took a girlfriend down to see her boyfriend at Windson. She set me up to see another guy. I was waiting at the bubble and I looked through the window. I saw this tall guy with glasses. I said, "What a hunk!" Then I told my girlfriend that I really didn't want that son-of-a-bitch - he's a con. No more was said or done. Then Rex got out and he was supposed to give me a message. He never did. He ended up in a Massachusetts jail. He wrote me and I became a messenger for Gary and Rex. Then Rex wrote and asked me to write him more. I've always been for the underdog. I'm always doing my girl scout duty for the underdog. I kept writing to Rex.

The majority of women formed relationships that became binding within a short period of time. Nineteen of the women in the study population had known their prospective spouses less than three months before getting married. The remaining 11 had known their men from four to six months prior to marriage. Some women met their men who then moved in with them after a few days or weeks. Courtships were, as a rule, counted in weeks or months, rarely in years.

Almost all the women who had legally married their men had lived with them prior to marriage. Other women continued to live consensually with

them as an alternative to marriage. Only a few of the women reported that they had given much thought to the matter before entering into these arrangements. In three cases, at least, the decision had had to have been the subject of some thought since the prospective couples had had to present their "case" to the Vermont Department of Corrections before they could get married. Whenever prisoners intend to get married, they must obtain official permission. The procedures involved demand persistence and can be extremely energy and time-consuming. It often takes as much as a year. Typically, one woman recalled with great pride how she had gained approval to marry:

Q.: What was the wedding like?

A.: It was weird! Our best man had been in the hole for fourteen days. He had had no bath in days. They just yanked him out of the hole and brought him up to be our best man. We had all kinds of cooperation from the lieutenants on duty that day. We weren't checked and we smuggled in all kinds of booze, and we were married in the conference room. It was really a nice little ceremony. They kept everybody out of the way; there were no guards involved - no guards in the conference room. My sister was maid of honor, and my sister-in-law was scared to death because she'd never been inside a prison before! But it was very nice; we were allowed to have a few friends in that we wanted who were residents, and their girlfriends and wives.

Another woman, then recently married in St. Albans, recalled a more traditional wedding ceremony:

When he was in St. Albans, we were married. The wedding took place in the correctional center. It was a nice wedding but it was unusual to say the least. His nephew gave me some flowers and I was all dressed up. We were married and then we had coffee and there was dancing. We had guitar music and our pictures were taken. It was nice, and that surprised me.

Whether their men were "on the streets," in prison, or hiding from the law, the reasons the women in the study population gave for their decisions to marry were not unlike those which working class women give for marrying conventionally-oriented men: they had "fallen in love."

They also maintained the conventional notion that "falling in love" almost necessitates getting married.

As we noted earlier, 22 men had been imprisoned before the sentences they were serving at the time of the study. About eight had been incarcerated at least four times. Fourteen had been in prison three times or less. The remaining seven had never been arrested, convicted, or imprisoned before. Thus, for a significant number of men, prison had been a constant presence all their adult lives.³

Before marriage, the bulk of the men involved had been convicted of such crimes against property as burglary, possession of stolen goods, and auto theft. Only four had been convicted of crimes against persons. Three had committed paper crimes and one had been charged with lewd and lascivious behavior. Most of these crimes can best be thought of as non-systematic. As with the women, prisoners had spent little time planning crimes or developing skills and techniques. As petty, disorganized criminals they committed crimes irregularly and haphazardly. However, unlike the women, they tended to continue to commit crimes into their adult years, and with some frequency.

³The conventional breakdown of offenses has not been used here. Offenses have been broken down into: (1) crimes against property, (2) crimes against the person, (3) sexual offenses, and (4) fraud, embezzlement and other paper crimes. Crimes against property include those felonies where there is no intent to harm people. This includes crimes such as theft, burglary, possession and concealment of stolen goods. Crimes against persons include those crimes where there is such intent, e.g., armed robbery, assault, kidnapping. Sexual offenses include voyeurism, lewd and lascivious behavior, and rape. Paper crimes include such activities as fraud, embezzlement, counterfeiting, and forgery.

2.3 INTERPRETATIONS OF MALE CRIMINALITY

No matter how they may have arranged to continue to meet and court the men they eventually married, most women developed similar perceptions of the activities that had led to their imprisonment: that crime "did not matter." This perception made it possible for the women to continue to interact with their men to the point where they could relate to them in ways which were independent of their criminal activities.

The primary mechanism which made it possible for the wives to convince themselves - and possibly others - that their men's criminal activities were unimportant was what has been called the "sad tale." A sad tale is a selected and often distorted arrangement of facts that highlights an extremely dismal past and thus explains an individual's present state. While the person creating the "sad tale" does not attempt to convince the listener that the behavior of that individual was beyond reproach, he or she does attempt to diffuse reactions to it.

Sad tales are typically employed under circumstances where it is no longer possible to simply "cover up" or deny that deviant behavior has taken place. Since the purpose of covering up is to maintain the impression that an individual's behavior is "normal" and morally acceptable, it is hard to sustain in a small or tight-knit community when criminal activity is involved.

In the course of the in-depth interviews, it became clear that the chief function served by both "sad tales" and "covering up" was to render their men's criminality unimportant as a life issue for the women themselves. Few simply affirmed or supported it. Thus both strategies of deviance disavowal served to create the impression that these men were really no different from anyone else and, therefore, acceptable candidates for marriage.

As a rule, although the women came to accept the interpretations which grew out of these strategies, they did not adopt them independently: prisoners encouraged their wives to cover up their criminal activities. Twenty-three women reported, for instance, that their men assisted them in denying their criminal status by emphasizing their more conventional roles and identities. Often the men attempted to project non-deviant images, attitudes, and concepts of self - especially when interacting with their wives. They were more likely, for instance, to accentuate those personal characteristics which the women had found attractive and to express their desire to settle down into a more conventional life pattern.

According to the women, their men primarily presented two kinds of images of self. The first was that of a "repentant reformer" who had sown his wild oats and was now really a "good guy" who just wanted to settle down with a wife, make babies, get a steady job, and buy a house in the country. For many women, this image was attractive enough to outweigh their men's criminal records. This made it possible for interactions with their men to escape the characterological implications of their master status as criminals.

Prisoners were able to accomplish much the same thing by projecting an image as an "underdog." Fifteen women reported that their men appeared to need to be rescued from hard living or from their "miseries," e.g., from parental abuse, drinking, rootlessness, criminal behavior, and so forth. Since many of the wives viewed themselves as being "for the underdog," they were able to come to believe that, through love, patience, nurturance and concern, their men could "change." The theme that "love can save my man" constantly ran through their accounts. Two women, both of whom had formed ties with men that had already had extensive criminal records, reflected on their reasons for marrying them:

Doreen: I always liked the underdog. I felt with Gene that he was either going to rip me off or he was going to be decent. I knew that I was going to be involved with him and I didn't want to be involved with another man.

Bea: Their family ties were bad and they only had us...It was a challenge for me. I kept asking myself if I can save him, if I can help him. I'd been through a bad marriage. I felt that if I could help someone then maybe God would forgive me.

The men reinforced these beliefs by presenting themselves as never having had anyone to rescue them from their miseries. Thus, they were men who needed the "saving love" and nurturance of a good woman in order to successfully encounter the conventional world. In projecting this image, the men readily engaged the women in "sad tales" which largely centered around the abuses they suffered while living in families devastated by alcoholism, violence, poverty and crime. And who could have been unsympathetic to the hard years these men had growing up? There was pathos in the women's presentations of their men's family lives:

He told me about how one time his stepfather put him in a tub for a bath. Then his stepfather held him in the tub and burned him with boiling hot water. He was about four years old then. Paul has been blamed for things he didn't do. Paul has a lot of hate involved and a lot of resentment.

These themes recurred constantly in the women's accounts: their men never had a chance to "make good;" had been "victims" of precarious and chaotic families; had fallen in with "the wrong crowd;" or had been drawn into the criminal activities of fathers or brothers. They were driven to criminal acts by external forces which they were unable to resist. What the women were able to accomplish by accepting these "sad tales" was to convince themselves that their prospective husbands were entirely blameless; acted upon rather than acting. Thus they came to tolerate their men's criminal pasts without making a frontal assault on their lifestyles.

2.3.1, Managing Presentations of Self

A common theme in wives' interviews was that "it's the man that counts, not his record." By adopting this position, of course, wives were able to sustain the belief that there was nothing different or unusual about their men, e.g., that they were "good people." For example, one woman, who was in the process of legally marrying a prisoner at the time, rationalized what she was doing by blaming her man's "troubles" on alcohol:

Q.: How did you first deal with his being in and out of jail?

A.: I knew he had been in jail before. I knew that he had a string of DWIs and B & Es. All of these he did under the influence of alcohol. These were his main crimes. He's a good person. It's hard to convince him that he is. He doesn't think well of himself. He felt he was going to hell for what he did... He figures that everything he's done is bad. These are minor things but deep down inside him is what counts. I feel that he's the man underneath all that. My concern is for the man and not the crime.

By disassociating the men from their actions in this fashion, the women were able to escape the recognition that, in marrying a prisoner or criminal, they were implicitly placing themselves in a marginal status: by conjuring up an image of their men as "normal," they also were defining themselves as normal. This impression was buttressed, in many cases, by the assertion that everyone had been dishonest at some point or another in his or her life and that the only difference between their men and others was that they "got caught." In rationalizing her husband's possession and concealment of stolen property, one wife maintained:

That doesn't bother me at all! Whether he's been in jail or not doesn't matter. Everyone does some wrong and we all have to pay for our mistakes. He's paying for the things he had done wrong... He's as good as anyone whether he's been in jail or not. I feel strongly about that.

Part of the support for this view comes from the belief that the law protected many profoundly immoral and exploitative acts committed by conventional people. Accordingly, their men's criminal enterprises were no more exploitative or vicious than many legally-sanctioned ones.

Another way to establish distance between their men and their men's criminal acts was to stress that "what happened in the past is over and done with." As a rule, the women did not seek out details of their husbands' criminal activities. Instead, they stressed, both in their own minds and in dealing with others, their beliefs in the men's current possibilities:

Q.: How did he get arrested?

A.: I think it was a B & E. Maybe an armed robbery. He hasn't told me all about it. He's told me parts of it. I figured his past is his past. I love him for him and not for his past.

A small minority of women in the study population avoided these strategies entirely by simply transforming their husbands' pasts into "attractive" and "exciting" accounts; non-threatening and "good" stories about exciting intervals in their lives:

A.: He was heavily into the drug scene and he thought he was the big time. But he only sold one pound a week and he tended to sell most of his drugs to his brothers in St. Johnsbury. He talked about his past life as a junkie and a life of selling drugs... When he came to live with me, he brought along pictures of him behind bars in all these places and he keeps the newspaper clippings about what he had done. He's very proud of this book. I thought that his stories were simply wild stories and had no reality to them. They didn't frighten me.

Q.: What kinds of wild stories did he tell you?

He told me about all these wild parties he went to, and that he was in a motorcycle gang and he made himself appear like he was a member of the Hell's Angels. I don't remember all of them but I knew there was nothing to them. It's the way he tells the stories that makes them not seem so threatening. They appear like good, charming stories.

2.4 ACCOMMODATING TO A DEVIANT LIFE COURSE

In meeting and marrying their men, the women in the study population for the most part accepted a deviant life course. It is clear from the accounts reported here that many of the women involved had been prepared to take on the status of "criminal's wife" by early exposure to crime, courts and prisons. In addition, some had engaged in a range of petty, disorganized crimes of the same type as those for which the men to whom they later developed ties were sentenced to prison. They were neither shocked nor surprised to learn about their prospective mates' criminal activities. They met their men, for the most part, through friends, kin and associates who, in most cases, did not react strongly and negatively to the men's histories of criminalization and imprisonment. In a minority of cases, the men were in prison at the time they met their wives.

In reaching a decision to marry their men, the women in the study population typically employed a number of non-conventional interpretations of their prospective husbands' behavior which helped them in managing their presentation of self vis-a-vis the community at large. In many cases, their men encouraged these interpretations. Almost three-quarters of the women used "sad tales" or "covering up" as basic strategies in perpetuating an image of their men as basically "conventional" or "normal." A few women did not attempt to disavow their husbands' activities, but simply to recast them into the form of "wild and exciting stories."

These kinds of interpretations of prisoners' behavior allowed the women to interact with them without having their criminal past become a vital factor in any relationships which might develop. Hence, interactions became spontaneous and natural, rather than forced or artificial.

The most striking feature of the accounts of courtship and early marriage provided by prisoners' wives is, of course, the extent to which they parallel conventionally sentimental notions of "love and marriage" in the larger society. The overriding theme in the accounts of the adjustments prisoners' wives made to their men's criminality in the earliest phases of their relationships was the expectation that, through love and forbearance, they would be able to induce the men to "settle down" to a conventionally-acceptable lifestyle. In this sense, there is an explicit similarity between the role behavior of prisoners' wives and other women their age.

Chapter 3

BEFORE ARREST: DOMESTIC LIFE, MALE CRIMINALITY AND HARD LIVING

I worked all the time and have nothing to show for it. When he worked all was fine. We looked as though we were holding our own. But when he wasn't working, then things got rough. He felt that it took away his manly dignity when I worked and he sat at home. He would have liked me to be out of work when he was. He didn't work for long because he wanted the carefree life. He wanted to run around, drink and party.

3.1 BACKGROUND

The literature on prisoners' families has been largely based on studies which have utilized questionnaires or structured interviews to explore the relationships between abstractly specified variables.¹ It is within this vein that researchers talked about the relationship between "pre-marital adjustment" and "marital adjustment during separation." But it is difficult to reconstruct the broader context within which these adjustments occur from aggregate statistics. In this chapter we will look at wives' perceptions of two kinds of marital patterns which they and their husbands may establish prior to the latter's arrest, conviction, and imprisonment: "hard living" and "square living."

¹The following research studies have focused upon the relationship of specific variables: Blackwell, 1959; Love, 1970; Morris, 1965; Struckhoff, 1977; Swan, 1981.

As we noted earlier, most women who subsequently become prisoners' wives expect that, having "sown their wild oats", their husbands will settle down and begin to live moderate, restrained lives. Instead, they often wind up with "troubles" - hard living and more encounters with crime and the criminal justice system. In order to understand the extent to which the marital patterns established by wives are likely to change as a result of involuntary separation and reunion, we must first understand how some came to learn about "hard living", while others found their husbands returning to crime out of a "square living" pattern.

In the last chapter we saw how common social histories predisposed some wives to reinterpret their husbands' previous criminal activities in a favorable light. Here we will examine other elements of these social backgrounds in an effort to determine what bearing they might have had on the subsequent accommodations wives made to the crises of imprisonment and release. We will specifically deal with the extent to which wives were aware of their husbands' criminal behavior before their arrest and what bearing this had on their continued accommodation to criminalization.

3.2 SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS AND CONTINUED ACCOMMODATION

Most of the women in the study population married men with whom they shared not only family histories, but elements of personal histories as well. Taken together, these common elements in their personal backgrounds made it easier for wives to accept the notion that they ought to continue to maintain ties to their spouses, rather than sever them, after the men reverted to earlier patterns of criminal behavior.

3.2.1 Age

Researchers in the area have uniformly been struck by the youthfulness of their samples of prisoners and their wives. A disproportionate number of prisoners in penal institutions of the United States are recruited from among younger adults. A similarly disproportionate number of prisoners' wives are drawn from this set of age-cohorts. The women in the study population here are no exception to these findings.² The modal age was between twenty-one and twenty-nine and over fifty percent of the women were under thirty at the time of the initial interview. The range was from nineteen to forty-four years of age.

The men were also young. Their modal age was between twenty-one and twenty-nine years of age. Over fifty percent of the men were also thirty years old and younger. The range was from twenty-one to fifty-five years of age. Although the men were young, the majority were two or three years older than their wives. A larger proportion of husbands (18 out of 29 men) were in the late twenties to mid-thirties (25-38). Only one man was more than forty.

3.2.2 Employment

Fifteen women had steady jobs prior to meeting their prospective mates. Ten held jobs as factory or service workers such as waitresses, chamber maids, nurses aids or domestics. Five of the fifteen worked in such clerical and or supervisory jobs as administrative assistants, accountants, secretaries and so on. Three of the women had attended some kind of post-secondary educational institution. The remainder had been homemakers taking care of pre-school children.

²Similar findings have been documented by Blackwell, 1959; Love, 1970; Morris, 1965; and Swann, 1981.

Short term employment seems to be the norm. Among wives who work, there appeared to be no expectation of continuity or need for stable employment. Work had not proved satisfactory for most of them. It had not provided them with either status or adequate monetary rewards. Only three women considered their jobs satisfying and intended to keep them permanently. On marriage, nine of the working women kept their jobs. Three women continued working as waitresses or kitchen workers in hospitals. One woman continued doing semi-skilled factory work. Five kept jobs as clerks, administrative assistants, etc. One woman continued attending college. Either at their husbands' insistence and or on the basis of their own personal decisions, the remaining wives were homemakers.

The differences in the work histories of the women and men at the time of their marriages were not very marked. When they met their prospective spouses, only five men had been steadily employed. Two were in white collar occupations (counselor for a social service agency, and a clerk), and two held semi-skilled jobs (factory worker, apprentice with a plumbing service). One man was self-employed in a well-established business.

The nine other men worked, when they could at seasonal or short-term jobs such as construction, house painting, farm work and so forth. Thirteen men were unemployed at the time they courted their women.

There were, however, appreciable changes in the husbands' work histories after marriage. The number of men who were gainfully employed decreased. Nine men remained employed. Of these six worked as unskilled, semi-skilled or industrial and service workers. The majority of jobs were seasonal. One man continued as a counselor in a social service agency. The self-employed businessman continued to be self-employed. Two

men were getting money by stealing or drug dealing. According to the wives, eighteen men were unemployed.

3.2.3 Education

None of the working class women found academic work pleasureable or interesting. Sixteen had not completed high school. One woman reports "some" college education and two had four or more years of higher education. Very few of the women who had not attended college or university reported having considered any other career than getting married and having children. All the women with at least some college or university intended to pursue some kind of career.

More of the men completed high school than the women: 13 as opposed to 11. Eleven men had less than high school training. Five had some college education. Of the thirteen men who finished high school, eight received high school equivalency diplomas while in prison. While the men's general level of education was higher than the women's, wives report that for the most part, the men also found academic work uninteresting.

3.2.4 Previous Marital Histories

Thirteen women had married at least once before meeting their prospective mates. According to the women's accounts, 11 men had been married at least once before. These earlier marriages had, as a rule, been very difficult. Ten women mentioned experiences with such marital problems as alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, infidelities, and sexual deviance.

On balance, then neither the men nor women came from backgrounds which were achievement-oriented. While young, they had less than average

education for persons in their age-cohorts. Although there are observable differences in the work and educational histories of working class and middle class respondents, both groups had had substantial experience with divorce or marital breakdown. The majority of the women in the study population, therefore, appear to be attracted to men with similar orientations toward education and work. These orientations, as a rule, preclude employment in any but unskilled or semi-skilled jobs--ones which, in Vermont, tend to be largely seasonal.

3.3 UNEMPLOYMENT AND HARD LIVING

As we observed earlier, almost all the women came to their marriages with the expectation that they and their husbands would pursue a middle or working class round of life. Wives anticipated that their husbands would establish settled lives in which they would work steadily and provide adequate income to support their wives and children. Their husbands assured them that they were ready to settle down, obtain steady jobs, and establish families. Only two women expected their husbands to continue their criminal enterprises. But even these women thought that their husbands would eventually act as steady income providers and responsible husbands and fathers.

For the majority of women, however, these expectations were not fulfilled. Most wives found themselves struggling to deal with not-so-conventional marital patterns. The most difficult problem is their husbands' unemployment. These wives offered several reasons for it. First, some claimed that their men were not resistant to the idea of working. Most men found themselves likely to be unemployed due to lack of skills, education and a history of steady employment. Second, other wives claimed that their men were only qualified for unskilled work; which tends to be monotonous, demeaning and low paying. Some men refused

to work for these reasons. However, the wives maintained that the men accept such work for brief periods of time in order to satisfy their wives or parole officers. Other men, the women report, seemed reluctant to work at all and managed to be fired or quit, once they found work. Thirdly, a few men sincerely wanted to find work and eventually found unskilled, low paying seasonal jobs from which they were laid off. Thus, despite the fact that many men did find work, they brought in very little income.

Not all the women, however, attempted to rely on their husbands' incomes. A few women worked outside their homes. Nineteen others received some form of public assistance to supplement their husbands' earnings. In some cases they were entirely dependent on it.³

Even when men were working, 22 wives reported that they could not supply basic family needs out of the money available to them. Thus, poverty was the norm for the majority of couples, whether men were working or not. The majority of wives and their families were very poor: only four described their economic situation as "comfortable." Most wives reported that they frequently had arguments with their husbands which centered around money and how it ought to be distributed within the family unit.

³Some wives, did not report the fact that their husbands were employed so that they could combine public assistance with income from their husbands' jobs. This is illegal. Women were willing to risk detection since there was no way that they could depend on their husbands' incomes.

3.3.1 Hard Living in General

It is clear from wives' accounts that, in many respects, their households closely resembled those of traditional working class families. For instance, gender role segregation followed the traditional pattern: all but five women indicated that their households incorporated a clearly defined division of tasks in which women did the housework and men took responsibility for repairs and other traditional male concerns. In other respects, however, these same families did not fit the mold because husbands did not conform to all the components of the settled, working class male role. Early in their marriages, a significant number of men began to resume "hard living."

Wives' accounts of their lives strongly resemble those portrayed by Howell in Hard Living on Clay Street. Five components seem characteristic of this life pattern: (1) marital instability, as evidenced by male infidelity and/or separation from their wives; (2) violence, especially wife beating; (3) heavy drinking or drug abuse; (4) intermittent and chronic unemployment; and (5) seeking adventure in criminal and quasi-criminal activities, frequent absences from home with peers, hanging out in local bars, etc..

According to 25 women, their husbands began actively pursuing at least two of these elements of hard living soon after marriage. Nineteen reported that their men pursued four or more. Only three indicated that their men had not been involved in any kind of hard living, but had been steadily employed, had acquired some middle class status symbols, and appeared to conform to conventional norms.

The kind of lifestyle that a man adopted was a focal concern for his wife. Chaotic employment can cause families untold grief. Unemployment means money becomes scarce, arguments proliferate, men become depressed

and uncommunicative, marital tension increases, men "walk out," etc.. These problems tend to become more acute, moreover, when wives discover that scarce resources are not being used to benefit their families. Eighteen women reported that, when money was tight, their men tended to squander it on alcohol and drugs. More than half of the men went on periodic binges or regularly consumed large amounts of alcohol. A small number of men used both alcohol and drugs, while a handful were primarily drug abusers.

Men's attachment to their male cliques also became a crucial issue in the women's lives. Fifteen reported that their unemployed husbands constantly associated with their "drinking buddies" in houses, taverns, and on the streets. All these wives were aware that their husbands' "buddies" were hard livers who were sporadically involved in petty crime. In nine cases, the husbands maintained that they had a right to a "night out with the boys." This night out, of course, would often extend into nights out.

What was most worrisome for most women was that these unnecessary absences from home not only involved male peers, but would also involve heavy drug and/or alcohol consumption and/or sexual infidelity. It is interesting to note that the men returned home after these "absences" and resumed family roles. One woman described her stormy marriage to a hard living husband in this way:

Well, we fought over mainly money problems or the people he hung with. He was always drunk and using up the money. And he was always hanging around with these people and he never came home. He was seldom at home. He was always with his friends and he was drunk. And here I was pregnant first with the oldest one and then with the youngest one. Things got really bad with the friends he hung around with. They were drunk and they were rowdy. He went over to New York where his parents lived and his brothers and sisters live. He got a job in construction. It was a good job. But once the winter came, he was laid off. The next day, in fact, he got into his old friends who lived around

there. They also drank and were rowdy, and he ended up in jail for disturbing the peace and here I was pregnant with Tommy.

Marital infidelity tended to occur during these absences: nine women indicated that they knew about short-term affairs their husbands had had with other women.

The majority of the wives in the study population reported that they usually resorted to nagging and complaining as a way of attempting to deal with this situation. Arguments erupted. It was then that physical assaults by husbands on wives by frequently took place. Nineteen men had physically assaulted their wives. All who had done this had pursued at least four elements of hard living. Moreover, whenever men's unemployment became chronic, the rate of violence appeared to rise. Fourteen unemployed men had battered their wives; eleven of these after heavy drinking. One wife described this pattern vividly:

But everything was really good until Russell started hanging around with Hal. Two months to three months later, he was drinking with Hal, and I'd be left alone when they went out drinking. They did what they wanted to do and if I complained, I'd get beaten. The first time that happened, I was shocked. I was pregnant and I was lying on the bed. I told him I didn't feel good and he told me he was going out anyway. I wanted him to stay with me. I was spotting and I was pretty worried. He punched and kicked me. I started crying and he said he was sorry and wouldn't do it again. I went to my mother's house until he decided to come and get me. But this was the beginning of the beatings. Every time I opened my mouth, he beat me. On Maple Street, he hit me because I tried to stop him from going with Hal. He said "keep your mouth shut and there'll be no beatings."

Interestingly, the women who, themselves, were active in the drug subculture were least likely to have seen these aspects of hard living as posing problems for their marriages. Instead, they were preoccupied with the difficulties involved in finding money for drugs, getting these drugs, and avoiding the police in the process. This daily round could wear thin after awhile. One woman involved in the soft drug culture observed:

I was getting bored with the way in which Dan and I were living. We were still just hanging around. We were getting up every day and then we'd try to find some pot and then we'd try to sell the pot and at night we'd get stoned. That was our life.

When the excitement began to tarnish, and when these women wanted to leave the drug subculture and establish more conventional life patterns, they began to experience the same difficulties with their marriages reported by the other wives.

3.3.2 Accommodation to Hard Living

For the most part, prisoners' wives tended to put up with such elements of hard living as unemployment, financial irresponsibility, drinking and drug habits, and physical assaults because they had few alternatives. Most were not well prepared to enter the labor force themselves and, in some cases, their children were quite young and required some form of home care. Moreover, for some women their marriages were not their first and they were determined to "make them work." In many instances, moreover, the "troubles" they were experiencing were not qualitatively different from those they had encountered while growing up. Thus their husbands' behavior struck them as disturbing, but not scandalizing. What concerned most women was the lack of companionship they experienced: 17 women reported an unsatisfactory level of companionship, intimacy, and sharing in their relationships with their husbands during this pre-separation period.

3.4 SQUARE LIVING

As we noted earlier, a minority of prisoners' wives reported that they lived outwardly conventional settled working class or middle class lives during the early period of their marriages. In this sense, they pursued what I have referred to here, following Irwin, as a "square living" lifestyle: (1) their husbands were steadily employed in skilled working class or middle class occupations; (2) consumption of drugs or alcohol was moderate; (3) their marriages were stable; (4) they acquired some middle class status symbols; and (5) they participated in a settled working or middle class round of life.

Two of the three women in the study population who fell into this pattern reported that, during this phase in their lives, their spouses had established roots in their communities, and that they had had comparatively financially secure and comfortable marriages. Both spouses converged in their lifestyles: they pursued a square john or settled working class round of activities. By contrast, while one woman reported that she and her husband were rooted in their community and financially affluent, their lifestyles diverged. As a "square jane," she had had to cope with her husband's pursuit of such elements of hard living as frequent unexplained absences, illicit sexual liaisons, and heavy consumption of marijuana and cocaine.

Thus, even wives who were relatively financially secure had no guarantee that their marriages would be wholly satisfactory. It is clear from wives' reports, in general, that the vast majority of wives wanted to establish settled and conventional marriages. Instead, 25 had married men who were unemployed and/or actively engaged in three or more components of a hard living lifestyle. What became especially troubling for the women was not so much the likelihood that their husbands would

become involved in some kind of criminal activity, but that they were erratic providers of the material and emotional support the wives believed necessary for themselves and their children. Thus, a recurrent theme in wives' accounts was their commitment to preserving their marriages, regardless of the troubles entailed, since they still believed that their spouses would provide them with the kind of lives they had hoped for at some future date.

3.5 HUSBANDS' CRIMINALITY

As we noted earlier, most working class women in the study population reported some familiarity with crime, jails and prisons through family members or friends who had "gotten into trouble with the law." Most of these women saw crime as an activity which men did in order to get money: they usually did not view it as outrageous, unusual or disturbing behavior. Therefore, it is important to note how wives reacted when they learned that their husbands were continuing to participate in criminal acts. Twenty-two wives reported that they had some knowledge about their husbands' illegal activities. Some, however, were more knowledgeable than others. Nine women had regularly or sporadically engaged in some hard living activities themselves. These wives were the most likely to know the details of their husbands' criminal enterprises. The ten women who had lived through their husbands' arrests and incarcerations once before were more likely to know at least something about this than wives that had not.

However, the three conventionally oriented working class women in the study population who had no previous experience with the process of arrest and incarceration had only vague knowledge of their husbands' activities. Their hard living husbands, in turn, were likely to be vague about their criminal pursuits when dealing with their wives.

The few wives whose husbands had committed sexual offenses were, by contrast, likely to be painfully aware of their husbands' sexual deviations such as voyeurism, exhibitionism, sadism when these took place in their homes. However none of these women were aware of these when they took place in public places.

The five remaining women were committed to marriages to men who outwardly lived a square john or settled lifestyle. These women claimed that their husbands had kept their criminal activities secret.

Despite variations in how they came to learn about it, then, it came as no great shock to most wives when they discovered that their spouses were engaged in criminal activity. First, 18 women claimed that they were initially more likely to look upon these activities as worrisome, but not as shocking. All these had had early exposure to criminal activities. Most had resided in working class communities where certain types of criminal activities -such as check forging, receiving stolen goods or shoplifting - tended to be tolerated. Many had grown up with the view that these kinds of crimes were ordinary survival mechanisms utilized by many working class people.

Second, many wives reported that they had not expected their husbands entirely to abide by conventional normative expectations. They viewed non-alcohol-related crimes tolerantly since they saw these as less likely to conflict with domestic roles than other ones. Thus, as long as their husbands' deviant activities did not upset their households, most of these women were not likely to make a big fuss about it. Twelve women, in fact, indicated that they would usually tolerate their husbands' illegitimate activities as long as these remained "on the street." If the men did, this left their wives free to continue functioning in their roles as wives and mothers: "the less [they] knew

about it the better!" Their husbands helped to sustain this position by: (1) maintaining secrecy about their activities; (2) giving only vague details about their crimes; (3) outright lying to their wives about what they were doing.

Seven wives maintained that they initially tolerated their husbands' criminal activities because: (1) the money from these crimes was necessary to meet the basic needs of their families; and/or (2) that they provided their families with small luxuries they could not otherwise have afforded. When money was scarce, there was a tendency among some couples to combine income from public assistance, employment, and crime in order to "get by." For example, one woman explained how her household lived better when her husband shoplifted:

Q.: Does your financial situation get better when Frank's here or when he's not here?

A.: It depends. If Frank is still going straight, it doesn't change. But if Frank is into criminal activity, it changes a lot - we live better. You know, boosting food or something; it makes things a lot easier.

Q.: At the time he does this, what is your response when he comes home?

A.: If we need food, I'm glad he's done it. But if it was for something ridiculous that we don't need, then I get mad because he took a chance and it was stupid.

Therefore, these wives were likely to accept such crimes as receiving stolen property and shoplifting food or clothes for their wives and children.

A minority of wives reported tolerating their husbands' deviant activities because they, themselves, were involved in them. Three couples had apparently centered their relationships around dealing and consuming drugs. Four other wives had, on occasion, acted as accessories

in such criminal acts as receiving stolen property, shoplifting or armed robbery.

Active acceptance of criminal activity of this kind was, however, rare. While most wives might not have reacted negatively to renewed criminal activity when evidence of it first appeared, most did not directly participate in it. Most wives, moreover, tended to become increasingly disturbed by it over time. Some wives obviously had shifted their positions from neutral to positive, to outright negative as circumstances demanded. Others simply reacted negatively at the outset and did not change.

As a rule, wives came to regard their husbands' behavior as a source of difficulties when it appeared to interfere with their own aspirations for a conventional home life, i.e., when this behavior impinged on their roles as husbands and fathers. This was most likely to be the case when heavy use of alcohol or sexual deviance was involved. Thirteen women reported that they felt that their men were failing to perform many of their domestic responsibilities. Eighteen seemed concerned about the devastating effects alcohol could have on their families.

What also became problematic, and therefore intolerable, to 14 of the women in the study population was any form of deviant behavior that interfered with their own performances as wives and mothers. For example, 12 wives reported that they would not tolerate behavior that disturbed their household schedules and routines. An old timer, whose husband had committed numerous alcohol-related crimes, recalled how his lifestyle did this:

When he was drunk or on drugs, he'd come home and pass out on the chair or come in with a group of people and they'd turn on the stereo and party in the house. Dan wanted me with him no matter how late it was or whether I had to go to work in the

morning. In the morning, there would be empty bottles strewn around the house and the house would be a mess. He always wanted me to talk to his friends.

One woman recalled how her husbands' sexual deviance undermined her role as wife:

I knew things were getting bad. I knew that I really had to do something. The last time we were together was very frightening. I realized he was beginning to notice our daughter who was 12 years old. There was absolutely nothing sexual about her. She had not developed at all. She was outside across the street playing with some friends. She had wrapped some towels around her and she was playing that she was Queen of America and she was strutting around, rolling her hips. She was trying to imitate a beauty queen. Lyle saw her and he hollered at her that she was a "slut" and a "whore." I was aware he was picking on her. I was aware because I was raped when I was 12 years old. I said to myself, "Oh God, he's noticing her sexually!" My inner instinct of protecting her foamed up.

For 13 women, their initial tolerance began to fade when their husbands' became blatantly public and/or onerously troublesome.

3.6 THE LIMITS OF TOLERANCE

In general, then, most women who later became prisoners' wives had committed themselves to their husbands under the assumption and with the understanding that their criminal activity was going to become "a thing of the past." During courtship, their husbands had assured them that they were ready to settle down, get steady jobs, and establish families. Only a few women entered marriages in the full recognition that their husbands were going to continue to be involved in crime and hard living. Even they, too, expected that their husbands would act as steady providers and responsible husbands and fathers.

When their husbands returned to criminal activity, what most women were concerned about was that they would get caught, and not the

criminal activity, per se. As the wives came to understand the impact that their husbands criminal activities could have on their own lives, they also began to search for some interpretation of this behavior and for strategies to use in combatting them and hard living in general. As we will see in the next chapter, this search set the stage for the kinds of accommodations they felt they had to make in order to preserve their marriages.

Chapter 4

BEFORE ARREST: ACCOMMODATIONS TO MALE CRIMINALITY AND HARD LIVING

Earl has a warm thing about kids. He becomes all soft and emotional about them. But he has another side to him. Most of the time he feels he has to come on as a Macho guy. Earl is caught in a little world. Part of him wants all the good things in life. But he hasn't any control. He can't seem to go after the things he really wants. He can't sit down and get them. He's like a double person. Something clicks inside him and he's the ex-con, the rip-off.

4.1 BACKGROUND

Prisoners' wives usually bring dreams of home and family, of a predictable and conventional life, into their marriages. Yet, for the vast majority, there is a gap between these dreams and reality. Most wives almost immediately find themselves struggling with not-so-conventional marriages and the burdens of managing their husbands and children. A major issue confronted by these wives is their husband's hard living and criminal activities. Their husband's criminal activity sets the stage for the criminalization process through which their social identities (as conventionally-oriented married women) could easily be shattered. In order to fully comprehend the impact of the criminalization process on prisoner's wives, it is thus first necessary to understand how these wives accommodate in order to attempt to deter their men from criminal behavior and to preserve their marriages.

Since this research addresses a relatively unexplored area, I have

confined myself here to identifying, in a preliminary fashion, significant dimensions of this process from the wives' point of view : how the wives attempt to understand the meaning in their husbands' criminality and how they attempt to cope with its direct manifestations.

It is possible from wives' accounts to begin to reconstruct their experiences with men who participate in criminal activities and are eventually arrested. The process of the definition of criminal behavior, as well as the utilization of accommodative techniques has a natural history. During the courtship stage, most women defined the past criminal behavior of their men as not very important. They were far more concerned about their men's other roles and identities as suitors, fathers-to-be, etc. However, during marriage but prior to the men's arrests, twenty-six wives began to deal with some stark realities. Their husbands had resumed some hard living patterns and had participated in deviant activities. Wanting to deter their husbands from these "troublesome" patterns, these wives then devised ameliorative interpretations of their husbands' behavior and searched for accommodative strategies to deal with them.

The literature on family reactions to members who are mentally ill, alcoholics, or batterers has documented family responses to deviant behavior. However, almost no data has been collected on the kinds of definitions and responses prisoners' wives employ under similar circumstances. We will see in the chapter that follows that throughout their marriages prisoners' wives devise a "vocabulary of motives" which explains, justifies and answers questions about this criminal behavior. What the wives seek to achieve is a continuation of their perception of their men as husbands, and incidentally as criminals. In fact most women use more than one definition and response in minimizing and explaining away evidence of their husbands' criminal behavior before

arrest. The accounts their husbands make, therefore, assist the wives in continuing to normalize their husbands' behavior. By employing them the wives can sustain, both for themselves and perhaps their audiences, the rationale that their husbands are basically "good people" who are victims of bad conditions, ill luck, or physiology.

The study of the ways in which prisoners' wives cope with their husbands' criminality and hard living is, therefore, part of a larger attempt to integrate what we have learned from the growing body of research on lifestyles with our more specific knowledge of crime and the criminalization process. In this sense, the discussion of patterns of accommodation among prisoners' wives is related to the larger problem of understanding concretely how individuals go about integrating diverse social worlds.

4.2 WIVES' REACTIONS TO HUSBANDS' DEPARTURES FROM SETTLED LIVING

Almost all the women in the study population, whether working or middle class backgrounds, entered their marriages with expectations that their relationships would become permanent. Marriage for them was not an institution to be treated lightly. All the women regarded it almost as a profession. For the majority, being wives and or mothers required a total commitment.

Although they entered marriage expecting that they and their spouses were eventually going to establish settled lifestyles, it came as no great shock to many when their men resumed some elements of hard living and some criminal activities. From the wives' perspectives, they then had to strive to perceive their husbands as important members of their households- regardless of their husbands' hard living and criminal behavior- in order to preserve their marriages. Thus, they developed

rationales which allowed them to continue to perceive their husbands as fathers, decision makers, repair men, garbage collectors--and most important-- providers of economic and emotional support. At the same time most of the wives continued to struggle to establish settled conventional lifestyles for themselves and their families.

When they first learned about their husbands return to criminal activities, all twenty-six women searched for some kind of rationale which could allow them to maintain their marriages. The wives often discovered more than one. These were seldom consistent. Moreover, they would frequently change in response to the kinds of commitments wives made to their marriages, and to the degree of tolerance for their husbands' behavior.

Almost all the wives, however, tried to postpone labelling their husbands as deviants. They tried to "normalize" their husbands' behavior, to interpret it as "reasonable." Once this was done, wives could then make it seem less severe or less important to the "total" person.

Another strategy they commonly employed was to create a positive image of their husbands' behavior by neutralizing its negative connotations--at least for the wives themselves. The wives only treated their husbands' behavior as "hopeless" in a few cases.

Three kinds of rationalizations emerged: (1) blaming the husbands' deviant activities on outside forces (2) blaming the husbands or (3) blaming themselves.

4.2.1 Outside Forces As Perceived Cause of Male Deviance

Wives definitions of their husbands' criminality typically included both an affirmation and a neutralization of the behavior. The husbands, they maintained, were not really responsible for their actions, but were victimized by conditions for which they were not responsible. Blame is thus ascribed to outside forces, and the husbands' criminal actions are seen as beyond their control. They are acted upon, rather than acting. In these cases, the chief mitigating circumstance is their lack of control over their actions; they are driven by external forces. Three "sources" or "causes" predominate in their accounts: (1) scapegoating; (2) alcoholism; (3) environmental factors.

Scapegoating Scapegoating was employed by twelve women. Here women point to someone other than their husbands as the direct or primary cause of the men's current and past crimes. Common targets were parents who were deficient or abusive in the treatment of their children; alcoholic parents; or criminally oriented parents. Other women sometimes blamed their husbands' other criminally-oriented or hard living relatives. One wife blamed a childhood acquaintance of her husband as well as his parents for his current pre-occupation with "kinky" sex:

As I've said, his problems go way back into the past. Al was discovered by a woman who was very sick. He was discovered by her when he was 11 or 12 years old. He was masturbating in the barn. He was sifting sand over his penis. Al has a deep fear of his father. He feels that his father is a cock sucker ... Oh, back to this woman who found Al masturbating. She used his fear of his father against him. She controlled Al through this fear. Then she told him that she was going to tell his father. When she told him that, he was scared. She then told him, "I want you to come to my apartment at a certain time." She lived on Champlain Street in Burlington. He came up at the designated time and he was worried. She tied him to the bed and put an enema hose up his ass. She then ran hot and cold water into him. She used him for this for a year. He reached a breaking point one day. One part of him was enjoying it and the other part

hated it. This time she put the enema hose up his ass and let it run for three hours continuously. He passed out and he was in pain. He started to shout. She then gagged him and he endured it and then he totally blacked out. When he came to he had a different attitude. He found himself more into it. She then introduced him to a man. He liked to gag me and tie me up and he used these electrical cords that couldn't break. Just like she did to him. She brought this guy up. Al was tied up on the bed. This guy used him orally and then anally. There was a great deal of pain. The guy came. Al didn't want this guy. The woman then used the guy on herself and had Al watch. This explains why he did things like that. He was twelve years old at the time.

Just as frequently, wives also laid blame on peers. A few insisted that their husbands are easily led by alcoholic or drug-using friends who then proceed to get the husbands involved in illegal activities.

Alcoholism A commonly used mechanism was to ascribe responsibility to an impersonal outside force, like alcoholism. Twelve wives who were married to husbands involved in alcohol-related crimes did this. These wives were most likely to see their husbands as "good people", but subject to a bad condition for which they were not responsible. A foreign substance, alcohol, had overpowered them and propelled them into crime. Thus their husbands' problems were simple: they would sometimes drink to excess. Only then would they commit crimes, sexual deviance, or become physically abusive. However, their essences remained untouched. Despite having to acknowledge their husbands' deviance, wives are thus able to neutralize it. In any event, "alcoholism" is not a crime and it therefore follows that their husbands are not criminals.

Five wives specifically used a reference to "Dr. Jekyll" and "Mr. Hyde"

When Charles was drunk one time, he broke my nose. He's like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. When he drank he'd be abusive or wallowing in self pity. He came to my house all drunk and crying about how terrible a person he was and all that whining. It got on my nerves. I told him that I was sick of him getting drunk with the guys.

A few other wives asserted that their husbands' particular form of Mr. Hyde was "macho man." When they were with friends, their wives said, men who could be tender and loving at home, turned into "macho men." They didn't give a damn about anything. They sought excitement and adventure. They tested legal and other forms of authority. They rebelled against conventional society. They were tough and drank or consumed drugs heavily... One woman interpreted her husband's criminal behavior in this way:

Q. What kinds of things has he done?

A. Stupid things like driving without a license. Petty shit like getting into fights and then he's the one who gets busted, no matter what. He's into this theory that a coward walks away from a fight. He's a chauvinist. He expects his woman to have her place and her place is to be in the home and not to go to the bars or not to work. I like that. I know he cares and he's very macho. He's the big strong man type and believes that to show kindness is a weakness.

To many women, machismo was the moral equivalent to "evil" and to some extent synonymous with hard living. By ascribing battering and other crimes to Mr. Hyde, these wives are able to maintain faith in their men: Dr. Jekylls. They are likeable, lovable and repentant. They beg forgiveness and promise never to do it again. Yet, the wives reported, Mr. Hyde does manage to re-emerge periodically.

Environmental Conditions A third rationale presented by wives, is that environmental factors have impinged on their husbands' lives. Only five wives' accounts do this. Environmental factors—such as unemployment and poverty—they maintained, influenced husbands to commit crimes in order to supplement their incomes or reduce their frustration and anger. According to one woman's account, whenever her husband became unemployed he became depressed, drank, and then committed a series of forgeries:

A: When Ron got depressed or angry then he'd drink. He'd feel

discouraged or he was just sitting around when he lost a job. He needed to work. He wants to keep going or he gets bored easily. When he wasn't working, he'd drink.

Here pointing to environmental factors averted responsibility from the husbands and allowed wives to believe that their identities as normal were still intact. This form of justification also allowed wives to imply that their husbands' conditions were not permanent. As environmental factors decrease, their husbands' conditions are likely to change, e.g. when they are steadily employed.

4.2.2 Internal Defects as Perceived Sources of Male Deviance

When some wives finally confronted their husbands' unconventional and or criminal behavior, their reaction was to lay the blame on defects in their husbands' characters. Their husbands, they reasoned, were basically "good people" suffering from a "bad condition" In effect, they attempted to encapsulate some character flaw--and thus see it as something separate from them as individuals. By doing this they were able to shift blame away from their husbands who, after all, were simply being driven by uncontrollable internal forces. Wives saw three defects which could affect their husbands in this fashion: (1) immaturity; (2) character "weaknesses"; and (3) mental illness.

Immaturity. The most frequently employed rationale was immaturity. Nineteen of the working class women asserted that their husbands were immature since they had been slow in developing emotionally. In describing their husbands' criminal acts, these women often described their husbands' as having acted like "boys." Or they would simply assert that their husbands had never grown up: they were "just big babies." In this fashion, the women were able to convince themselves that the men's behavior was governed by physiology or biology. One woman, whose husband had been cashing her checks, had this to say about his behavior.

Brian ended up being another child and he was like a hyperactive child that you have to watch every second to keep out of trouble.

Still another wife used this rationale to explain her husband's repeated involvement in alcohol-related check forging sprees:

I'm a crutch for him. The minute I'm away from him he starts to drink. I went to the hospital for a while and he started drinking until I came out. It's like having another kid.

Implicit in this interpretation, of course, is the idea that their men's condition is not permanent. "My man needs time to sow his wild oats before he settles down." But until their men grew up, these wives were able to describe their husbands as spoiled, lacking will power, and acting like babies.

This rationale was probably drawn from the surrounding working class subculture. Within this milieu, it is often expected that men will live "hard" during their adolescent years. Once they have had a chance to do this, they are then expected to settle down, establish families, and assume adult roles.

Character Weakness

In attempting to maintain a positive image of their husbands, prisoners' wives ascribe their husbands criminal behavior to specific character defects; such as "bad tempers", "meanness", "lack of self control" and so on. This was true of ten women in the study population. These character defects are perceived as "mild", but recurrent. Only some of their husbands' characteristics were offensive. Thus while their husbands were wrong, they committed criminal acts due to inherent character weaknesses which were beyond their control.

Mental Illness

Whenever the wives used mental illness to explain their husbands' deviance, they also tended to denounce this behavior. Only four women provided this rationale, and only on those occasions when their husbands' behavior was so bizarre that they could not avoid other people's perceptions of it as completely "crazy" or "sick." Under these circumstances, wives were prepared to assert that the person they thought they knew was no longer there.

Once women defined their husbands as mentally unbalanced, they were able to describe them as ordinary, conventional husbands in their previous incarnations. Once wives came to believe that their husbands were "sick", they frequently accepted their condition as permanent and hopeless.

4.2.3 Wives as Causes of Male Deviance

The final strategy, offered by eight women, was to place the blame on themselves. Here, husbands' behavior was explained, justified, or made acceptable by the fact that the wives themselves caused it, e.g., that they did not do enough for the husbands. Interestingly, all the women who offered this explanation indicated that their husbands encouraged them to assume blame. These wives consider their husbands' accusations to be valid, and subsequently did blame themselves for varying periods of time.

Accepting responsibility for their husbands' acts tended to leave wives tense and bewildered. For example, one young wife, explained her reasons (or lack of reasons), for blaming herself for her husbands' sexual offenses

At first, I thought that it was because of me. I put the blame on myself. I don't know why. I didn't really know why he did it. But I figured that there must be some reason. His mother blames herself too. It's just like why do I blame me? Because I don't have any other explanation.

A few other women reported that, the more their husbands' reinforced them for doing it the more likely they were to search for additional areas for self blame. Thus, they made every effort to become the kinds of wives their husbands expected them to be. But, typically, no matter what they did, their husbands' deviance persisted. One older woman (married for fourteen years) related how she was in a quandry as to how exactly she was to blame for her husbands' alcoholism:

We've had disagreements and I ask him if he goes out to drink to punish me and he says, "No!" But I do feel that he's punishing me. I feel that he's saying, "I'll hurt you and I'll drink just to show you that I can drink." When he does drink, I go through my mind--what have I done, what have I said, and I never come up with the right answer. Sometimes I feel that if we had an argument, he'll use it as an excuse. So I've stopped arguing with him.

By employing this justification the women involved were able to isolate a single factor which was responsible: they, themselves. Once again, the men were not responsible for their acts because they were driven to them by their wives failures. The reason that all of these rationales were employed, of course, was that it is not easy to go about applying criminal labels to one's intimates. Wives of criminally involved men want to postpone assigning this identity to their husbands--especially if their marriages are their lives, jobs, and careers. Beyond this, many wives sincerely care for their husbands. They marry young, have minimal job skills, lack education and have placed their eggs in one basket. They in no way want to threaten this basket. While their husbands may be irresponsible hard livers, they are better than no husbands at all. All these rationales, then, were employed to make their

marriages more bearable, and to allow wives to stick by their husbands "for better or worse."

These rationales were made more plausible by the fact that few wives perceived their husbands' situations as unalterable. Most wives did not denounce their men as "rotten eggs" who had had every opportunity to make something of themselves. Nor were the men generally seen as requiring permanent care. Rather, wives searched for sources of change in outside forces, within themselves, or any other place except within their husbands. In searching for evidence that their husbands were really nice guys, they hope to find some accommodative mechanism which would allow them to establish the kinds of marriages they wanted in the first place.

4.3 ACCOMMODATING TO MALE CRIMINALITY

If I'd known he was really drunk, I would have walked away from the verbal harassment. You just use whatever "tricks" work; what seems to be the most advantageous thing at the time. Sometimes it's a sexual overture; sometimes just walking away and changing the subject; sometimes just saying you're sorry.

Defining and rationalizing criminal behavior is not enough. In their everyday world, wives must learn to accommodate to male criminality and hard living. Thus to make their lives more bearable and preserve their marriages, the wives employed various accommodative strategies.

These strategies differed depending on variations in their husbands' behavior. Many wives, such as the one quoted above, reported that they were likely to change strategies when they proved to be ineffective in curbing their husbands' criminality. Sometimes, they reported that they used an array of strategies until they found one that worked, at least temporarily. The strategies they most frequently employed were (1) nurturing; (2) acting like pains-in-the-asses; (3) mixed strategies; (4)

passive distance. Less often employed coping mechanisms were (1) acting as co-deviants or (2) reluctant co-deviants in their husbands' various enterprises.

Nurturing

Almost all the women in the study population had, at various points in their marital histories, used nurturing as an accommodative strategy.

One pattern mentioned by many wives was to respond to their husbands by treating them as child-like spouses who needed to be encouraged to grow up. Hence, wives gave their men emotional support and manipulated situations in the hope that they would mature. Or they would tend to speak to their men as if to a troublesome child: rationally present the consequences of their acts, lecture them about their behavior, and even offer them rewards for "good" behavior, e.g. sexual intimacy, more personal wifely attention, special treats, and so on.

Another form of nurturing that women reported was simply to provide their husbands with socio-emotional support. This kind of nurturing generally was initiated when husbands appeared to need support, patience or love. Here nurturing means building up the men's self-image, listening attentively to their husbands' problems, as well as being generally supportive:

He kept telling me that his main problem was that all he needed was a family to support and someone behind him and he wouldn't go to jail. He had never had anyone who really cared about him. I tried to help him. I spent my whole time trying to help him. I tried to keep him away from drugs. At the same time he looked so sad and pitiful that I felt that he really wanted to have a family.

Nurturing could also take the form of making an effort to manipulate the environment in order to prevent their husbands from pursuing hard

living or criminal activities. Some women, therefore, worked hard to manipulate the behavior of other family members towards the men. Others went to great lengths to control as many external factors as possible. For instance, they expended time and effort in decorating their homes, preparing special meals and putting the kids to bed early so that their men would have their homes and wives to look forward to rather than street activities. That is, they attempted to make their homes and themselves more attractive. Beyond this, they also often arranged as many social activities as possible in an effort to keep the men so busy that they had no time for crime:

Q: Did you try to control Brian's drinking and drug consumption? A: Brian was into shooting downs. He wasn't having a problem with downs at the time. Thoughts about the downs did run across his mind though. When he'd tell me, I'd say, "stay at home for the week-end and we'll do something. I always tried to put something else in front of him to do so he wouldn't get into drugs. There was always beer and casual drinking and no one really got drunk.

Pain-in-the-ass

Generally, wives employed other accommodative strategies before they came to the point of acting like pains-in-the-asses. As their husbands' alcohol and/or their pursuit of elements of hard living became disruptive, seventeen wives got to the point where they could no longer tolerate this behavior. Two other women, who have occasionally formed criminal partnerships with their husbands but eventually wanted to settle down to conventional life styles, also resorted to acting like pains-in-the-asses.

After running through a variety of coping strategies, most wives observe that none work to permanently "keep husbands out of trouble." However, they remained convinced that their problems in coping with male criminality could be solved as soon as they discover the correct

formula. As their husbands involvement in criminal activities deepened, these women report that they felt threatened. They wanted to lessen their man's chances of arrest. To deal with what they perceived as their families vulnerable position, these wives reacted as pains-in-the-asses.

Mixed Strategies

Hoping to stabilize their marriages, many women fluctuated between nurturing and acting as pains-in-the-ass. As time went on, they found that nurturing did not prevent further criminal or deviant behavior. Thus, they resorted to its logical complement: being a pain-in-the-ass. Both strategies are usually employed with recalcitrant children. Hence, we can infer that these women were reacting to their husbands as children who were "up to no good." A few reported that they argued, screamed, nagged, or pressured their husbands as they would their children. An older woman explains her reasons for doing this:

Men do things like a kid. They will do anything for attention in order to see if you care. If you scream at them, if you're madder than hell at them, then they know that you care. It's their security.

Pain-in-the-ass behavior can assume a variety of forms. The women in the study population reported spending countless hours reasoning with their husbands, showing them the consequence of their actions, etc. When this stopped working, they resorted to nagging, berating, and arguing with their husbands. Some wives reported that their husbands responded by ignoring them and continuing their criminal activities. Other men reacted to the nagging and arguing by pretending to acquiesce. Eventually, wives reported, their husbands attempted to hide their activities. All the men in question began to lie to their wives. One wife said:

Mark would lie to me and say that he was going out so that he

could work on his car engine. But he'd be out ripping something off. I'd call where he was supposed to be and he wouldn't be there. I'd ask Mark where he was and he'd lie to me. He always lied to me.

In response to their husbands' lying, wives typically escalated by playing out a full-fledged spy game. They came to feel that they could no longer trust their husbands. Hence, they attempted to keep track of their husbands' whereabouts, the kinds of friends with whom they were associating, etc. If the men were spending household money for their own purposes, the wives might attempt to control the money, hide their checkbooks, etc. Some women also resorted to hiding the wine or whiskey bottles, drugs, knives, or the car keys, in an effort to block future moves their husbands might make.

Often, the women, when arguing and nagging were perceived as ineffective, resorted to violence. The men, themselves, often physically battered their wives in response to their acting like pains-in-the-asses. At times, both spouses acted violently. One woman recalled how she resorted to violence in response to her husbands' heavy drinking:

The last time it was really bad. We were both drinking, which is really bad news, and I really got mad because he was drinking and I wanted these people to leave my house and they wouldn't leave. The kind of people he hangs around with when he is drinking are different than the kind of people he hangs around with when he is sober. He finds the dregs of society when he is drinking; people that come in and destroy my house. I called my neighbor and asked him if I could borrow his gun, and he said, "Why?" and I said, "Cause I'm going to shoot Manning!" And he says, "Not today, Lucy!" I pulled a knife on Sam. I threw stuff at him. I could have killed him that day if he hadn't knocked me cold. I'd had it.

In most cases, wives indicated that they felt a mixture of relief and intense shame at having deviated so far from the "behavior of normal women", after these incidents were over.

Acting in this role as pain-in-the ass, two women arranged for their husbands to be committed to the state mental hospital. Another informed the police about her husband's criminal activities. Frustrated by their husbands' continual pursuit of hard living and crime, they believed that the only thing to do was to enlist professional help. One woman, whose husband's heavy drinking had escalated, told why she did this:

A. Either some asshole would come along and bring him some booze, or he would have to go out and get it. He was going from a Dr. Jekyll to a Mr. Hyde type of personality; begging me one minute to help him, and the next minute he was trying to rip my face off. I had him committed to Waterbury, and I was afraid that he wouldn't understand, but he thanked me for it after he sobered up. Q. How did you feel after you had him committed to Waterbury? A. Bad, you know. I realized that was the only way I could help him. It was hard.

If all else fails, the women were likely to resort to threats-usually to leave their husbands if their criminal activities continued. Ten women separated from their husbands. Several of these had done so repeatedly. Others had taken off once or twice. In actually separating from their husbands, these wives hoped to "teach them a lesson."

Whether or not the wives became fully active in the spy game-complete with interrogation ("where the hell have you been for the whole night?") or threatening to leave their husbands, the net results were the same. There was a loss of trust when wives discovered over and over again that their husbands were up to their "old tricks."

Passive Distance

When wives discovered that other accommodative strategies neither made their lives bearable nor deterred the men's hard living and criminality, fourteen of them resorted to "passive distance." Most wives indicated that they tended to use passive distance whenever they detected that

acting like pains-in-the-ass resulted in marital discord or physical abuse.

After an extended period of hard living and criminality, wives were likely to behave like women in classical literature: throw up their arms to the sky and bemoan their fate. By withdrawing, the women reported, they could not communicate with their husbands about pressing household concerns or dissatisfactions with their activities. Instead, they become absorbed in themselves and their children, kept their mouths shut, and did not attempt to interfere with their husbands' enterprises, or have any knowledge of them. They seldom questioned the men about their associates or "business" activities. They withdrew whenever their husbands brought drug deals, stolen goods, criminal associates, etc into their homes. One woman explained her reasons for withdrawing in this fashion:

We lived in Winooski. He and his friends more or less figured it all out. I was there when they were planning it. I was watching T.V. as they were planning it [a burglary job]. I was scared and I didn't want him to do it. I told him and he said that I shouldn't worry about it. I just kept my mouth shut. When he does something stupid, I don't talk to him. I just more or less sit in my corner.

Passive distance can only be an effective strategy if husbands allow it to be. If they keep what they do on the streets, then their wives can more easily remain absorbed in their own worlds. If the husbands succeed, then they achieved minimal scrutiny from their wives and thus reduce wives' need to be pains-in-the-ass.

Husbands can react violently to their wives pain-in-the-ass behavior. As a response to battering, most wives, for varying periods of time, isolated themselves from their husbands out of fear. They kept their mouths shut and retreated into silence: fear was a major response by the

women to battering. As in the case of this young woman, many women came to believe that there was nothing more they could do:

I wanted him to stop drinking and I've given up on him. He won't stop unless he wants to. Nothing I can do about it, but I'll just watch him drinking the rest of his life and I'll just be watching him drink for the rest of mine, I expect. When he starts to drink, he picks up a bottle. I get so afraid that he's going to hit me. I just sit there and I don't say anything and I am so scared that I just sit quietly and drink my coffee and smoke cigarettes. Sometimes I go to the store and buy him more beer. I don't know why I go, I'm scared and wonder when the first punch is going to come. When I told him I wouldn't go to the store and get his beer, he punched me.

Wives reported that they derived certain satisfactions from employing passive distance. It allowed them to control the kind of information they could acquire about their husbands' activities--information which might possibly threaten their perceptions of their husbands as "good" guys. Wives generally attempted to observe only what they and their husbands deemed safe. Passive distance also reinforced the wives' determination to preserve their marriages. By acquiring scant information about their husbands' hard living and criminal activities, they could consolidate themselves in their roles as mothers and put away those parts of their roles as wives that would potentially threaten the stability of their marriages. When their men continued to pursue hard living for instance, the wives intensified their activities as homemakers, as disciplinarians for the children, and as decision makers: they became "domestic controllers." As wives, they held on to their obligations to service their husbands: they fed them, did their laundry, kept their homes according to their husbands' standards, and had sexual intercourse with them. What the wives derived from this strategy, then, was the illusion that husband-wife-children roles were viable and intact.

A deep sense of powerlessness is reported by wives who employed this

strategy. Their husbands still continued to shape the wives' behavior and the structure of their households and the wives realized this. This sense of powerlessness was also reinforced by the belief that there was an inevitability to their husbands' "troubles with the law."

Co-Deviance

Eight women had established criminal partnerships with their husbands, primarily involving property crimes, such as burglary or shoplifting. Two couples had dealt in drugs, one in check forging and one in armed robbery. Four women in the study population had independently participated in criminal activities such as shoplifting, check forging, burglary or drug dealing.

Criminologists recognize that the criminal world is male dominated. This is reflected in the fact that women, as co-deviants, usually play secondary or supportive roles in criminal activity. Seven women in the study population had engaged in a variety of deviant activities in roles which reinforced their husbands'. Only one woman had played a leading role in planning and carrying out crimes initiated by her husband.

Generally it was husbands who first taught these wives the techniques used in particular crimes. Wives most often act as accessories by carrying weapons, driving get-away cars, acting as look-outs, and hiding stolen property. However, the husbands are not always in a position of dominance. All these women reported that there were times when they also planned, initiated and enacted crimes in which their husbands assumed secondary roles. For example, one woman recalled how she initially learned to do burglaries from her husband, but eventually planned and carried out her own:

Q: Had he done others?

A: I helped him on a few jobs. He did other pharmacies, too. I went with him one night and chickened out on it. But I did do one with another guy. I drove him there and I planned it. When I think of it now, I kick myself that I got myself so deeply into it.

Q: What happened on the job that you pulled?

A: We broke into the pharmacy without making any noise. I planned how to get the stuff and how to get out and where we would meet. It was a simple break and entry job. I wasn't caught.

Q: Did you do many?

A: We must have done a few of them. We needed money for narcotics and this was the best way to get it.

Co-deviance was initiated by wives for several reasons. First, five indicated that co-deviance can be an accommodative strategy used in preserving marriages. By pursuing hard living and criminal activities with their husbands, they demonstrated their loyalty and love to their husbands. Women also reported that they established criminal partnerships with their husbands because they provided them with certain kinds of personal satisfaction. These were : (1) They could heighten the excitement and adventure of daily life. Most criminal activities provide excitement and challenges not present in women's everyday domestic roles. (2) Crime - especially drug use - can be a form of recreation. As members of the drug subculture, three wives reported that all drug-related activities could be satisfying, since the drugs bring euphoria and pleasure. (3) Those wives who abused drugs reported that the whole process of securing money, finding drug connections and getting high, could bring them and their men "closer together." Since their relationships were based on drug consumption, they could share a mutual orientation. Finally, a handful of wives reported that they were involved in crimes for immediate tangible reasons e.g., money and material goods. These women reported that they primarily acted as co-

deviants or as independent criminals in order to secure money to support their households or their drug habits. One woman asserted that she forged checks primarily for economic reasons. However, she also derived other satisfactions from it: excitement, fun, and the challenge of "beating the system:

Q: Why did you participate in criminal activities?

A: When it was a necessity. When we were broke and needed money. Like checks. We'd cash checks when we were broke. I was scared shitless when I did it, but it's like a disease. You can't stop! It's a fever but how you can con some people! One day I gave a check to a gas station attendant that I knew would bounce. I had a these phony plates on the car. He told me that he was going to write the plate numbers down and check right after because he thought that it was a bad check. I was gone before he found out that it was bad. There are all kinds of ways to beat the system. There is always a way to get around the system. It's fun to use your mind to get around it. It's the excitement of getting away with it. You first wonder if you're going to get away with it or not. All your senses become alive. You're alive! I lived it. But since I am older now and have more responsibilities, I don't do it. I think that we're all excitement oriented.

Also, according to these women, once they decided to establish more conventionally-oriented lives for themselves and their families, then their husbands' persistent criminality became problematical. Since co-deviance does not deter their husbands' hard living and criminal patterns, these wives then turned to other accommodative strategies.

Reluctant Co-Deviance

There were three women in the study population who hesitantly and reluctantly engaged in their husbands' deviant activities, under threats of physical harm. Poorly trained and educated, they felt that they had few alternatives to remaining in their marriages and participated in deviant behavior they found offensive e.g., receiving stolen goods, securing drugs for their husbands or experimenting with "kinky" sex.

Mary: Nelson was a sexual deviant. His idea for sexual fun was using whatever he could. I told him at the end that what he needed was a corpse. I came out and said that to him. I told him that, 'You want me to function as a housewife and mother during the day in perfect fashion and then at night you want me to come into the bedroom and be a corpse. What kind of life is that for me?' He did all kinds of things. He would build himself up to a frenzy.

During the day and then at night he would do these things. He strangled me, put stuff inside of me that didn't belong. I let him do all these things because I didn't want the children to know what was going on. I wouldn't scream even though there were times that I could barely help myself from screaming. But I didn't want to wake up the kids or he'd kill me. There was no place for me to go. There was nobody for me to talk about. Nelson. I was always afraid that he would kill me. Around my 30th birthday, I got very tired of all this. I began to plan on leaving him, but I wanted to wait until the kids were grown.

Since reluctant co-deviance primarily served to prevent further verbal and physical abuse, it did not even limit the men's deviant and criminal behavior.

4.4 CONSEQUENCES

None of the strategies outlined in this chapter were as effective as wives anticipated they would be. At best, wives were able to achieve a momentary attenuation of some of the hard living or criminal activity they found most difficult to cope with. The majority experienced an overwhelming sense of powerlessness as a result of trying to deal with their husbands during this stage in their lives. Linked to this was a sense of inevitability about their husbands "getting into trouble with the law." This undermined the effectiveness of the strategies they adopted, and made the task of steering the men away from criminal acts and hard living -- and thereby preserving their marriages -- even more difficult than it might have been.

Chapter 5

ARREST, COURTS, LAWYERS AND SENTENCING

I don't think that anyone understands the degree of loss that I feel about his going to jail. I can't talk with my friends. It would be so different if Danny had died. When someone dies, people see it as a legitimate reason to act weird, but they don't see any legitimate reason to be weird because your husband goes to jail. I feel a sense of loss and they don't realize that. They don't realize that he was torn away from me. My friends see his arrest as something you have done willingly. They see my relationship as my blame. I've made my bed, so now I lie in it. They see it as if I did something wrong, too. It's absurd. When they say, "How do you devote yourself to him?", they don't realize that I can't turn my feelings off like a water faucet. It's not the kind of thing that I can be objective about.

5.1 BACKGROUND

Four crisis points appear to occur in the experiences of wives whose husbands are passing through the criminalization process. Here we will primarily look at two of these - arrest and sentencing - and how wives are able to relate to them.

The literature has paid some attention to wives' reactions to their husbands arrest and sentencing. Schwartz and Weintraub (1974) document how prisoners' wives perceive the atmosphere in courts, their husbands' lawyers, and the fairness of their husbands' sentences.¹ I will go further by describing how wives pass through the sequence from arrest, to court sessions, to sentencing.

¹Also see Swann, 1981 and Morris, 1965.

We will first look at the circumstances surrounding arrest and sentencing, and then how wives react to the world of lawyers, judges, and other court personnel. From wives' accounts we also learn that, at each of these crisis points, they were confronted with multiple tasks which they had to perform which were an important part of their husbands' careers. We will pay particular attention to how wives handle these specific tasks in order to support their spouses.

In the last chapter we saw how wives' commitments to their marriages propelled them into adopting a variety of strategies designed to steer their husbands into conventional behavior. This chapter extends this discussion of wives' accommodations to criminality and hard living, by showing how they were willing to cope with the unfamiliar, and sometimes frightening aftermath of arrests and sentencing. In the course of this, we will also see how wives assess past events in order to explain their husbands' new identities as "accused offenders," and how they attempt to reconcile this status with their images of their men as "husbands and fathers."

According to Goffman, deviant individuals do not immediately appreciate the effects of organizational processing, but gradually come to recognize these over time. This chapter will extend Goffman's argument by showing that the impact of court processing does not end with sentencing, but continues after "prisoners' wives" go home, alone, to enter the next stage in their careers.

5.2 ARREST AND BAIL

In the last chapter we noted that the majority of women who later become prisoners' wives anticipated that, at some time in the future, their husbands would "get in trouble with the law." The other, naive or unsuspecting wives were also, of course, unaware that their husbands were going to be apprehended by the police. For both groups of wives, the circumstances surrounding the arrests, themselves, engendered a new set of accommodations and activities; e.g., raising bail and making adjustments to their statuses as "wives of offenders." The ways in which wives coped with these, however, differed for "neophytes" and "old timers."

5.2.1 Arrest

Whether or not wives are knowledgeable about their husbands' criminal activities, their husbands' arrests came as something of a surprise. Arrest is a rude awakening in which all wives experience disorientation, i.e., bewilderment, shock and disbelief. Of 28 women who had been living with their husbands for six months or more at the time of their arrest, 17 were aware that arrest was imminent - but all experienced some degree of surprise. Nine were "old timers," i.e., they had previous experience with their husbands' arrests, convictions, and imprisonments. Old timers were more likely to believe that their arrests were imminent than neophytes. The remaining 11 wives, who did not anticipate their husbands' arrests, were all neophytes.

Two major factors seem to determine whether wives anticipate "troubles with the law": whether or not their husbands were "living hard," and the type of criminal activities in which they engaged.

When the men were living hard and were involved in criminal

enterprises, their wives anxiously awaited their arrest. Sixteen of the wives of the 21 men with previous criminal records believed that their husbands were going to be arrested. This was particularly true of those whose men had histories of repeated alcohol and/or drug-related crimes. In all of these cases, these women had accumulated enough information to realize that the spiraling effects of alcoholism or drug abuse would eventually land their husbands in jail.

The extent to which wives were able to anticipate their husbands' arrests varied by the type of offense involved. Ten wives whose husbands engaged in property or "paper" crimes reported some knowledge of their husbands' activities. Five women whose husbands were arrested for crimes against persons were aware that arrest was likely. Two of these women pressed the charges against their husbands for either physical abuse or both physical abuse and forgery.

Fewer wives had been completely unable to anticipate their husbands' arrests. Almost all were wives of first timers, who had, without warning, gotten themselves involved in some criminal pursuit. None of the wives of "square johns" were aware of the imminence of their husbands' arrests. One wife reported that her husbands' drinking had been the reason that he had committed a crime against a person. Of the three men arrested for sex offenses, two wives had not anticipated troubles with the law. The other seven wives were tied to men arrested for some form of property or paper crime. Three wives reported that another reason that they had not been suspicious about their husbands' activities, was that they had not been living with them at the time as a result of marital discord, hospitalization in a mental institution, or temporary residence in another state due to a family emergency.

Many men had been charged with more than one offense. Nineteen women

said that their men had been arrested for such crimes against property as concealment and/or receiving stolen property or breaking and entering. Eleven named such crimes against a person as aggravated and simple assault, armed robbery, and kidnapping. Five reported charges of forgery and counterfeiting. Three women said that their men have been charged with sexual offenses such as attempted rape and lewd and lascivious conduct. Four women said that their husbands had been arrested for escaping from prison. Only two wives reported that their husbands had been charged with sale or possession of drugs.

In recalling the circumstances surrounding their husbands' arrest, seventeen women said they witnessed the event; the other eleven women had not been present at the time of the arrest. Generally, when women witness their husbands' arrests, they define them as both dramatic and very traumatic events. Most arrests took place in their homes, on the streets, or in cars. The wives recalled that most arrests were handled by the police in a routine, fair manner. There was usually no particular hostility involved.

Movies and television tend to portray arrests as dramatic moments, often involving violence or at least a threat of it. The actual threat of police violence was present in only a few cases. Despite the fact that the police handled their husbands' arrests in a routine and non-violent fashion, most wives found the event to be devastating. This was even true where the husbands had severely assaulted their wives, forged their checks, or, as in one case, attempted to murder his wife and children.

Wives did not react this way when they were not present at the actual arrests. According to these wives, they first learned about their husbands' arrests from their husbands, friends, other family members,

the police, or - when wives were temporarily separated from their husbands - from newspapers. Some old timers report having to telephone the local hospitals and jails when their husbands did not come home for a night or so:

Randy went out with Ken one day at 9:30 in the morning. They went to fix the blinkers on the car. They went someplace. At 11 o'clock in the night, they weren't here. Then one o'clock came by and they still had not returned. I stayed up waiting for Randy and then I went over to his mother's and he wasn't there. While I was sitting here, and it was dawn by then, the lady upstairs asked me to come up for some coffee. She suggested that I call the jail and find out if he was there. I called one of the inmates at the jail and he told me that Randy was back there. I cried and that's how I found out.

When women were not present, they generally treated their husbands' arrests as rather routine or unexciting events. Whether or not the arrest took place in their presence, those wives who were aware of their husbands' criminal activities were most likely to report that they experienced a sense of relief because the dreaded event had finally occurred.

Once their husbands had been arrested, most wives reported that they were presumed guilty. Twenty-seven women reported that they also believed that their men were guilty of the specific crimes for which they had been arrested. For these wives, the arrest was the most important event in the judicial process: their husbands' cases were virtually "over" when arrest occurred. Hence, once the police had their men, what became important to them was how well their men did on sentencing day. Only one wife believed that her husband's arrest was entirely unwarranted. Consequently, she perceived the next stages of the judicial process to be critical instead. Whether or not wives thought that their husbands should have been arrested, they found that they were forced to come to terms with the formal labelling process as well as the more direct consequences of their husbands' arrest.

5.2.2 Willingness of Wives to Raise Bail

Immediately after their husbands' arrests, wives were confronted with the problem of securing bail money. Wives soon learned that, as the wives of accused offenders, it was their responsibility to attempt to do so. Husbands first informed them of this; only two men took direct charge of raising the necessary money themselves. Sixteen women actively attempted to raise bail, while twelve women did not. Of these seven neophytes and five old timers, eight simply did not have the necessary funds, nor could they raise them from friends or family. A neophyte related how she reacted to the amount set for bail:

The judge read what the charges were and what the consequences of these charges would be. Then he set the bail at \$50,000. It didn't look like I'd be raising bail. (Laughs here) I wasn't laughing then and they sent him back to jail.

The reason given by five old timers for failing to attempt to raise bail was their husbands' histories. They described how they actively supported their husbands when they had had their first encounters with the law. After repeated arrests, however, they refused to respond to them as emergencies which required immediate attention. Instead, they assumed a position of passive distance: they withdrew. Accordingly, they neither called lawyers nor provided bail money:

Q: Did you cry the last time he was arrested?

A: I didn't cry. I'm trying to remember how I found out. I probably did cry, but it wasn't the same--bawl! bawl! bawl! I probably cried and said, "Barry, you fucked up again!" and that was it. All I think about now is my work. If he gets into trouble, go ahead. I've given up. I've given up on him. I've helped him all I can. His father came and told me that Barry wanted to see him at the court and he needed bail. I might have cried but then I went back asleep. I had to go to work the next day and that was more important than Barry's needing bail.

Four other women did not make an effort to raise bail. Two were simply

unwilling to raise bail since their husbands' imprisonment guaranteed that they would be out of their homes. Two other were not around: one was hospitalized and the other was out-of-state.

Obtaining bail is costly and places additional financial strains on wives who want to secure their husbands' release from pre-trial detention. Often large sums of money are required for bail, lawyers' fees and incidentals. These amounts involved were usually beyond the means of the wives in the study population.

Thus the crisis of arrest was often exacerbated by wives' lack of cash reserves for bail money. As in any crisis, almost all these prisoners' wives sought support from their personal networks; particularly their close families, and sometimes extended kin and friends. Twelve women sought bail money from relatives. Neophytes were more likely to ask and receive family support, while old timers were less likely. Seven neophytes and two old timers received assistance. A neophyte, married to a man who had previously been arrested, described how her family got her husband "out on bail" after his first arrest:

I tried and I couldn't get it up. The bail was about \$5,000. They wouldn't let Gary out. My father went down and said he'd sign this paper that Gary would be in his custody and then Gary got out. My grandmother put her house up for us. He got out after a month. It took awhile because the lawyer had to get so many things together. He tried to get Gary's bail reduced and other things and as a last resort he used my father.

Old timers, by contrast, were less likely to receive support from families. Three old timers and only one neophyte asked their families for support and were denied. Of the nine neophytes who made no effort to raise bail, six explicitly stated that they have not tried to ask their families.

The general reasons for not asking for or receiving family support were similar. With each arrest, trial or sentence, the women usually made heavier demands on their husbands, and/or their own families. However, when arrests were repeated, families' reserves of good will tended to dry up. Hence, families became less reluctant to let the men remain in pre-trial detention, and wives more reluctant to ask for help.

Ten wives were successful in getting their husbands released on bail as a result of family help. Four other women did not have family support. One old timer reported that she got her husband released in her custody. Two men did not need their wives' help, since they had sufficient cash reserves and made all the necessary arrangements. Two other wives, as members of the drug subculture, turned to other drug users for help.

Thus, a little over half of the men have remained in pretrial detention. While wives' willingness to raise bail money played a role in determining who would be released and who would not, the accused's economic standing also was important. For instance, when "square janes" discovered that they could not raise bail money, their husbands' families were likely to come to their assistance. All the square janes' men met their bail, while fourteen working class husbands did not.

It is clear from wives' accounts, then, that they were the ones most likely to assume major responsibility for their husbands' release. Wives' initiative, perseverance and assertiveness were important factors in determining whether or not this occurred. In doing this, wives had to balance a multitude of responsibilities: the care of their children, homes, jobs, as well as their husbands. It appears that the critical differences between the women in the study population who obtained their husbands' release from pre-trial detention and those who did not was (1)

the wives' willingness to make the attempt; (2) the wives' status as neophytes or old timers; and (3) their ability to marshal resources in the form of a cash reserve or family support.

5.2.3 Wives' Reactions to the Crisis of Arrest

Arrest can be a crisis-provoking event in the lives of prisoners' wives. In general, wives are abruptly confronted with both involuntary loss and the kind of status transformations inherent in this stage of the criminalization process. Their husbands are officially labelled as "accused offenders." This carries with it implications for these wives, as well; and conditions their reactions to the events going on around them.

Many wives reported feeling disoriented at the time of their husbands' arrests. According to most wives, they had a sense that events were suddenly out of context. Those wives who were unaware of the imminence of their husbands' arrest were more likely to report that it had nightmarish qualities since they had no information about what their husbands had done to deserve being treated as they were:

When I got home, I just freaked out. I cried and cried and cried. Everything was ruined; my world was ruined and my house was torn apart - all my clothes were on the floor. Some of them had been ripped. The police took my personal things like rings and I didn't get them back for a year. They said that they assumed that they were stolen articles and had to hold them until they were sure they weren't stolen. This was all so big. It was happening around me and I just watched it. It was happening and I was part of it but I had no say in what was happening. This was overwhelming.

Most wives recalled that they experienced feelings of shock, denial, disbelief, helplessness and personal loss at the time the arrests occurred. Many women indicated that they have felt both uncertain and fearful about what the future would hold. However, this was clearly more

true of old timers. As wives became aware of the ramifications of their husbands' arrests - jail, trials and likely convictions - the tears flowed and then the floundering began. What confronted all the women was getting on with the business of getting over with the legal process. One neophyte whose husband had just been arrested for sale of regulated drugs illustrated these reactions:

I was up all night. I found it was hard to sleep under the circumstances. I was trying to figure out what had happened to him. Early that morning, I was trying to get him a lawyer. I called all sorts of people to find out the names of the lawyers who'd likely take his case. I also wanted to find out what to do about my car and how I should handle myself. I wanted to know if I had to get a lawyer for myself as well as for Pete or what to do.

Neophytes of course were more likely to feel disoriented since they had few guidelines as to how to act; old timers were usually less disoriented. Since their husbands' arrests often were more-or-less expected, they experienced shock and personal loss, but soon tended to be resigned to their husbands' guilt and eventual conviction. What ran through old timers' accounts were such responses as anger, resignation, relief or a "Here we go again!" attitude. One old timer expressed this well:

Fifteen minutes after they picked him up, Ruddy called me on the phone to tell me where he was. He told me that he loved me. I said to myself, "Here we go again!" He doesn't remember that he called me. Then he called me again from the police station. He told me that he had been arrested. I told him that I knew that. He had called me before and told me. Then the police dropped over to the house and told me that he had been arrested. They always come over and tell me when Ruddy's in. Ruddy told me that he wanted me to know first.

Beyond this, old timers were more likely to know what to expect, more likely to assert theirs and their men's rights, to refuse to sign statements, to immediately call their lawyers, and to go about raising bail money, if possible:

The minute he gets busted, my first reaction is to call the lawyer because I know that the first hours are the most important ones. So I keep busy with the lawyers.

The predominant reaction among old timers whose husbands were alcoholics or drug users was one of relief. Feelings of relief were also expressed by two wives of sex offenders. In most cases, this relief was based on the expectation that prison personnel would be able to control and/or "cure" their men of their "aberrations" and turn them into "normal" citizens.

Three wives, however, were relieved to see their husbands arrested for other reasons. As victims of their husbands' crimes, they welcomed their husbands' arrest and subsequent detention as a viable solution to an intolerable marital situation. In effect, jails and prisons became the final solution for their deteriorating marriages.

Women who experienced this sense of relief usually did not feel anger and resentment. Nine old timers, however, reported that they reacted this way since they believed that their husbands committed the crimes with which they were charged and they were angry and resentful at the possibility of being left to manage on their own. In these cases, the wives in question seemed more resentful about their husbands' apparent "desertion" than the fact that they had committed crimes.

No matter what offenses the men committed or how many times they had been arrested, the majority of wives reacted with concern for their men's predicament. What the wives tended to feel was that being supportive of their men was their wifely duty.

5.2.4 Rationales for Husbands' Statuses As Accused Offenders

Arrest begins the process of changing the men's status from ordinary citizens to "accused criminals." This dramatic shift, however, does not occur in a vacuum: it has an impact on their wives and families as well. The wives must also deal with this new status.

Wives reported that, for days and sometimes weeks after the arrest, they were preoccupied with the events leading up to it. Many life concerns were brought up for review. The wives sometimes investigated their husbands' past or, just as frequently, examined themselves and any possible role they might have played in their husbands' "downfall." "Accounts" can flourish during this period, and the women usually referred to those explanations their husbands provided. Hence, husbands' own assessments frequently become incorporated into wives' accounts.

It was usually at this point that the wives of the prisoners in the study population first devised a comprehensive account or a history of the men's criminal behavior; a sad tale as to what had transpired. These sad tales differed in several ways from those presented by women during their courtships. First, in these instances the sad tales generally focused on a few significant events, or on a few themes, in order to demonstrate what went wrong in their men's lives. Second, these sad tales were devised to reassure the women themselves that their marriages were really worthwhile so that they could maintain that preserving these socially acceptable marriages ought to take priority over punishment for their husbands' crimes.

Unlike the kind of sad tales wives devised previously, the tales wives created during the crisis of arrest also include situational justifications. As a part of their accounts, eight wives placed their husbands' behavior within the context of "extraordinary situations"

which were not likely to happen again. For instance, one neophyte recalled how her husband committed his first rape:

He got into the routine of jogging every evening if he found that he couldn't sleep in the evenings. He had developed a pre-arranged jogging path that he followed every time. As he went along, he got into the habit of looking into people's windows. This looking acted as a release for him. He had all these tensions and stresses. In one window he usually saw a woman who was parading around her house without any underwear on. He got into stopping and watching her. I don't know how long he watched her. It must have happened one weekend. I don't know how he got into her house, but he got in. He cut the telephone wires. When he got into her house he went into the bedroom and said to the girl, "Don't be frightened, don't holler. I need someone to talk to. I don't want to hurt you but I will if it's necessary." She was scared to death. Then he said, "I want to make love to you and talk to you." She said, "No!" He said, "I don't want to be mean." She then told him that she was afraid that she would get pregnant. She asked if she could use her diaphragm. He said, "Yes!" He took her into the bathroom where she got her diaphragm and put it on. They made love. He had to do it so he could be close to her and talk. But he couldn't come. He made her perform oral sex and then he finally reached orgasm. She was quiet and made it clear that she wouldn't struggle.

Other wives elaborated their sad tales by placing their husbands' crimes within the context of disturbed marriages, overwhelming job pressures, car accidents, and so forth. Another wife ascribed her husband's attempted rape to his history of unusual sexual situations:

...But when he was arrested, a lot came out of him. Things that I never knew about Charles came pouring out. I didn't know that he was charged with rape during the service. He was with a woman in his apartment and attempted to have sex with her and she cried rape. The charges were dropped. One by one I started learning things about him. Also when he was in the service he got some girl pregnant. She went back to her home town. When he got out of the service he found that she had given up the baby and married another man. He didn't know that as she hadn't told him. He wanted that baby. He's never had any good experiences with women and he doesn't trust them...I also found out that he was raped in the service by five or six guys. A girl had set him up for this. He had all these problems with girls, and he felt that he couldn't trust anyone.

As in the sad tales they devised during courtship, these wives found

outside forces to blame for their husbands' criminality. The men themselves contributed to this: they presented themselves as being "wronged" by environmental factors. Once again, wives' tales reinforced their own belief that their husbands were "victims of circumstances." In twenty cases, alcoholism and broken homes, drugs and unemployment, and criminally involved friends or family members were presented as the factors which drove their husbands to commit the crimes they did.

Similarly, some women attempted to interpret their husbands' behavior in terms of "character flaws" and "defects." As during courtship, they tried to ascribe the men's present criminal behavior to some previously-unrecognized character flaws. However, in the aftermath of arrests, their scrutiny of their husbands' character defects usually was much more thorough. The same women who denounced their husbands' behavior during courtship and early marriage, continued to do so after their arrests: their husbands are "hopeless cases," and beyond reform.

One wife whose husband had attempted to murder her and the children described how a psychiatrist's evaluation validated her perceptions:

Dr. Marvel told me there's no cure for Nelson. He's a homicidal maniac. There is absolutely no cure for that kind of disorder. Nelson can be quite charming when he wants to be.... Maybe he'll find someone as sick as he is. He should find a woman who is sexually compatible with him. I've told him that. I don't see bondage and sadomasochism as fun. He enjoyed the fear that it instilled in me.

Here we see that prisoners whose wives regard them as "hopeless" can no longer break through the interactional limitations imposed by their master status as criminals or as mentally unbalanced. By denouncing their husbands, these wives had, in effect, begun to dissolve their marriages. It is interesting to note that a larger proportion of wives blame themselves for their husband's arrest than ascribed blame to

themselves prior to this. Fourteen wives saw themselves as chiefly responsible for their husband's arrest.

Arrests seemed to challenge, in a number of fundamental respects, many women's conceptions of themselves as responsible and devoted wives. A typical rationale was offered by one young wife whose husband had been charged with rape:

I blame myself for over half of what happened. I was selfishly into my own job and into my weight problem. I put my energy into myself and not into him. And when I don't put energy into him, he goes and rapes women.

Wives of men charged with alcohol-related and sexual offenses tended to assume blame in their sad tales. It seemed as though they could not continue to think that their men, who had declared their love for them, could be as brutal and violent as their crimes revealed.

By creating these sad tales, most women appeared to be reminding themselves of how frail and insecure their husbands were. Their men, in time, reinforced this perception. In these sad tales we were told how much the men need their wives, how sick and in need of help the men were, and how their dismal pasts had virtually undone them.

In order to reinforce the notion that their men really needed them, some wives included their fears that their men would commit suicide in their sad tales. The men reinforced this by centering their frailties and insecurities around this issue. Suicide was not an idle threat: a handful of the men validated their sad tales by attempting to commit suicide. Many wives, as a result, came to believe that their men were so mutilated by past events that suicide was a "normal" solution to their problems.

5.3 WIVES' PERCEPTIONS OF LAWYERS

Not only was it necessary for prisoners' wives to care for their children, cope with the issues of everyday living, but they also had to learn how deal with their husbands' lawyers. In Vermont, all felony defendants must be provided with a lawyer, i.e., either a public defender or a private attorney. When a defendant is indigent, the courts can either appoint a public defender or a private attorney to represent him. According to the women's accounts, twenty-four men were represented by court-assigned public defenders, while five retained private lawyers.

Twenty-nine women believed that their men were guilty and ought to be punished. Since this was the case, they did not expect their husbands to be acquitted. Thus they expected their husbands' lawyers to do a variety of other things, i.e., to protect their men's interests and dignity and to negotiate minimal sentences for them.

In most cases, reality differed sharply from wives' expectations. The majority expressed disillusionment with their husbands' legal counsels. This was more likely to be the case with court-appointed lawyers than with private attorneys.

This disenchantment began for most wives when they realized that their lawyers were relatively inaccessible to their men. Most women reported that busy public defenders spent little time with their husbands and received minimal information from them. Usually, wives reported, these lawyers only met with their clients for five or ten minutes before a court session. One young woman observed:

A month later, there was a hearing to lower the bail. Grant finally met his lawyer. He was so well prepared for the case that he didn't know Grant's step-parents who were part of the case. He was so together that he had to ask the judge what the bail had been set at. My intuition told me that things were

going to be bad. The D.A. read his past record and took the position that Grant was a bad risk. Jeff Lowell was Grant's lawyer. And Jeff Lowell more or less agreed with him. They lowered the bail to \$5,000. But this still was an impossibility. I didn't have the \$5,000.

Another major factor in the women's disenchantment with court-appointed lawyers was that they only appeared to be interested in "the deal" the prosecution would make in return for a guilty plea to a lesser charge. Hence, the lawyers' brief conversations with their clients usually focused on "deals" and not on the details of the crimes, mitigating circumstances, or husbands' motives or backgrounds. Therefore, many wives believed that public defenders were on the state's side, since they directed their energies towards plea bargaining rather than understanding their clients as individuals and interpreting their behavior to the criminal justice system. In treating their husbands in this way, public defenders appeared to be helping to create a system of assembly-line justice.

By contrast, five wives reacted favorably to their husbands' private attorneys. They felt that these lawyers were "on [their] husbands' side." Private attorneys seemed to be interested in their welfare as clients' wives, had fought hard for their men, and were willing to provide wives with information as to what was going on.²

²Casper, 1972: 241, suggests that the difference between private attorneys and public defenders is not so much how they behave, but, rather, the nature of the transaction between lawyer and client: the private attorney is paid by his client and, hence, he must be on the client's side. The public defender, by contrast, is paid by the state - and, hence, must be on the state's side.

5.3.1 Wives' Relationships with Lawyers

According to most wives, they perceived themselves as having had a separate or direct relationship with their husbands' lawyers. These relationships were generally disappointing.

Most women did not understand court procedure and wanted answers to scores of questions about what was going on. They felt they had a right to answers to their questions, both as members of the accuseds' family and as emissaries for their jailed husbands. In most cases, these answers were not forthcoming.

Most women reported that they initially expected their husbands' lawyers to provide them with the technical information needed to help understand their husbands' legal situations: (1) information about the progress of the case; (2) chances of acquittal; (3) possible lengths of sentences and (4) chances for parole. Instead, most wives claimed, it was almost impossible to obtain answers to these questions from court-assigned lawyers. no such observations were made about private attorneys.

Most wives needed to obtain legal information for their husbands. Since their husbands were often in jail, it was up to the wives to keep track of the lawyers and convey information between them and their husbands. This, took a considerable amount of time. Since the men have little personal autonomy, many placed continual pressure on their wives to act for them. Since lawyers were often unavailable and since men on-the-inside have difficulty understanding this role as a go-between was a continual source of strain in the relationships between prisoners and wives. In these and other ways wives seem to be trapped by ambiguous and conflicting role expectations.

Six wives mentioned, for instance, that court-assigned lawyers encouraged them to help pressure their men to negotiate "the best possible arrangements under the circumstances," i.e., to plead guilty rather than stand trial. These wives complied. This, in effect, meant that they had become agents for the court system rather than their husbands' advocates.

5.4 COURT SESSIONS

It has been well documented that, to outsiders, courtrooms appear to be "closed clubs" in which the major interactions take place between legal experts who handle similar cases together over a long period of time. This small group of judges, prosecutors and defense lawyers have more in common than they do with most defendants. Accused persons pass through the system, while court personnel remain. Therefore, none of the participants - defense lawyers, prosecutors or judges - want to disturb the process. This view of the judicial process is highly consistent with those presented in wives' accounts.

Twenty-two wives indicated that they attended court sessions as frequently as possible. Eight attended no court sessions. One woman was detained in jail, since she was an accessory to her husband's crime. Another woman was confined in a mental hospital. Two said that they had mixed feelings about their husbands' predicament. They therefore chose not to attend court sessions. The last two women preferred to remain at home and receive the news when their husbands informed them by phone. They did not think their presence could help their husbands because there did not appear to be anything they could do.

Those women who did attend court sessions were often bewildered, frustrated, intimidated or disoriented by them. These feelings emerged

primarily as a result of wives' lack of knowledge of courtroom procedure. One wife expressed her sense of helplessness this way:

When in court, I felt more or less like an outsider. I couldn't understand what was happening. I sat there and listened. I felt like one of the kids because I didn't understand so there was no way I could help my husband. I felt left out and I really felt bad. I wanted to help but I didn't know how.

Only two of the old timers claimed to have understood legal terminology and court procedure well enough so that they did not feel disoriented. Both had been in court more than four times before. Some prisoners' wives reported that they had felt intimidated by the judges. Six neophytes and three old timers mentioned that they were awed by their symbolic power.

As a rule, courtroom procedures reinforced wives' sense of powerlessness. Nine neophytes repeatedly expressed the feeling that they had no direct control over the circumstances of their husbands' lives and, thereby, their own. Three old timers reported similar responses to courtrooms.

For example, a few wives told how the state can publically symbolize its power, and the consequent moral inferiority of the accused, by bringing the defendant into court in manacles. A symbolic message is thus conveyed to the women, who come to believe that there is no way they can alleviate their husbands' predicament:

When court time came, I was pretty tired. In court they didn't paint too bright a picture about Beany. When he came out of the elevator, he was handcuffed to another person. This freaked me out. It looked so inhuman - to know someone as you know them and here he's seen as a different person without the qualities that you know. This freaked me right out.

Because of their ignorance of courtroom procedure, and because of

these kinds of symbolic messages, wives only sense of being able to do something came when they could act as character witnesses and/or "good wives." Whether they could play out these roles or not, most wives were fully cognizant that they were present as spectators at their husbands' inevitable convictions.³

5.4.1 Sentencing Day

Arrest presents a crisis for wives, and sentencing day becomes an extension of that crisis. On sentencing day, the prosecutor, the defense attorney - and sometimes the defendants themselves - are permitted to speak in front of the judge. The prosecutors and the defense attorney, from their different perspectives, speak about the defendant's crime, his background and past history, and typically make a recommendation to the judge about what sentence the defendant ought to receive.⁴ The judge then passes sentence.

Although sentencing day is naturally a crisis-provoking occasion for most women, the outcome is not unexpected. Most wives knew that their

³Although they were most frequently spectators at the event, wives reported that they were sometimes given another role to play: they could be a "moral credit" for their men and lawyers to draw upon. Eight old timers and five neophytes reported that they had acted as loyal wives so that their husbands could amass moral credits. They did this by (1) holding hands with their husbands; (2) throwing loving glances at them; (3) speaking and behaving in a helpless manner; and/or (4) wearing clothes that accentuated their pregnant condition.

⁴Although not principal participants in these proceedings, probation agents also have an in-put. Prior to sentencing day, they present a pre-sentence report describing the "facts" of the defendants' lives and recommendations about whether the defendants should be imprisoned. This information is only generated on the lives of defendants who are guilty - by pleading or after a trial. These reports are available to those who are to pass judgment.

men had pleaded guilty in exchange for a reduced sentence. What became important, then, was whether or not the men would receive the sentences negotiated by their lawyers.

Twenty-two women in the study population did not believe that their husbands had been sentenced fairly. According to these women, (1) the sentences were not according to the going rates, (2) the judges were to blame, or (3) the lawyers were at fault. Nine old timers and six neophytes measured their husbands' sentences against what they considered to be the "going rates" for the particular crimes involved. A sentence which exceeded these rates was considered "unfair." As a rule, wives learned about these rates from their husbands, lawyers, and from knowledgeable people in their communities.

Feelings of injustice about the sentences were most frequently expressed by the three wives of sex offenders:

...the sentence wasn't fair, it was too harsh. He should have gotten two to four or two to six. Other guys that were convicted of actual rape got less than Storm did. And other guys that were up for murder got the same thing that he got. It seems ironic because he would have served only 18 months, which I don't feel would have been enough. But I feel that four to ten was too harsh.

Wives expected individualized justice. That is, they expected their husbands' lawyers, the prosecutors, and the judges to take the individual involved into consideration. As a result, many wives concluded that their husbands' sentences were unjust since they were not the product of individualized attention. They expected both the court system, in general, and the judges, in particular, to pay attention to their men as individuals and, therefore, take their social backgrounds, the circumstances of the crimes, marital histories, family backgrounds, etc. into consideration. A few wives thought that this individualization

would result from their husbands' willingness to cooperate with the police.

Seven old timers and three neophytes specifically blamed the judges for the failure to individualize sentences. Some wives asserted that the judges had not been concerned about what was "best" for their husbands: the harsh sentences meted out had little to do with rehabilitation or individual treatment, but mainly with punishment:

When Kevin was sentenced, the room went up into the air. I was shocked and I saw it worse than before. He was angry. He felt that he was honest to do what he had done. He was getting help, he has signed a confession and things like that. He had learned that he won't be afraid to ask for help again and he had spared the women and the state from having a trial. The sentence was stiffer than what was recommended. He knows it's the system and it's run by people who don't know him. The judge made the decision - all this was laid on this judge who plays God. The judge had to weigh what people told him. And all these people know that Kevin's changed. It's unfair and there isn't much there to help him in jail.

Some old timers, instead, blamed the judges for creating a kind of multiple jeopardy in which their husbands continued to pay for what they had done in the past. Most of these women saw the judges as passing sentence solely on the basis of their husbands' past criminal records. These wives firmly believed that the judges determined the amount of time their husbands were to serve by the number of their previous convictions:

Almost eight years ago, Frank pulled an armed robbery and kidnapping, too. He used to do these bad assed things before I knew him. They judge him by these things he did then. He can't be judged now by his previous record and yet they do.

A few wives concluded that judges also took their husbands' families' reputations into account:

The judge also knows Matt's father. They have a record on his

father and I don't know what he's been in for. Matt has been in and out of jail six or seven times for possession of stolen property and for attempted escape. I think that's why [the judge] doesn't have a high regard for the Denton name. I think that once the judge hears the Denton name, it sets him off.

Another circumstance that indicated to the wives that their husbands' cases were not being treated individually was the judges' apparent sensitivity to "public opinion":

It was hard to catch all that was going on between the lawyers and the judge. Prosecutors said, "Look, these people are upset by what he did. There have been a lot of armed robberies all over Burlington. They want to see these people who do these crimes in jail for a long time." That was basically the same thing that the judge said. Tim gave a speech. He tried to talk the judge out of sentencing him. The judge laid four to six years [on him] and I feel the judge intended to give this sentence before the trial. It looked like everything was predetermined.

Ten neophytes, by contrast, concluded that court-assigned lawyers were primarily to blame for the situation with regard to sentencing. Although their husbands had pleaded guilty, these wives felt that their lawyers could have negotiated a more favorable sentence. They felt double-crossed. Neophytes, naive about lawyers as well as the rest of the court system, were most likely to lend credence to the lawyers' confident and bland assurances that their husbands were going to receive light sentences once they had pleaded guilty. According to wives' accounts, lawyers also frequently claimed to have "inside knowledge" about the intentions of the prosecutors, police, probation officials - or to have direct access to them. Based on such assurances and inside knowledge, many wives urged their husbands to cooperate with these officials. On sentencing day, when wives heard their husbands' sentences, they felt that their attorneys had "conned," manipulated or tricked their husbands into copping a plea by promising them a sentence less than the going rate:

We went to court that day. I had told the lawyer that I was pregnant with Charlie's child. The lawyer assured us that Charlie would be out on the street in seven months. We thought we could handle that. When we went to court we expected that Charlie would get the sentence that would allow him back home in seven months. We really believed the lawyer. Charlie knew he had a problem. He found it was easy to talk to the Doctor. He had confessed. The judge gave him four to ten years. I was shocked. We believed the lawyer.

As a rule, wives who reacted this way did not realize that lawyers could only negotiate a promise from the prosecutors to recommend a sentence in exchange for a guilty plea, and that judges normally have sole authority to pass sentences.⁵

Finally, seven neophytes and six old timers also based their notions about the fairness of sentences on more subjective criteria. All these women had been aware that their husbands were going to serve some time in prison. Yet, they initially expected that their men were going to receive minimum rather than maximum sentence. They built their expectations around this. Since these wives' notions of "fairness" primarily rested on their own sense of how long they could "manage" by themselves, they often concluded that sentences were "unfair":

Q.: What was your reaction to his being sentenced?

A.: I was going in circles about all this. I didn't want to see him in jail and we both knew that this time he would be sentenced for sure. That morning, when I heard the sentence, I was knocked out. I couldn't believe it. He got zero to two

⁵This process reported by the wives is plea bargaining. Generally, the defendants are offered a deal. Charges will be reduced, sentence agreement or both in return for a plea of guilty. The husbands have been offered this deal through their lawyers with assurances that the prosecutor will recommend this deal to the judge. As the defendants, in Casper's 1970 research study, the wives are unaware that judges do not always go along with the prosecutor's deals. Many times, judges may impose higher or lower sentences than is recommended by the prosecutors.

years. We depended upon him and we needed him. What were we going to do? I didn't know what was to happen to us. We just needed him around. Just having him around was important. Any problems that come up, he would handle.

Eight women believed that their husbands had been sentenced fairly. Five of these were neophytes. A "fair" sentence here can mean one of two things: (1) a good deal - something less than what their husbands might have gotten; or (2) the going rate for an offense. Neophytes were more likely to conclude that their husbands' sentences were "fair" when they conformed with the going rate than when they did not. The three old timers in this group believed that their husbands' sentences were "fair" since they were light.

Women who had been the object of their husbands' criminal acts tended to be ambivalent about sentences. On the one hand, they believed that the courts had acted in a "just" manner since their husbands were going to prison for an extended period of time. On the other, they believed that the sentences were not fair since their husbands had often received less than the "going rate." Thus we observe that objective criteria for determining the "going rate" were redefined subjectively: wives defined it in terms of their own reactions to how long their husbands were going to be kept away from them.

5.5 RESPONSES TO CONVICTION AND SENTENCING

Regardless of the severity of the crimes for which their men were sentenced, most women were quite unprepared for the sentences they received. Sentencing day and initial incarceration is perceived as a crisis point by most women. When their husbands received their sentences, their wives' statuses were abruptly transformed: they became prisoners' wives. In effect, the wives - especially the neophytes - felt the loss of the social scaffolding on which their self-definitions had

rested. They had lost their spouses as active partners in their households and were losing the social definitions they associated with marriage. They were between selves; they had not yet formed new social identities as prisoners' wives.

For most of the women in the study population, the experience of arrest and shuffling back and forth to court had been disorienting. They had been extracted from relatively orderly and familiar routines and thrust into an unfamiliar and often seemingly chaotic environment. For all intents and purposes, wives felt themselves in limbo while the judicial process determined the parameters of their lives. When they heard their husbands' sentences, many wives reacted with relief: there was a definite end in sight to the process of arrest and imprisonment.

Reasons for this reaction varied depending on whether or not the women wanted to continue to be in contact with their husbands. Those who wanted to remain married, if they were neophytes, felt relieved because they thought that the prison system would be able to help their husbands to deal with their problems. Old timers were more likely to feel relieved because they were free of their husbands' most serious demands on their families' monetary and emotional resources. A few old timers also welcomed the separation with relief since they had previously discovered that their relationships were more satisfying when their husbands were in prison.

The wives who were committed to their husbands reported not only relief, but disorientation and grief. This was true of both the neophytes and five old timers: they lost their appetites or began eating compulsively. They could not sleep, were depressed and lonely, etc. By contrast, the four wives who had wanted to get rid of their husbands offered different reasons for feeling relieved. In these cases, their

marriages had been conflict-ridden before separation. Hence, imprisonment offered them an opportunity to begin the process of dissolving marital ties. In many instances, it also provided them with some respite from the fear of physical abuse or financial disaster. For these wives, imprisonment meant sanity and peace and quiet.

However, wives who were using the time their husbands were in prison to break off marital relations also reported that they were afraid. The husbands who had committed crimes against their wives continued to threaten to harm them. They thought their husbands would try to retaliate against them in some way. Consequently, all of these wives had decided to wait until their husbands had "cooled down" before filing for divorce. One woman also prepared to defend herself:

I got a gun - a 38 special. I told the guy I bought it from I wanted the biggest bullets possible. He sold me the biggest and I went out that day and it took me one-half hour to learn. I orked and cried. I took hold of myself and got to the point where I knew how to shoot it. Next time he called, I told him that if he hassles me, I had the means to handle it. He told me that he had some guys who would be coming to get me. I said, "Let them come! I'm ready!"

Although enforced separation can primarily engender either relief or unhappiness, it may also be the beginning of a new situation which holds promise for rewards as well as the "pains of separation."

Chapter 6

MANAGEMENT OF COURTESY STIGMA

I made this point of not watching the news because I knew he would be in the news and I didn't want to hear it. When I read it in the papers, it was a real weird feeling...It was hard to read it in the papers. I feel the problem was a lot more me than anything else. My name is still Abbott and no one has yet said, "Are you related to that guy?" It's me fearing the unknown and of people changing their opinion of me. But I did feel that if they did, fuck them! But no one has ever done that. — A Prisoner's Wife

6.1 BACKGROUND

The effects of arrest and imprisonment reverberate throughout husband's families. Such events are, at once, forbiddingly confusing, shameful, disturbing and sometimes tragic for their wives and children. When social scientists describe arrest and imprisonment, they focus on how prisoners perceive these events. Very little is said about the extent to which wives and families share in the situation. Some attention has been paid to the effects of incarceration, per se, on the wives left "outside." Little has been done to show what it means for wives to share their husbands' official labels as "criminals."

Here we will see that husbands' stigma does extend to their wives, and that women living with criminals anticipate and actually experience stigma, both within their own communities and in encounters with the criminal justice system.

Some attention has been paid to how wives react to courtesy stigma within their own communities.¹ Here we will look at how wives experience and anticipate stigma from such significant others as family members, friends and neighbors. On the basis of a processual model, we will observe that wives' experiences change according to the stage in the criminalization process which their husbands are undergoing. Within this context, we will then examine how women go about disclosing information about their husbands and how they deal with inquiries from their children, families, and other relevant people. Such accommodative strategies have been employed by women to explain their husbands' institutionalization in mental hospitals² and by parents to reduce stigma transferred from their handicapped children.³

6.2 WIVES' FEELINGS OF SHAME AND STIGMA

As a public event, arrest serves to bring the wives of accused men into the public view. Other people learn about men's arrests through the media and word-of-mouth. In response, people acquainted with these men's wives often expect them to account for their husbands' criminal acts. Here we will see how these encounters and similar events serve to distribute or spread stigma to wives during two crisis periods: (1) at the time of the actual arrest and (2) after initial incarceration.

¹For a discussion of the extent to which prisoners' wives anticipate and/or actually experience shame and stigma, see: Chaiklin, 1972; Morris, 1965; Schneller, 1978; Schwartz and Weintraub, 1974.

²For a discussion of the kinds of accommodations wives make to the hospitalization of their mentally ill husbands, see Deasy and Quinn, 1955.

³For a discussion of parents' reactions and accommodations to their children, handicapped by polio, see Davis, 1972. Another discussion has focused upon parental reactions and accommodations to their mentally retarded children. See Birenbaum, 1975.

For both husbands and wives- but especially wives, since they were on the "outside" - stigmatization was most likely to occur when husbands' criminal acts received the most public attention through the media; at the time of arrest, and when sentences were handed down. Women were most likely to report that they experienced feelings of shame or other reactions to stigmatization at these times. The extent to which they did so depended on (1) whether they were neophytes or old timers and (2) the kinds of crimes for which their husbands had been arrested.

The stigmatization which prisoners' wives experienced was not continual or general, but episodic and situationally specific. At the time of their husbands' arrests and subsequent sentencing most wives reported that they not only feared gossip and worried about encountering stigma-producing events, but experienced feelings of shame. During the aftermath of arrest and during initial incarceration, twelve neophytes and six old timers reported feelings of shame and stigmatization. However, wives' fears usually were worse than reality: they were more likely to worry about stigma-producing events than actually encountering them. Thirteen wives, however, had vivid recollections of unsubtle stigma-inducing experiences.

Thus, whether or not these incidents actually occurred, stigma was a real presence in the lives of all the wives. They were constantly aware of the kinds of situations that were most likely to lead to stigma-producing encounters. This perception did not overwhelm them. They had other issues that they saw as more vitally important to their lives: taking care of legal matters; child management or domestic concerns; and extending support to their husbands during arrest and incarceration. Moreover, the on-going physical separation from their husbands was a constant background against which all other factors had to be judged. What the wives missed most acutely was the financial support, sympathy,

and companionship of their husbands. They were therefore more concerned with being deprived of their husbands than with the stigma associated with imprisonment.

6.3 COMMUNITY REACTION

During arrest, conviction and initial incarceration, the women in the study population usually feared hostile reactions from friends, neighbors and other community members. Wives' actual encounters with stigma, however, varied. Wives reported that community reactions to their husbands' criminal offenses were neither uniform nor predictable. Usually, families, friends, and co-workers reacted to husbands' arrest as a disaster or crisis event. Friends and neighbors offered emotional and practical support. This barrage of attention and sympathy from significant others clearly played an important part in undercutting the wives' own feelings of shame or stigma. In many cases, it seemed to reassure wives that they were not blameworthy, i.e., that they had not done something terribly wrong to have caused their husbands' criminal acts.

This positive or sympathetic community reaction is partially explained by the kinds of areas in which most wives lived. Arrests are not extraordinary events in most working class communities. People are in and out of jail. In some communities, being officially labelled as criminals' wives is so common that it becomes personally irrelevant. When wives live such in crime-tolerant communities, they do not appear to suffer as directly from shame or stigma. One wife, for example, described her neighborhood in the largest urban center in Vermont:

Most of the people around here weren't so bad. The neighbor next door had been in jail and so had her husband. The people across the street have been in jail. Charlie Guy knew Billie for a while and he was a deputy sheriff and when he knew that Billie

was an escapee, he didn't turn him in. A lot of people around here have been in trouble. I like this neighborhood. They don't think that if you've been in jail, you're going to be a criminal for the rest of your life.

In these communities, arrest was considered to be more crisis-provoking than stigma-provoking by many residents. Within middle class communities, however, arrests were not treated as ordinary events. There were, moreover, no apparent guidelines which provided people with clues as to how they ought to respond to a husband's arrest. Wives indicated that, within these communities, friends and neighbors were unlikely to know how to respond. Friends were more likely to be supportive. Neighbors were more likely to withdraw. One young woman who lived in a middle class neighborhood, observed that:

It was uncomfortable with the neighbors. When someone dies, people know what to do. But when someone goes to jail, it's not socially acceptable. They don't know what to do. The neighbors didn't call or come over and I felt that was strange. I got real paranoid. I realize now it was probably more my feelings than what happened because when I did see them in the normal course of events, they expressed how concerned they were about Roger and me and asked me if he was okay. At first, I had this fear of the unknown.

When Roger came home on bail, he talked with the neighbors. It was not uncomfortable for us to be in the neighborhood. We're not uncomfortable with what happened to Roger and the people take their cues from us.

Many prisoners' wives lived in some of the small cities where Vermont's prisons were located. People in these cities, nine wives reported, were generally hostile to both prisoners and their families. These wives in particular found themselves facing various forms of stigmatization: "they were frequently treated as "suspicious," "irresponsible," or "psychologically disabled." They were discriminated against. They were denied jobs when employers learned who their husbands were. Landlords refused to rent to them. They were subject to petty

acts of vandalism. Shopkeepers refused to service them. Neighbors avoided them, and their children were taunted by their peers.

As a rule, community reaction did not vary by the kinds of crimes that men committed except in cases where wives, themselves, had been their victims. Whether or not they lived in crime-tolerant communities, women who had been victimized were not stigmatized. Instead, several women recalled what they considered to be overwhelming support from friends, families and community members.

A: People kept asking me what I was going to do. At work, I saw their faces and they said that they knew what happened. Then they were really supportive.

Q: Did people react adversely?

A: I received no negative reaction. People tried to give me money. They wanted to help me pay back on the checks he had cashed. They were super to me... My neighbors didn't really react. For them, it's typical. It's typical around here to see guys go in and out of jail. They all knew what Michael was like anyway. He is stealing everyone's welfare checks, and so the neighbors just said that they were glad they got the sucker. People were relieved to see him go because their welfare checks stopped disappearing.

During these two initial crisis periods, then, wives were more likely to worry about the possibility of encountering hostile reactions from friends and community members. But in reality, they were more likely to receive support from friends and community members. Hostility and stigma were only the predominant reactions in prison towns.

6.4 FAMILY REACTIONS

The majority of the women's families were quite familiar with the possible ramifications when a member is arrested and subsequently incarcerated. This was especially true when family members knew at least one close relative who had been arrested and/or incarcerated. What

perhaps was most problematic was wives' families' emotional reactions to the husbands.

Families' hostility towards husbands initially dispersed to the wives and then dissipated. It tended to emerge (1) prior to the women's marriage to their prospective husbands and (2) at the time of husbands' arrests. After arrest and initial imprisonment, families were likely to be supportive.

Not all family members reacted to the women's impending marriages in the same way. Some were supportive, while others were cool, indifferent or hostile. Initially, parents' reactions to their daughters' impending marriages to men with previous records were likely to be unfavorable. Twenty wives reported that their parents reacted in this way.

According to most wives, those parents who reacted negatively to their men seemed threatened by their past criminal behavior. They funneled all their evaluations through the man's master status. Thus, in some sense, they reflected values in the larger community. What seemed most threatening for parents, however, were doubts this master status raised as to their prospective sons-in-laws' abilities to provide an economically viable and conventional lifestyle for their future families. They were fully aware that there can be a gap between thought and action. While these men assured their fiancées that they had done their hard living and were ready to settle down, parents were sure that they would continue to do the opposite. Moreover, parents were worried that the men's criminal behavior would generate stigma which would affect their daughters. For instance, one woman recalled that her mother believed that her man, who had an extensive criminal record, had crime "in his blood":

They were very upset because I was going with a jailbird. They

felt that I'd get hurt and that he was using me. I don't have much to do with my family because of it. My Mom and stepfather - they don't get along with him at all. My Mom and I are very close... She says that it's my life and she's afraid that I'll get hurt. She doesn't see that Saul is going to change. She feels that as often as he's been in jail and the things he's done that he hasn't been caught for shows that crime is in his blood. I say that it takes the right person to change him.

Parents who had been exposed to crime were the most likely to react with disapproval. Families which had achieved some degree of stability in the conventional world also tended to be upset since such a marriage seemed to threaten their tenuous hold on "respectability." A little less than a third of the families were reserved but supportive. Some family members took the position that whatever their daughters did was right. They reassured their daughters that they would not treat their prospective mates different from anyone else.

The initial tendency was for almost all women's families to react negatively to their prospective sons-in-law. However, these reactions tended to be relatively short-lived. Family members often had opportunities to observe the men performing in a "normal" manner, i.e., not as stereotypical criminals. With no visible stigmata, most decided that the men were not radically different from themselves. Normalization occurred. However, there were residues of their previous reactions irrespective of the men's performances as suitors, workers, or conventional community members. The women in the study population, of course, went ahead with these marriages despite parental reactions. It was, therefore, not surprising that when the husbands were arrested and imprisoned, parents were likely to respond to these events as crises. Neophytes' family members were more likely to rally around them during arrest and initial incarceration than old timers' families. The most common forms of assistance were to give their daughters a place to stay for the first few days immediately after the arrest; meals; help with

child care; and, in some instances, financial assistance. Ten neophytes and two old timers also reported that these offers of assistance were not coupled with reproach.

Some family members, however, offered the same assistance, but remained hostile to their sons-in-law. Four women reported that some family member acted in this way. This was most often true when the husbands had criminally harmed their wives.

By contrast, eleven old timers and four neophytes encountered unsympathetic and unfriendly responses from their families. These hostile reactions did not appear to diminish as husbands served their sentences. These women reported that their parents continued to refer to their husbands as "no good," "jail birds," or as "hardened criminals." They continually pressured wives to leave their husbands.

Six old timers also reported that they rarely received emotional or practical support from their families. One old timer, whose husband had been incarcerated twice, spoke about her parents' response to her situation:

When I needed money for Pampers and stuff, they wouldn't give it to me though. Right now I have trouble getting my mother to babysit for me. She doesn't want to watch my kids. There has been no support for me when my man is in jail. They believe that it's not their problem. My father puts Barry down as a stupid kid. My mother wanted me to leave Barry and get a divorce and I told her to keep out of my life. I'd do what I wanted to do.

Wives generally felt strongly that they were being betrayed by families who refused support since they tend to view the family as a last resort or refuge.

6.5 WIVES' ACCOMMODATIONS TO STIGMA

Although arrest was common in the social milieu in which the women in the study population lived, the event still made them feel exposed and uneasy. The wives' chief concern was impression management: "How can I project an image of normalcy to others despite my husband's criminal status?" Behind this question was another: "How much information can I disclose to others about my husbands' situation?" Who and what to tell thus became critical. How wives controlled information about their husbands depended on the management strategies they used to present what they considered to be "normal" faces to others. The most commonly used strategies were (1) affirmation; (2) misdirection or avoidance; (3) covering up; and (4) jailing.

The wives in the study population adopted different strategies depending on the community responses they anticipated. New encounters demanded new efforts at normalization. Wives found themselves almost continuously engaged in utilizing whatever strategy they felt would achieve some reduction in stigmatization.

6.5.1 Affirmation

Affirmation was a widely used technique. While old timers were more likely to affirm their husbands' situations than neophytes, it was used by eighteen of the wives, 11 old timers and 7 neophytes. When the women made their acknowledgements, they usually provided cues as to how significant others could continue to relate to them as "normal" wives and mothers. When they were successful and the preferred definitions were accepted, wives could continue to sustain normal relations with those with whom they came in contact. One old timer described how a strategy of affirmation is carried out:

Q: How do you handle friends and neighbors who ask questions about Tony?

A: I say, "Hey look, my husband's in jail. I love him, I support him. You have your views, I have mine. I'm open to listen to your views, but I won't change mine and I know you won't change yours."

Affirmation can assume a variety of forms. It frequently does not involve full disclosure of potentially stigmatizing detail. One woman, who had been physically abused by her husband, explained how she decided how much information to disclose and to whom:

I just told them he was in jail. I don't want to keep the truth from them. Everyone saw it in the newspaper anyway. People just asked factual information and asked if I was going back with him when he got out. For those who haven't read it in the newspaper, I just told them why and where he was. With some people I tell them he committed a violation of his probation. I didn't want to go through all the questions.

Wives generally received some help from others, in the form of tactful inattention, in insulating themselves from their husbands' spoiled identities. This made it easier for wives to reject the application of labels to themselves and their children and allowed them to maintain a sense of themselves as "normal."

6.5.2 Misdirection or Avoidance

Another device used by three wives was to question people about their own crimes and misdemeanors, thereby reminding them that they, too, had once been potentially subject to stigmatization. This strategy limited other people's opportunities to draw lines between themselves and the wives, and allowed the latter to redirect the encounter into other directions. In some sense, this strategy relied on the same principles as those used by magicians: it focused viewers' attentions on things which were not damaging to the illusion and away from things which were.

A similar strategy employed by some wives was to avoid the application of labels by denying their relevance. This technique involved acknowledging the arrest and its circumstances, and yet being indifferent to other people's reactions to it. At one time or another, seven old timers and three neophytes reacted in this manner. They recognized that this strategy might not always protect them from stigmatization. One old timer talked about this:

Q: How do you feel when you see his name in the newspaper?

A: I don't bother to read it anymore. People let me know that they've heard Frank got busted, they heard it on the radio or something. I know it, I don't have to read it.

Q: Do you feel that this affects what you do in your everyday life?

A: No, I don't let it. I could be afraid to walk down the street or curl up, but I say, "To hell with it. Frank did it and Frank's doing time for it. I'm not going to let them infect me that way."

Even when these women did not "accept" other people's definitions of their men's behavior, they were forced to respond to other people's reactions by maintaining distance. Yet these wives avowed their "differentness" precisely because it implied an outcome of less differentness, not more.

Another variation on this approach was to avoid those situations where stigmatization would occur. Ten neophytes and two old timers reported doing this. Initially, these wives felt that their statuses had been dramatically and publicly shifted from "ordinary wives" to "accused criminals' wives." The fact that their husbands' criminal behavior was often reported in the local newspapers made them ashamed and embarrassed. They did not dare to go outside for days. However, these feelings rapidly wore off. They continued, however, to avoid social

situations which would provoke stigma. For example, some wives avoided stores where they were treated rudely, avoided landlords known to be antagonistic to prisoners' families, or avoided social affairs with people who were likely to be hostile.

Some wives avoided contact with neighbors who might want information about their husbands. Some reported that this was unnecessary since their neighbors avoided them. A neophyte, whose husband had been heavily involved in receiving stolen goods, told why she moved away from her old neighborhood:

Q: How did your friends and neighbors react to the arrest?

A: After the bust, the neighbors snubbed me. They wouldn't have anything to do with me. They would call the police when my dog barked. I felt it was time for me to move because I couldn't live in that hostile area. The kids didn't go out too much and we all stayed in the house.

In cases where stigma was suddenly imposed, avoiding old acquaintances or members of their communities was a common reaction.

6.5.3 Covering Up

Another accommodative strategy, covering up, was employed by thirteen wives. The most common form it assumed was withholding information about husbands. Under these circumstances, wives simply rearranged their round of activities so as to conceal their connections with their husbands, and made their appearance and lifestyles even more conventional than they might have been. For example, one prisoner's wife moved back to her parent's home in another state:

Because I was kinda a dual person at the time, when I went to work at my father's business, I always tried to be as conservative as possible. I tried to give an innocent and naïve appearance. I was very conservative. I didn't want them to know about Phil. I was having my own problems there. In the travel

agency, the girls and Mr. Forman, who was my boss, didn't know how to relate to me because I was the boss's daughter. It took them a while to get them to trust me. I felt that their knowing about Phil would just place greater stress in my work world. So I kept it a secret.

Covering up was generally used in situations where people's "official" identities were at stake, e.g., applying for jobs, talking to landlords about renting houses or apartments. Neophytes were more likely to withhold information from friends and relatives:

I wanted him to move to Greenfield because I knew he could get a job there. I knew though that if people knew, he would be ruined here. Manny had told me that the only reason he didn't get anywhere in Vermont is because he had a record. I moved to Greenfield to protect him. I didn't want people here to see him as a person just out of jail. I did not want his entrance into my world to be as a "jail bird." I wanted to give him a new entrance to the world. I didn't want people to be saying, "Here is this wild, crazy guy from Vermont." I just didn't want him to be a legend in town. I felt that this was the best way to handle it.

Covering up, therefore, required uninterrupted vigilance on the part of the wives. They therefore tried not to respond to or encourage even friendly inquiries about their husbands. They carefully watched every word and gesture when they were around strangers. As long as they could conceal information, they assumed that community members or significant others would regard them as "normal."

6.5.4 Jailing

The least frequently employed strategy wives used to cope with potential and actual stigma was "jailing." Three old timers and two neophytes used it during the period when their husbands were in prison; and then only when they lived in prison towns. "Jailing" involves cutting oneself off from the outside world and attempting to construct lives around the prison. Wives who "jailed" were likely to acquire other

prisoners' wives as friends. They centered their lives around prison gossip and expressed scant interest in events going on in the larger community:

Lewis says that I'm the only woman in Vermont who does time. A lot of the women have lives that are unrelated to their husbands and they just go their separate ways and meet occasionally. Mine is wrapped up in Lewis and Debra. I sit home and other women are out partying. I don't want to party. Women can get cliquish up here. But the society encourages that; society turns on the women. If they stay with their husband, they are a son-of-a-bitch. If they don't, they're a son-of-a-bitch also. So the women will stick together. A bunch of us women moved up to St. Johnsbury to live near our guys. One guy said that we're nothing but trash. Others up there feel that anyone who is married to a man in jail is trash or hookers. They see our kids as juvenile delinquents. Any town that has the centers has this attitude towards us.

Wives devised these strategies to cope with potential public reactions and to convey an appearance of normalcy. However, permanent normalization was difficult to achieve. As their husbands passed through the criminal justice system, their progress impacted on the wives' lives. Each stage of the criminalization process - arrest, court sessions, sentencing and imprisonment - could come to the attention of significant others. Each event could force wives to engage in impression management and new efforts at normalization.

6.6 CHILDREN AND STIGMA MANAGEMENT

At the point when their men were arrested, twenty-one wives realized, often with shock, that they were on the threshold of a new style of living. For an unspecified period of time they were going to be alone with their children for whom they were now going to be solely responsible. All these wives were taking on the role of single parents at a time when they also had to cope with the legal system. At the same time, they were aware that their children needed both socio-emotional

support and some explanations about their fathers' disappearances. Again, these wives had to engage in impression management. Information had to be given to the children which might preserve their images of their fathers as "just normal like anybody else's."

Almost all the women in the study population expressed fears about their children. What concerned them most was that the children not suffer as a result of their fathers' arrests. Consequently, wives reported, they were quick to react to possible community hostility. No matter how tolerant the women's communities were, they anticipated that there would be some people who would stigmatize their children because of their fathers. Therefore, a large proportion of wives wanted to prepare their children - especially if they were of school age - for any possible form of stigmatization.

This was a realistic stance. Mothers of school-age children frequently reported that their children were periodically stigmatized by other children and/or teachers:

There is a teacher at school who won't let Lilly go to the bathroom. When the children are out on the playground and she's in charge of the children, she refuses to let her use the bathroom. She is the only teacher that refuses her. She's the niece of the family that Frank robbed. I might be paranoid but I feel she's taking it out on Lilly... Too many days she comes home with her underwear soaking wet. She has to remain at school feeling wet and uncomfortable.

During arrest and initial incarceration, the women had to decide what and how they would tell their children about their husbands' situations. What they did depended, in large measure, on how old the children were. Very young children recognized that their fathers were gone, but they were unsure what "arrest" or "jail" meant. It was therefore easier to conceal information from pre-school children. Seven wives practiced some form of deception in doing this. Some told their children nothing about

their fathers' arrest and imprisonment. Others simply avoided the issue by telling them that their fathers were somewhere other than prison, e.g., in the hospital, away at work, or at school. Most women reported that some deception was necessary because their children were too young to understand. These deceptions, they felt, would permit children to maintain images of their fathers as normal, conventional people. But sometimes these did not work out. Many women were aware that their children could pick up information through neighborhood gossip or by overhearing adults. These wives, therefore, attempted to design their children's environments to maintain secrecy. Wives, however, were not entirely certain as to how well this deception worked.

Children of school age were likely to have witnessed their fathers' arrests or to have heard about them from adults. They were therefore likely to ask questions about their fathers' situations. Under these circumstances, wives were not likely to conceal information:

I don't lie to the kids and when they ask questions, I tell them up front and handle it as it comes. Jason has heard something bad about his father. He has heard many bad things, in fact. When he comes and mentions it to me, I say, "Yes" he did it and I tell them to wait for the court to make its verdict and then we can talk about it.

If mothers decided to tell their children the truth, they were walking a precarious tightrope. In doing so, they hoped their children would continue to ascribe the master status "father" to their husbands, and assign less importance to their status as "criminal." Many old timers shared the details of their husbands' criminal behavior and arrests with their children regardless of age. In doing this, nine old timers and four neophytes placed great emphasis upon the temporary nature of their husbands' situations. The common message was that the men had done some "bad" things, but that they would not always do these activities:

Q: Has Barry's going to jail affected the kids?

A: They are too small. There aren't any problems. Sally knew he was in jail. I told her. She'd ask me where is Daddy? and I said "Daddy has been a bad boy and when he is a good boy, they will let him out." I won't lie to the kids. I don't believe in ever lying to them. My sister doesn't tell her child. I want to be honest with them.

The old timers also more or less assumed that their children were aware of their fathers' criminal behavior and had already devised their own accounts. According to these same old timers, their children took their fathers' arrests in stride:

I was worried when Cliff got busted back in St. Johnsbury for driving without a license because of people talking and she was going to kindergarten. It was a very small town, and the people didn't want the jail there. We went to the laundromat and this little kid said, "My mommy said that your daddy's back in jail," and Kim said, "I love him and don't you say things or I'll slap you in the mouth!" So I said to myself, hey, she can handle it. I don't know how frequently it happens.

On the other hand, neophytes were more likely to flounder and feel uncertain about the kinds of explanations to give to children. Most were disoriented by the enormity of their husbands' crimes and the drama of arrest. In response to their own feelings of shock and bewilderment, they were likely to disclose some information but were anxious about the adequacy of these explanations. In general, neophytes were uncertain as to how to effectively manage their husbands' stigma for their children's sake.

Wives were also likely to take the kinds of crimes their husbands had committed into consideration in deciding the amount of information to disclose to their children. When the men had committed property crimes, wives were more likely to tell their children the circumstances of their husbands' arrests and to answer questions than they were under other

circumstances. Wives of sexual offenders were more likely to be uncertain as to what to tell the children. Partial disclosure or covering up was used with the children of sex offenders. Wives did tell children where their fathers were, but they tended to conceal most details:

I kept asking myself, what am I going to say to Joyce. I don't know how you tell a nine year old girl: "Your Dad raped two women." I just told her that her Daddy had hurt two women when he was all mixed up. Then I told her that "Dad was very sick in the head and hurt two people. He needs help and how he can get it." I left it at that.

By contrast, the three wives whose husbands have criminally abused them were not in the least reluctant to provide details. While informing the children about their fathers, these wives tended to describe this behavior as socially unacceptable. Accordingly, these wives were likely to describe the children's fathers as unredeemable, "bad," "no-good bastards," "sickies," or "turkies." According to two of these wives, their children accepted these definitions, since these children had sometimes, themselves, been abused.

As a rule, wives do not take community reaction into consideration in their decisions as to whether or not to tell children about their fathers - although wives who reside in crime-tolerant neighborhoods are likely to be more matter-of-fact.

6.7 WIVES' CONTACTS WITH AGENCIES OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Arrest is the first official step in the criminalization process. As men pass through other stages, they undergo a series of status transformations. When they are imprisoned, they assume social identities of "prisoners." In some ways, wives share their husbands' status transformations: when husbands are officially labelled as

criminals, their discredited and devalued statuses can diffuse onto their wives.

There are, of course, differences between wives' and husbands' statuses. Prisoners experience stigma as ongoing. Wives' sense of shame or stigma is neither cumulative nor central to their lives. However, because they cannot avoid being associated with their husbands in these contexts, wives' encounters with the criminal justice system periodically and persistently open them up to stigmatization. It is therefore important to examine what role police or prison personnel play in the general diffusion of social stigma to prisoners' families.

6.7.1 Police

When witnessing their husbands' arrests, wives reported that they experienced not only anxiety, but stigma. Eight wives reported that the police had treated them as "discreditable by association" while arrests were going on.

Whenever they took place in front of them, arrests had a nightmarish quality for the wives. This became even more true if the police treated wives as "discreditable by association." Those six wives whose husbands were dealing in drugs and/or stolen goods were most likely to experience their husbands' arrests as not only sudden and disturbing, but as stigmatizing. In many cases, this was a result of the fact that the police felt free to devastate their possessions while searching for drugs or stolen goods:

We were both sleeping when the cops came in. Two creeps with shotguns came into the house first. All of a sudden the house became a madhouse with cops swarming all over the place. We were told to sit in the kitchen. The house was a mess. They took everything apart. They even took the fish tank apart and took the filter out of the tank. Some of my fish died. It was a mess! they looked through everything. Later, I discovered that someone had put a bug on one of the curtains.

They wouldn't let me get dressed. I asked them if I could go into my room and put on some clothes. They wouldn't let me. They got their jollies out of seeing me nude. For most of the time they were here they had me sit in the kitchen nude. They let me get dressed when they got good and ready. And then they insisted that one of the cops had to be in the room with me when I got dressed.

After experiences like this, wives felt shamed. Their sense of degradation was compounded when they were informed by the police - as they often were - that they had to go to the station for questioning. Being interrogated by police officers often was both discrediting and disorienting. Neophytes were more likely than old timers to react with shame, bewilderment and fear to the experience since they usually had little information about how they ought to deal with police.

However, in the majority of cases - where arrests were treated as routine and undramatic - wives were unlikely to report that the police treated them as discreditable and devalued. Instead, wives whose husbands were arrested in this fashion tended to see prison visiting as the most stigma-conferring type of event.

The guards are very hostile. They aren't friendly and they don't seem to be glad you're coming visiting. I got the real feeling that we're no different than those on the inside. We're just one more wind that they have to let in and out.

6.7.2 The Prison System

Most accounts of prison life focus on how prisoners adapt to a system that has been primarily designed for their punishment. To the extent that stigma is an issue, most accounts deal with it in relation to the prisoners themselves. Very little has been said about the extent to which wives share their husbands' situation and how the structure of prison visiting, as well as prison policies, confer stigma upon their women and children. How this comes about - how the structure of prisons,

themselves, confers "courtesy stigma" on prisoners' families - is critical to a larger understanding of the impact of the criminalization process.

6.7.3 Vermont's Prisons

At the door of every center in Vermont is a list of regulations that pertain to visiting. Each prison system has its own rules which determine visiting days, length of visiting, degree of physical contact allowed between prisoners and visitors, and goods that can be brought into prison. While these "house rules" do vary from one facility to another, they have one characteristic in common: an emphasis on security. Wives consistently reported that greater emphasis was placed on security than on things which would encourage spouses to reaffirm their marital ties.

This is true in that, in Vermont, facilities range from the most to the least restrictive. In the "closed" St. Albans facility, known for handling "intransigent" prisoners, security is the tightest. Rules and regulations for visiting are detailed and intended to strictly control all aspects of prisoner and visitor behavior. There are written rules, for instance, as to when prisoners and visitors can embrace or kiss: physical contact can only occur at the beginning and end of visits. Other rules relate to utilizing the bathrooms, where visitors can sit, how children are to behave, how loudly prisoners and visitors can argue, and so forth. St. Albans' house rules also define contraband. In practice, contraband is anything the prison administrative staff designates as undesirable for prisoners to possess. The list is long - ranging from weapons, alcohol, and hard and soft drugs, to items, such as chewing gum, that can be used as escape implements, to items that will eventually clutter the prisoners' rooms. In order to prevent

contraband from being smuggled into the facility, all visitors are frisked and checked by guards standing at the entrance. All visitors then go through a metal detector, and all handbags, shopping bags, and packages are searched. If the institution is suspicious that a visitor is holding contraband, then the guards can demand that that visitor be strip-searched. Strip searches are done in private areas within the prison facility. Female staff members strip-search women visitors. Ordinarily, a visitor undresses and then permits staff members to examine all her body cavities.

Security is also emphasized in the more "open" correctional facilities, such as the Chittenden Community Correctional Center or St. Johnsbury. There are similar house rules, but they are less stringently enforced. Unlike St. Albans, children are generally allowed to walk around, but adults must remain seated. As at St. Albans, the CCCC also has rules on decorum which prohibit loud conversations, physical violence, or disruptive behavior. By contrast, at Windsor Farms - the most "open" part of the Vermont prison system - the house rules only relate to physical contact, to the kinds of clothes visitors must wear (e.g., men must wear trousers, shirts and shoes, and women must wear dresses or slacks and blouses and shoes) and to the requirement that visitors leave all packages, gifts, money - and anything that can contain contraband - with the prison guards on duty.

Shakedowns vary in thoroughness from prison to prison. At St. Johnsbury they generally involve only a quick frisk and a quick turn through the metal detector. At Windsor Farms, there is only occasional frisking or searches of packages.⁴ The other centers frisk people,

⁴Wives reported that Windsor Farms does not utilize metal detectors or strip searches as part of its usual control procedures.

utilize metal detectors, and search packages on a regular and predictable basis. None of these "open" facilities seem to employ strip searches, but all officially reserve the right to do so and provisions have been made for them.

6.7.4 Visiting

No matter which of these facilities wives encountered, they immediately learned that they did not have the same status as the prison personnel: there is a caste-like distinction between "those who carry the keys" and "those who don't" - prisoners and their wives. Thus wives' statuses were defined by the fact that they were married to members of the lowest tier in the prison stratification system.

Vermont's prisons are not populated by conventionally-oriented people who firmly subscribe to conforming behavior, and the folk who are likely to visit prisoners are not all likely to be committed to a law-abiding lifestyle. In the past, some of these visitors violated conventional norms of behavior. Over the years, these incidents helped shape prison rules and procedures for dealing with every aspect of visitor control. The bureaucratic style used in enforcing these rules is probably the only effective way to cope with the problems of control: the process thus takes precedence over the individual. The very structure of the prisons themselves, then, embodies assumptions that visitors are probable norm violators and should be treated accordingly. The expectation is that any wife who comes for visiting day must be the same type of person the institution was set up to handle in the first place.

It is through the enforcement of these rules and regulations that wives felt they received the message that they do not share the same status as prison personnel. They also claimed that these rules and

regulations set them up for experiences in which they were downgraded, humiliated and stigmatized: the requirement that wives only walk in certain areas, ask guards' permission to use the bathrooms, remain seated in visiting rooms, obey guards' orders, and so forth. Their self respect was further threatened by ever-present reminders that guards and other prison staff do not trust prisoners' wives, that their every act and word is viewed with suspicion, and that guards' words and actions are beyond reproach.

Another prison policy which conveys the same message is that visitors must wait to be processed by the guards before seeing their husbands. All wives reported that, at one time or another, they shared the prison entry-way with other wives and visitors while waiting to be searched for contraband. The majority of women reported that this herding together made them acutely aware that they shared a common stigmatized status with other prisoners' wives.

6.7.5 Contamination

Half of the women felt contaminated by their contacts with other prisoners' wives. Twelve neophytes held unfavorable opinions about the other wives, whereas only two old timers expressed similar feelings. During the earliest stage of their husbands' imprisonment, the neophytes came to visiting under the assumption that other wives must be suspicious, inherently discreditable, and as committed to criminal activities as their husbands. They were also more likely than old timers to point out how extensively other prisoners' wives had assimilated into the prison subculture. As a rule, neophytes tended to believe that other wives were old cons, since they seemed so "prison wise":

It depresses me to see the other people come in to visit. It

was like an in-group occasion. Everyone knows everyone else. They took the visiting and the men's incarceration nonchalantly and there I was with my heart in my mouth the whole time. The visitors would sit around before visiting and gossip about the guards and the jails. It was like a subculture of visitors. They would associate with each other on the outside and they would get very friendly with one another. I didn't want anything to do with it. I never identified myself with it. I never identified myself with anything -- high school, college or jail.

Another reason some wives gave for rejecting other prisoners' wives was their hard living styles: partying, bar hopping, and having sexual liaisons while their husbands were in jail. A few wives observed that other prisoners' wives seemed to be slow-witted, passive, meek or dependent. A neophyte noted:

Most of them had a lot of kids for their age, they were too young to have so many kids. I felt bad because I don't think that they realize that they didn't have to stay with their husbands. I got the impression that they didn't know what else to do. They all seem to be amazingly patient with their husbands and what they do and what they put them through. They are always adapting to their husbands and the situations that they create. They seem to adapt very well. They seem to be used to it. One of the girls would joke about who's going to be strip searched. I wasn't experienced and I got the impression that they were. I made no lasting relationships with them.

Wives tended to use two strategies to deal with the sense of contamination they felt when associating with other prisoners' wives: (1) dissociation and (2) association. In dissociation wives attempt to isolate themselves from contacts, situations, and involvements in which disavowal is difficult. Thus, they (1) avoided associating socially with other wives by remaining at the periphery of the group of visitors; (2) minimized interaction with them; and (3) only gave rides to other wives when asked.

Four square-jane neophytes found prison especially repugnant and therefore isolated themselves as much as possible from other wives,

resisted forming any ties to them, and believed that isolating themselves maximized their opportunity to maintain a conventional identity.

Association also occurred. As more conventional, working class neophytes became acclimated to the prison world, they were less likely to attempt to dissociate themselves from others. Instead, they came to perceive prisoners' wives as a varied group and to form acquaintanceships with other conventionally-oriented women - while continuing to avoid hard liners.

Fifteen wives reported that they formed acquaintanceships or friendships with other prisoners' wives. Contact was usually made in the waiting area. Relationships formed in this way were usually short-term and terminated with the husbands' release from a particular prison. By contrast, old timers - especially prison-wise old cons - made a point of contacting and associating with other prisoners' wives as much as possible, especially if they are also committed to "hard living."

6.7.6 The Prison Guard as Stigmatizing Agent

The enforcement of prison policies is usually left to the discretion of prison guards. How visiting takes place is, therefore, primarily their concern. House rules for visiting are devised in order to fulfill policies laid down by prison administrators. Since guards will be held responsible for problems that occur, they are likely to treat all visitors as suspicious or untrustworthy. In the course of this, prisoners' wives reported, the prison staff distributed "courtesy stigma" to wives or other visitors.

The guards at the entrance and in the visiting room of a prison are the ones who actually present that prison's face to the streams of wives

who enter on visiting days. Wives sometimes have superficial contacts with other prison staff, but most of their interactions take place with the guards. Guards are held responsible for rule infractions, fights, and disturbances among the wives and their men. Since many regulations are not written down and the penalty system is not completely specified, guards have some discretionary power vis-a-vis prisoners' wives.

On busy days guards must work speedily and efficiently to process the large number of people waiting to get into the visiting room. Many visitors bring packages, gifts, and laundry for prisoners. Ideally, each person should be as thoroughly searched as the rules demand. To do a thorough job, the guards must search all the visitors, their packages, books, shopping bags, etc. Given the time restrictions for visiting, this cannot be done. Therefore, the guards must exercise discretion as to which visitors to search and how thoroughly.

Twenty-one wives' accounts agreed that guards' decisions as to whom to search were not based on any strong suspicions about which visitors were bringing in contraband. Instead, these wives reported, guards based their decisions on presuppositions about wives' characters: (1) whether they were "good" or "bad" wives; (2) their demeanor; (3) the other visitors they associated with; (4) their husbands' prison behavior; and (5) their own criminal records, if any.

Prison guards, in effect, were perceived as categorizing prisoners' wives as either "whores" or "good wives." A "whore" would be a wife who liked bar hopping or partying, or had short-term sexual affairs while her husband was in jail. A "good wife" would be a conventionally-oriented wife who guards viewed as suffering from her husband's criminal activities.

Wives reported that guards' judgments as to whether a woman was a "whore" or a "good wife" depended, in no small measure, on their outward demeanor. If wives acted deferentially and respectfully to guards, if their children were well mannered and neatly dressed, if they obeyed all rules and regulations, did not swear, and were blatantly supportive of their husbands, they were more likely to be thought of as "good-wives." If wives were fractious or obdurate, acted tough or uncooperative, were obviously "stoned on some drug," did their own thing or acted as if they did not give a damn whether their men were in or out, they got categorized as "whores."

Once guards had decided where a particular woman fit, they could and did foist these roles on them by treating them in particular ways. "Good wives," for instance, were less likely to be searched than "whores." One "old con" described how guards go about forming these judgments:

The jail is a whole different community. The guards are the first ones to define the roles of the women. When you first start coming to visiting days, you find out that everyone knows everyone else. The guards look at you and classify you in two ways. You're either a cheat or a super-wife or superwoman. When the women play the super-wife role, it sometimes becomes a farce. They try not to show their anger and it eats them up. It's the role that is forced on them. The whole complex forces these roles - the guards, the wives and other husbands, etc. play a part in defining your role. For example, the guards treated me with respect because they saw me as a super-wife. I was at first the super-wife, I stood with Ed right or wrong. If the guards see you as a whore, they treat you that way.

Fourteen women also observed that prison guards appeared to make judgments based on whether or not they associated with other wives whose conduct they perceived as "suspicious." If wives were friendly towards these women, then they, too, could acquire this reputation by association. The prison guards would then treat these wives in ways they thought were appropriate for "whores." For instance, an old con talked about how the guards' treatment towards her changed when she became friendly with a known "whore":

A woman that I know, Lola, was one of these women who have four or five guys on a string. I tried to be friendly with her even though she's not my kind of person. She lived in town when I lived in St. Albans and so we began to see each other. They began to get a little fresh with me because I was coming with Lola. They thought that I had crossed the line and was starting to go to local bar joints because that was her game.

Nine wives mentioned that guards used wives' behavior towards their husbands in forming judgments about them. Many of these wives reported that prison guards made a point of observing how men acted towards their families and how wives acted towards their men.

Nine prisoners' wives also reported that guards appeared to form decisions to search them on the basis of their husbands' in-prison performance or reputation:

Q: What kinds of rules do they make in St. Albans, and do they keep the rules straight for visitors?

A: It depends on who you are. Like it's supposed to be no more than three visitors for each prisoner, but I've seen sixteen or seventeen people come in to visit with one prisoner. It depends on who you are. I get guards who treat me pretty decent because Frank's a big man. It's absurd!

Finally, according to four wives' accounts, prison guards searched and supervised them carefully as a result of their past criminal records.

Most wives reported that they found the process of searching for contraband, in itself, stigmatizing. Nineteen wives noted that many guards made derogatory statements towards them or acted in an inconsiderate and disrespectful manner while it was going on. These wives felt that they, too, were being treated as "criminals":

I didn't like going to the CCCC. The guards treat you like you're an inmate. They're so snotty to you and they give out smart remarks. If you bring stuff in, they go through the stuff. When they look at you, they look like they think we're beneath them.

At St. Albans, they make you feel like you are dirt. We have to go through this detector. Sometimes they like to ridicule you by making the buzzer ring for any object so that you have to go back and forth through the detector. They think it is funny.

Strip-searching only took place at St. Albans, the most "closed" prison. Wives considered this security measure, in and of itself, to be thoroughly humiliating and degrading. All the wives who visited St. Albans responded in this way. Twenty-six wives had husbands who had been incarcerated in St. Albans at one time or another, so that the threat of being humiliated in this way was real to them.

Nine of the wives in the study population readily admitted that they had smuggled contraband into St. Albans and three other centers. However, when wives talked about strip searches, they usually presented themselves as innocent when these occurred. In fact, strip searches were almost universally described as indignities performed on innocent wives.

Strip searches are only officially performed at St. Albans when institutional personnel have "reasonable cause" to suspect that visitors may be smuggling contraband. These suspicions are often correct. All nine women who brought contraband into the visiting rooms - as well as one other woman - had been strip searched. By contrast, sixteen women who never brought in contraband had never been searched. The women's accounts indicate that perhaps the suspicions of prison personnel were valid, and that they were strip searching those people who were doing exactly those things strip searches were intended to prevent.

Not all wives whose husbands had been imprisoned at St. Albans had, of course, been strip searched. A few wives suggested that women labelled as "good wives" were those who appeared to be "square janes" or living settled and conventional lifestyles. These women were seldom strip-searched. Hard living women frequently were. One hard liver recalled:

Q: How did you feel about the strip searches?

A: I felt degraded. It was especially degrading when I had my period because you have to remove your tampons in front of them. One time when I was being strip searched, a man looked into the window. Now they assured us that no men could witness the searches. They consider me the ring leader because I know my rights and I fight them all the way.

It's degrading. When I was strip searched, I signed the paper under protest. I signed my name and would write "under protest." Lieutenant Barr has made some nasty comments to me like "Women like you should be strip searched." I put grievances in on this harassment and on the man who looked in through the window at me. I know their games and it pisses them off.

The other criterion used by guards which was most frequently mentioned by prisoners' wives was the kind of visitors with whom the women associated. Guards were also likely to strip search women who associated with hard liners. If, for any reason, a wife came to be known as one who had smuggled contraband, she was always strip-searched at St. Albans:

They treat me like an inmate. I was accused of bringing in pot. They know Mark smokes pot and they think that I am always bringing it in. They have stripped me, his little sister who is seven years old, and the baby too.

I brought up a box with pot hidden in it and they found it. They have caught Mark smoking pot and now think that it is I who brings it in. I only tried to bring it in that one time.

They have been strip searching me since December 25th. Wright says that they'll continue to do it at every visit.

Wives' reactions to strip-searching were varied but similar: they experienced strip searching as embarrassing, disorienting, humiliating and degrading. It became a stigma-provoking event. Other wives - particularly those who had been stripped many times - reported that they felt a mixture of anger and hopelessness. The ordering of events was completely out of their control. Over and over again, they reported that nothing they did could alter the impression of them as "suspicious."

How the prison staff (always women) performed the search had an impact on wives' reactions to this procedure. Most wives maintained that, in some real sense, the guards performing strip searches had done something improper or unjust. At the same time, they felt the guards had to do it: it was their job. What provoked their anger - and feelings that they were being stigmatized - were the spiteful or derogatory comments guards made to them. This is when wives experienced most shame and humiliation. When guards performed this procedure in a neutral and impartial manner, the women generally expressed less immediate dislike for it. Yet underlying all their reactions was a feeling of righteous indignation, at having to undergo this procedure in the first place:

Well, you walk into a room and there are two women in the room with you. They ask you to remove all your clothes and place them on the floor. Then they take a flashlight and shine it in your eyes, up your nose and in your opened mouth. I don't know why they do that. Then they ask you to let your hair hang loose and then you're supposed to hold it up so that they can shine the flashlight into your hair around your neck. Then they shine the flashlight under your armpits. Then they ask you to lift one breast, one at a time and they shine the flashlight under your breast. Then they ask you to run your fingers around your belly button in such a way that you place pressure on the skin in that area. Do they really think you're going to be carrying something in your belly button? Then they run the flashlight through your pubic hair. After that they ask you to bend over with your hands touching the ground. They ask you to "crack a smile" and they bend over with the flashlight and examine your ass hole and then they look at your vagina with the flashlight. Sometimes when I'm like this, I'm tempted to fart. After this, they make you stand for 15 to 20 minutes while they check your clothes. The two female officers like to make a lot of sarcastic comments at this time. They make cracks like "It's time to buy a new bra, don't you think?" or "This underwear certainly is soiled." If you have your period, then you have to stand there with the blood flowing down your legs. It's gross! They don't care.

As this quote illustrates so vividly, those women who had been strip-searched experienced a common underlying injury: the violation of self. Some wives even reported that they experienced a sense of having been attacked in a sacred, inner place. They feel violated and contaminated

by being strip searched. Strip searches crystallized a sense of injustice among both women who knew women who had been searched, and those who had actually been searched themselves.

The final indignity for many wives was the way in which their packages were searched. Ironically, wives were only liable to having their packages and pocket books searched if they tried to fulfill their husbands' requests for approved goods. By playing the role of a "good wife," i.e., delivering goods to their husbands, they left themselves vulnerable to perpetual inspection and, thereby, to stigmatizing encounters with prison personnel. If guards inspecting these packages found something "unusual," they could further expose themselves to the risk of a strip-search. Wives employed a variety of accommodative strategies in order to reduce anticipated stigma from these encounters. The two most common strategies were "putting on a performance," and dissociation from other stigmatized wives.

6.7.7 Putting on a Performance

Most wives reported that they became aware of the criteria guards used in judging whether or not they were "suspicious." Thirteen wives "put on a performance" in order to attempt to shape or alter guards' perceptions: they attempted to hide any visible signs that they were prisoners' wives; tried to appear "conventional" in their clothing; acted extraordinarily polite and self-effacing; and spoke in a respectful and respectable way. A "square jane" described how she successfully "performed" for the prison guards:

I was horrified at the idea of being strip searched and I tried to make it obvious that I was not smuggling in drugs. I dressed like I was going to my office to work. Most of the guards there were a lot nicer to me than they were to others. I guess it's because of the way I acted. A lot of the visitors were very aggressive. I just acted as though they were any other

worker in a public place. I talked to the guards about the weather and some of them would be nice to me.

Ten wives who "put on performances" deliberately exaggerated their feminine characteristics whenever they were smuggling contraband to their husbands or when they intended to be sexually intimate with their husbands. The more prison-wise wives seemed to have developed skills needed in handling the guards. Most neophytes had not. Yet the younger, more naive and middle class-looking wives could learn to make use of their physical appearance to get away with rule infractions.

6.7.8 Dissociation

Since strip searching is an especially anxiety-laden and distasteful procedure, many wives deliberately attempted to disassociate themselves from other wives so as to avoid being stripped. Many wives hesitated to give rides to, converse with, or even stand in the prison entry with any woman who had been strip-searched. Some wives reported that they, themselves, had been strip searched as a result of associating with women who had.

6.8 MANAGING STIGMA

At the time of their husbands' arrest and initial incarceration, shame and stigma are not central but situational issues in wives' lives. They are more likely to worry about the likelihood of experiencing stigma than they are to actually encounter stigma-producing events. Feelings of shame and stigma appear to dissipate quite rapidly since they have even more pressing concerns to handle, e.g., their husbands' legal affairs, their own lives, their households, and their children.

Yet, upon occasion, wives do encounter stigma-producing events. This

is most likely to occur in prison towns than within crime-tolerant or more conventionally-oriented communities. A significant number of wives reported that their parents initially reacted hostilely to their daughters' impending marriages to men with criminal records. These initial parental reactions became tempered as they continued to interact with the men. However, at the time of arrest and imprisonment, old timers' families were likely to act in an hostile manner and offered little or no assistance to the women. By contrast, neophytes were more likely to receive emotional and practical support from their families.

To deal with both anticipated and actual stigma, most wives employed a series of techniques to control the disclosure of information: (1) affirming their husbands' situation; (2) avoiding likely stigma-provoking situations; (3) covering up their husbands' situation; (4) "jailing" - associating primarily with prisoners' wives.

Simply by virtue of wives' connections with their "criminal" husbands, they were vulnerable to stigma-conferring events whenever they visited their husbands. Almost all wives reported that they felt stigmatized and discredited by the kinds of house rules the prisons established for visiting.

Chapter 7

MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS INSIDE: VISITING AT THE PRISON

The visits affected my whole life. After a visit, I was affected the day after and maybe into the week, I felt affected. Then I would begin to look forward to the next visit. It affected my whole life and my moods depended on when I was going to visit him and then on dealing with the visits.

7.1 BACKGROUND

Prison visiting can be paradoxical. The literature indicates that, for wives, it is, at once, a source of enormous satisfaction and degradation, cruelty and unsettling anxiety. Visits can become a constant reminder of both fractured lives and the permanence of marital ties. Visiting is paradoxical, then, in that the ways prison systems structure visits both undermines and strengthens marital ties.

Yet no matter how paradoxical it is for them, prisoners' wives tend to remain strongly committed to visiting. In many cases, it becomes a central aspect of their lives. This chapter will examine the paradoxical nature of visiting in the context of the multi-dimensional social world of prisons. We will see how, within the constraints of prison life, relationships can be strengthened or undermined as prisoners and their wives attempt to resume remnants of their pre-prison marital patterns and their roles as husbands and wives.

Major attention has been given to prisoners' pre-imprisonment identities - especially to their ethnic and racial components - and how

these influence the kinds of adaptations men make to prison.¹ Here I show that, in the course of criminalization, men have not been completely "stripped" of their pre-prison identities as husbands. Thus they are prepared to resume these roles when their wives come to visit in their identities as wives. In the course of this, both identities, as we will see, are re-activated and sometimes redefined. This contributes to solidifying marital relations, as well as neutralizing partners' identities as "prisoners" and "prisoners' wives."

Although there is a literature on prison visitation, it is a very fragmentary one.² Here we will attempt to remedy this situation by focusing on the complex interactions taking place between wives and their incarcerated husbands. We will examine three areas in depth: (1) renewed courtship; (2) sharing household decisions; and (3) arrangements made to supply husbands with both approved goods and contraband.

¹The following researchers have explicitly discussed the relationship between prisoners' pre-prison criminal identities and adaptations made to prison: Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Irwin, 1970. More recent research studies have also explored prisoner's ethnic and racial identities and the kinds of adaptations prisoners make. See Carroll, 1974; Davidson, 1974; Ianni, 1974; and Jacobs, 1977.

²Some attention has been given in the literature to the relationship between the viability of prisoners' marital ties and prison visiting. See, for instance, Brodsky, 1975; Burstein, 1977; Holt and Miller, 1972. Some exploration also has been given to the problems of prison visiting by: Levy and Miller, 1971; Schwartz and Weintraub, 1974.

7.2 CONSTRAINTS ON PRISON VISITING

As it is structured, visiting benefits both the correctional system and inmates' families. The Vermont Department of Corrections assumes that visits act to preserve, strengthen and stabilize prisoners' marital ties. Administrators usually assume that visits allow prisoners to maintain contacts with their wives and families and that such contacts have a positive effect on prisoners' performance both inside correctional facilities and while on parole.

Although maximizing prisoners' contacts with their families is a formal goal of the Vermont prison system, each unit puts limits on visiting and, taken together, these shape the kinds of interactions that take place between prisoners and their wives. As we noted earlier, each prison has rules and regulations which determine visiting days, length of visiting, degree of allowed physical contact, prisoners' and visitors' conduct, and materials that can be brought into prisons. While these "house rules" vary, they tend to emphasize security. In fact, they often appear to do this even when it conflicts with the stated goal of encouraging prisoners to reaffirm their marital ties.

All prison systems place limits on the frequency of visits. Although there is some variation in days and hours, all facilities in Vermont arrange for visiting at least two days a week. In all facilities, except Windsor Farms, this includes a maximum of one day during the work week, and two days on the weekend. At Windsor Farms, visiting is restricted to Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Limits are also placed on the length of visits and these do not vary a great deal from prison to prison: in all Vermont prisons, except at Windsor Farms, visiting hours range from one to three hours. At Windsor Farms visiting hours are sometimes extended to four hours.

Visiting is considered a privilege that prisoners earn and, as such, can be revoked. In all Vermont correctional facilities the number of visits each prisoner is permitted is based on his security classification. For instance, at St. Albans, a prisoner who has been classified as needing minimum security is allowed four visits per week for up to three hours at a time. A prisoner confined to the special adjustment unit, by contrast, is permitted one visit per week for one hour.³

Prison facilities range from the most to the least restrictive. In the most "closed" facility, St. Albans, the rules and regulations governing visiting are designed to provide strict control over the behavior of both prisoners and visitors.

7.2.1 Physical Facilities and Atmosphere

Physical facilities for visiting vary. At St. Albans they take place in a very light, airy and rather pleasant cafeteria. Couples can sit at whatever tables they choose. An urn is provided from which the men or their wives can obtain hot water for coffee, tea or cocoa. Prisoners and their visitors are not permitted to leave their chairs unless they want hot water or to use the bathrooms. Prison guards continuously supervise the prisoners and their visitors.

St. Johnsbury and the CCCC provide large, barren, and drab rooms for visiting. At both centers, chairs are placed helter-skelter around the rooms since prisoners and their visitors can choose where they want to sit. There are no coffee urns, but there are vending machines that are

³At Windsor Farms, all prisoners are permitted to receive visitors during the designated times.

accessible with guards' permission. At Woodstock, visiting takes place in the library, which tends to be drab and uninviting. There are very uncomfortable chairs and a few tables. Neither coffee urns or vending machines are accessible. At all these facilities, visiting is also conducted under the watchful eye of at least one guard.

Even the more "open" correctional facilities - such as CCCC and St. Johnsbury - emphasize security. There are similar house rules to those at more "closed" centers, but these are less stringently enforced. At the CCCC, unlike St. Albans, children are generally allowed to walk around, but adults must remain seated. As at St. Albans, the CCCC also lists rules of decorum which prohibit loud conversations, physical violence, or disruptive behavior.⁴ According to wives' reports, Windsor Farms treats visiting in an entirely different way: it encourages men to have more access to the grounds and, to some extent, the community. Therefore, in order to maximize prisoners' sense of freedom, visiting is less physically structured. For instance, during the spring and summer months, wives and husbands may stay indoors or go out at will. The husbands can choose to talk and play games with their children on the picnic grounds, families can choose to have barbecues outdoors, and most important, they can find places to be alone in somewhat unsupervised privacy. All wives reported that even though visiting rules are similar to those in other prisons, at Windsor Farms there is greater opportunity for physical and verbal intimacy with their husbands.

Generally, the wives in the study population felt that, in all Vermont prisons except Windsor Farms, visiting is not an easy event. Twenty-

⁴At Windsor farms, the most "open" prison, the house rules only pertain to physical contact, to the kinds of clothes visitors wear, and to the handling of packages, gifts, and money.

seven of them pointed out three important constraints: (1) lack of privacy; (2) time restrictions; and (3) lack of freedom of movement. Prisons, all the wives reported, appeared to be more concerned with fulfilling custodial goals than with maximizing interaction between spouses. Since time and privacy are prerequisites for any kind of authentic emotional communication, lack of them makes these encounters somewhat artificial.

Visiting rooms are usually crowded with adults and children. All wives said that they were forced to overhear conversations and arguments between other visitors and prisoners. Crying children who cannot move around freely raise the noise level even further. Neophytes, in particular, find themselves distracted by the noise, arguments, and other goings-on:

During visiting, I got the feeling that people were aware of each other constantly. They were always watching each other. There was a lot more going on there than I could imagine. It was all so paranoid. For many of the inmates, it was the only time that they saw other inmates that they knew. Visiting became a vehicle for sending messages, for doing battle with one another. I was so busy trying to figure out what was going on that it was hard for me to pay attention to Bill. And I saw how they were watching me to see what I was doing. I really felt uncomfortable. I felt that people were tuning in to what we said so I didn't want to talk to Bill there. So I began to hide things. Thinking of visiting still gives me the goose bumps.

Sixteen wives reported that privacy was further undermined by the presence and surveillance of prison guards. Correctional officers are present in visiting rooms to control communication and sexual intimacy, as well as to prevent the passing of contraband. Needless to say, many wives felt inhibited and unable to communicate freely or spontaneously with their men.

Given the lack of privacy, ten wives reported that sexually intimate

couples distracted as well as upset them. They found it particularly difficult to be forced to observe other wives and girlfriends attempting to go beyond the permitted levels of sexual intimacy. Those wives who did not want to participate in sexual activities in public were most likely to complain about them. An old timer, whose husband had repeatedly been in prison, sums up many wives' reactions:

Then I have to sit there and see the wives crying throughout the visiting time or if they're not crying, they are fighting with their men 'til we leave. The little children are running around and they can't understand why they are there...You're so close to your man and you're only allowed to kiss and hold hands. But some of them go beyond that and it's disgusting with so many kids around to see them. It's very sad to go there and get locked in that room. And the people smoke there and it's a screen of smoke.

7.2.2 Time and Freedom to Interact

Almost all wives reported that the time specified for visiting also placed unnecessary constraints on communication. Thirteen wives specifically noted that visiting took place within a "painfully" short period of time, and no allowances were made for their needs for more extensive time with their mates. Seven wives also mentioned that no additional time was granted even though they had had to travel great distances to get there. One wife put it well: "What can be said when one is limited to two hours at a time, sometimes a little more?"

Finally, wives wanted to utilize visiting as a time for families to be together - including children. Yet, at all Vermont prisons except Windsor Farms, visiting was not structured so as to allow children freedom of movement. Children's behavior was supposed to be regulated by their parents, i.e., children were not to play, run, scream or cry, but sit quietly. If they did not, guards could terminate the visit. Thus, wives complained that visiting tended to center on controlling their children:

The kids want to see him and it's hard to keep the kids down and quiet when we're visiting. It's hard to visit with the two kids. I have to chase them around and at the same time try to see him. The guards tell me to keep the kids quiet. They can't be kept quiet. They've taken a long trip and have a lot of energy to get off. There's nothing for them to do but run around aimlessly.

The wives in the study population agreed that visiting was easier at Windsor Farms and St. Johnsbury because guards tended to be less obtrusive. Hence, there was greater opportunity for both verbal and physical intimacy.

Given these constraints, wives reported that they primarily spent visiting times conversing with their men. However, since visits were structured so that they had a defined beginning and end, all the components of wife-husband interaction had to be tightly packed in. Consequently, anxieties and tensions tended to build up. Both spouses came to face each other with their own anxieties, doubts, and fears. Pressures had built up since they had seen each other. Thus, eight neophytes and four old timers reported that conversing with their husbands could be very difficult and that they would experience, in close succession, anger and attachment, quarrels and remorse, vicious fighting and passionate reconciliation.

Regardless of the visiting structure, a small minority of women related that, for the first times, they began to communicate with their husbands. Six neophytes reported that they were able to get closer to their men than they had on the streets. Relationships appeared to strengthen for these women during visiting, especially the newlyweds.

This intensity of interaction is paradoxical, in that it could contribute to both strengthening and undermining marital ties. The paradoxical nature of visiting is most frequently observed in St.

Albans, Chittenden Community Correctional Center and Woodstock where more constraints are placed on couples. Even though wives can have time to speak with their husbands and to renew faith in their marriages, they also reported conversations to be more restrained and arguments more likely to erupt. By contrast, wives were more likely to report that they felt closer to their husbands, were able to communicate in a less restrained manner, and were less argumentative and hostile in the more "open" visiting sites offered by St. Johnsbury and Windsor Farms.

7.3 COURTSHIP AND INTIMACY

Remember when you told me that Rudi had told you everything was going to be sweet like roses when he got back? They promise anything when they're in jail. — A Prisoner's Wife

A recurrent theme that emerges from wives' accounts of visiting is that they and their husbands tended to experience renewed courtship.⁵ Within the constraints involved, couples appear to have gone about reaffirming their marital ties and had achieved a degree of closeness by doing so.

Prior to prison, couples could shape their own sexual behavior. They often based much of their marital relationship on spontaneous sexuality: holding hands, embracing, fondling, and intercourse. By contrast, the prison system only allowed them to interact sexually under very restricted and controlled circumstances.

To fill the void, spouses tended to court one another. Courtship allows them to acknowledge a romantic and sexual attachment to each other. What is unique here, is that courting takes place under the

⁵Holt and Miller, 1972.

surveillance of prison guards who act as adult chaperones. Almost all the wives reported that, during visiting, both they and their husbands tended to be in good moods, to try to be on their best behavior, and to dress in attractive clothes. They were likely to select topics which would make the best impression on each other. Courting also assumed the form of pleas for and declarations of love, flirting and jealousy, and mutual support. There was a feeling of closeness and rapport that made them enjoy each other's company and want to explore and deepen their relationships. Courting also provided the substance for everyday social conversations. For varying lengths of time, the realities of their former relationships could disappear and they could enjoy the "present."

Because visiting is constraining, wives reported that they found talking and flirting with their husbands enjoyable. They began to look forward to visiting time as a kind of "date." To some extent, courting could soothe the "pains" of enforced separation, and yet it could also intensify these "pains" since in-prison courting often cannot involve full sexual intimacy.

7.3.1 Sexual Contact

Within the context of courting, couples could participate in various forms of sexual contact. Sixteen wives reported that they did no more than hold hands, hug, or kiss their husbands. Eight wives reported that they had managed to cuddle and fondle with their husbands. Five reported that they had had intercourse.

From wives' accounts, it was clear that the degree of sexual intimacy they were able to achieve was dependent upon guards' willingness to ignore these items. Thus, the kind of sexual contact which occurred varied by the threshold-points of different guards. Moreover, wives

reported that the guards' tolerance varied by prison. At St. Johnsbury, Woodstock, and the CCCC, guards were frequently willing to keep their eyes closed. This was not true at St. Albans. However, even at St. Albans, some wives managed to have intercourse:

The guard closed his eyes and didn't bother us. I would send the kids to someone else to visit and we'd get together. We had sex in the visiting room. I know that the people who were visiting saw us having sex. We'd sit in the corner - way in the corner. I'd get there very early so I'd get the last seat in the visiting room. The guards are nice there.

When the structure of visiting was relatively "open," sexual intimacy could occur more easily. Whenever supervision was reduced, many prisoners and their wives were likely to fondle one another sexually or to have intercourse. According to wives, this sometimes made visiting more enjoyable and exciting, since it involved risk: spouses could be detected engaging in unacceptable acts, and wives chanced pregnancy:

I got pregnant when he was in St. Johnsbury. Well, I wore these gauchos with the crotch that opens up. I wore them whenever I visited. There was a little room off to the side of the visiting area where people would go and ball. We'd all cover for one another. The guards were never in the room. They left us alone to do what we wanted to do. We'd smoke pot and drink and have a ball whenever I could visit. Anyway, I got pregnant as a result. I liked St. Johnsbury. We had a good time on my visits.

Many wives, of course, did not feel that "nice girls" had sexual relations in public. Sex, they felt, was a private matter. They did not alter these beliefs in order to relieve the tensions generated by sexual deprivation:

In the visiting room, everyone sits on their men's laps and they would be mauling each other. I felt that this was pretty gross behavior. I got very cold there and it shook up Phil. I didn't want to fake orgasms like the people are doing on each side of us. And sometimes if you normally embrace, then the guard comes over and separates you. That's completely bizarre.

A few wives were, however, willing to fondle their men sexually, or to be fully intimate with them. Six wives reported that they had only engaged in sexual play in response to pressure from their husbands. A few others reported that they wanted to test the threshold for sexual intimacy - to put one "over on the enemy." Like lovers courting, couples found all kinds of ways to achieve greater sexual intimacy during visiting. However, no matter what degree of sexual contact wives were able to achieve, they, themselves, got little direct satisfaction from it since they had to be continually alert to the movements of the guards and the other visitors.

Since the majority of couples had to cut off the expressive emotional sides of themselves, they could only express this side by communicating their sexual feelings verbally. But they were continually frustrated by this.

For many couples, sexual intimacy became problematic at every visit - with each kiss, with each hug, or with each attempt at sexual play. Many wives related how aware they were that their husbands, more than ever, needed to reassert their identities as men who were important to them. This need was undermined by the visiting situation. In turn, wives were frustrated in that they wanted sexual intimacy for their men's sakes as well as their own: they wanted to demonstrate to their husbands that they still perceived them as attractive and capable of validating them as women.

7.3.2 Effects of Courting

Courting does benefit wives. Renewed courtship can serve to "soothe" sexual deprivation, reinforce couples' faith in their marriages, and reinforce wives' beliefs that visiting their husbands is worthwhile.

At the same time, nineteen women reported stresses and strains derived from enforced separation surfaced during courtship. These often centered around husbands' anxieties about whether or not their wives were being faithful. Wives reported that the question of sexual fidelity tended to provoke arguments during visiting. Their men, to a greater or lesser extent, realized the temptations, conflicts and anguish to which their wives were subject. They seldom believed that their wives could be absolutely faithful. Enforced separation created insecurity among the men, insecurity which was continually reinforced when other prisoners received "Dear John" letters. No matter how "open" or "closed" a prison system, men are sufficiently isolated from their homes for sexual fidelity to become a major issue.

When prisoners heard rumors about their wives' sexual infidelities, most men waited until visiting day to confront them. Six wives who had had sexual liaisons, also waited until they could see their husbands to "confess." For men in prison, learning about their wives' infidelity is equivalent to learning about the loss of an attachment figure. Infidelity is seen as abandonment, and prison compounds this feeling. Many men feel that they are in jeopardy of losing their only satisfying connection to the outside world.

Many of the wives in the study population whose husbands had discovered that they had had sexual liaisons were amazed at the intensity of their fury. Most men reacted by threatening their wives, and some actually attempted to strike them. One old timer, who reluctantly and infrequently visited her husband, recounted his reaction to her infidelity:

I guess he sits in jail and sees other guys' wives doing it. I guess he sat around and thought about it. Who wants to be locked in a room and asked if it's true that you're running around. I told him the truth and he almost strangled me. That was almost

the last time I saw him. I told him I was seeing this guy and he first threw a chair across the room and then he tried to strangle me. I can't remember if I pushed him away or if I stepped on his foot to try to stop him. He told me to leave before he tried to kill me. I understand his hurt feelings. I'd have them too. It scared hell out of me. I didn't want to see him again, I was the only thing he had on the outside world and he finally understood that he didn't have it. Not much any more left.

However, the structure of prison visiting generally placed limitations on the kinds of arguments that could arise. Prison guards do not, as a rule, tolerate any kind of disruptive behavior: either loud arguments or physical abuse. Thus, many wives felt more protected when confessing their infidelities during visiting than they would have in their own homes. Thus, it also allowed spouses to vent their anger knowing that arguments usually could not escalate into physical violence.

7.3.3 Plans for the Future

Renewed courting not only heightens sexual and emotional intensity among couples, but it also provides them with a belief in the permanence of their relationships. One major component of courtship was the chance for couples to build a "partnership for life."

Prison visiting became central to many wives' lives since it offered them a chance to begin doing this. During visiting, twenty-seven couples made plans of this kind. Release, and renewal of their lives on the outside, became primary topics of conversation.

Plans for the future were typically made at the beginning and end of husbands' sentences. At these times, the men were psychologically close to "the outside." One old timer, whose husband had been sentenced to a minimum of two years, illustrated how plans were a major topic of conversation at the beginning of her husband's sentence:

Q: You mentioned that your relationship has changed. How else is it in the process of changing?

A: First of all, the first few weeks we discussed all our plans for the future. In the meantime, my life became pretty much the same thing day in and day out. I find it hard to find things to say to him and he wasn't having any new things happening to him. We laid our plans early in the game and we both found it repetitious to keep discussing them. Both of our lives were stagnating.

The "outside world" was prominent in the minds of wives and husbands when the men first began their sentences. As couples reached the middle stage, wives were more focused on their own independent lives and the everyday business of survival. For many men, the outside world began to fade and prison events took on more importance. Looking to the future continued, wives reported, but with less intensity. As release became imminent, both wives and husbands were drawn back to their future plans, and these were placed within the context of the parole program. According to wives, twenty-five husbands made promises to them about future behavior.

It was through this process of courtship that wives got a glimpse of their original dreams about what their married lives would be like. Most men made promises similar to those they had prior to their weddings. Twenty-four men assured their wives that they were now ready to "settle down." Almost all promised to become steadily and gainfully employed, to provide a satisfying standard of living for their families, and to stay out of trouble.

When they indicated that they intended to work and provide a steady income for their families, most men, however, did not specify the kinds of work they intended to do. Thus it may well be that wives only needed to hear that their men wanted to work in order to remain committed to them. Or perhaps, prior to prison, many of these men had been reluctant

to submit to a regular work routine. The promise to work would then, in itself, have functioned to provide reassurance that the men intended to be the kinds of husbands their wives had always wanted.

A second theme was the family-oriented dream: to settle down and work hard in order to build a home in the country,⁶ obtain a new car, and provide a warm and emotionally nurturing environment for their soon-to-be blissful children and wives. Men's promises also included plans for greater sexual intimacy with the wives. As a consequence of being denied a multitude of small pleasures and several major ones - including sex - the couples tended to give a great deal of thought to planning how they were going to catch up.

According to the wives' accounts, ten men emphasized their willingness to "settle down," but only with the stipulation that they be able to continue to participate in such "controlled" deviant activities as occasional marijuana use, accepting only those stolen goods needed by their households, or occasionally gambling and sharing winnings with their wives.

Most wives were more interested in their husbands' willingness to get jobs than they were in plans for controlled deviance. But most important to the women was hearing that their husbands did not intend to get into trouble with the law. Husbands expended considerable time and energy during visiting reassuring their wives that they were going to avoid any acts associated with a high probability of detection and re-arrest. One wife, whose husband had attempted to escape from various prisons, said:

⁶Husbands usually promised to build log houses.

Q: Has he ever made promises to you about what he would do when he got released?

A: He told me he'd have a job and we'd have children when he got out. He's promised me that he'd never escape and that we'd have a house and a car and live comfortably... He promised me that he will never do any more B&E's and that he'd make a life for us and a home. He's told me all this the last time and he told me that he'd never escape again. He realizes now that he has a good wife and a home and he now knows that I wouldn't wait all my life for him to grow up.

In planning to shun their old ways, 14 men stated that they would avoid old criminal associates or criminally-involved family members. Seven discussed plans to leave Vermont or, at least, to move to rural areas far from their criminal associates. These plans were based on the notion that they could only build "new lives" for themselves and their families by leaving their old haunts.

Prison visiting, then, becomes a time for repentance. Many prisoners feel that they must put on a public front of reform when they are in the presence of conventional people. Husbands are likely to show their wives that they have reflected on the "errors of their ways," and are now committed to righting these "errors." The men make these future plans to demonstrate convincingly that they have sincerely repented and their imprisonment has lastingly altered their conduct. Many wives, moreover, expect their husbands to repent since they want reassurance that they are not going to experience enforced separation again.

In presenting a reformed and repentant image, most husbands repeatedly assure their wives that they are so highly motivated to fulfill these future plans that they are strenuously attempting to get an early release. Over and over again wives reported that their husbands assured them that, if they had not had such faithful wives, they would not be so motivated to get out on "good behavior." For example, one woman

described how her husband stressed how he was working for an early release and a future with his family:

He feels that he's working for something now. I think it's done him a lot of good. I see a change in him now. His attitude has changed. He didn't care about anything before except his drugs and now he cares. He cares about his family and our well being. He stays to himself there and tries to help the other guys when they need help. He hasn't fought up here as he did in Burlington. He has learned that there are responsibilities in this life and he didn't learn that at Burlington.

It seems reasonable to expect that, as institutions which emphasize punishment, prisons would encourage inmates to want to settle down, lead a normal life, and stay out of trouble. Prisoners have found prison to be so unpleasant that they sincerely and adamantly do not want to return. The mere fact that the men's movements are restricted, however, is far less painful than the fact that they are cut off from their wives and/or children. It is not difficult to see this as painfully depriving or frustrating for them in terms of lost emotional relationships, loneliness and boredom. Prisoners, therefore, tend to look to the outside community and will promise those things that can ensure their place in their homes with their wives and/or children.

Repentance, therefore, becomes an effective strategy to further motivate wives to remain committed to their marriages. Seventeen wives asserted that this time their husbands had learned a lesson. Going to prison had helped them, wives asserted, to make the transition from boyhood to manhood. It had encouraged them to want to settle down to conventional lifestyles:

He never gave me any reasons for why he did these things. He told me that he had the little kid in him. But since jail, he's learned a lot and he's grown up now. He felt that jail has changed him. All he wanted to do was get out and settle down and lead a life like anyone else. He told me that he's learned his lessons the hard way.

Neophytes, of course, were more likely to accept these promises than old timers: 12 neophytes believed that their husbands were sincere, while only 7 old timers did. The wives who did gave two types of reasons for doing so.

First, none of the wives placed much faith in these dreams without other indications that their husbands' behavior had changed. Most wives reported that they came to the visiting room searching for clues that this was so. Since prisoners' wives frequently accepted the notion that rehabilitation could transform prisoners' behavior from criminally-oriented to conventionally-oriented, they often expected that their husbands were going to change.

And, second, the wives also frequently used visiting as a time to acquire information about their husbands' in-prison performance, e.g., the extent to which they participated in prison work and leisure activities, stayed out of trouble with prison personnel, and the kinds of friends they had made. In turn, the men cooperated by providing the appropriate cues to convince their wives that they had reformed. They would inform their wives about how they were going to prison counselors and AA meetings, how they were working on their high school diplomas, or even how they were making their own beds in the morning:

Sandy has made a lot of accomplishments. He's going to school for water treatment plant maintenance. He has made a breakthrough with Dr. Marshall and he now feels that he has enough insight into his problems that he would make it. They consider Sandy an alcoholic because he has black outs in which he remembers little or nothing of what happened. He was chairman of AAA but he's too busy now to be chairman. I think he tries to do too much. I feel he's done his time good! I'm proud of him! He does not like to hear me say that because he says he should have done right all along.

The promises, the contrite and loving behavior, and the participation in prison activities make visiting worthwhile. Their husbands, many

wives assured me, were men of their words: they never broke promises. And the wives frequently believed that, this time, their men would get the kind of help they needed.

Unlike those wives who believed in their husbands' future plans, six wives did not: five old timers and one neophyte. Each arrest, conviction and imprisonment had brought the same promises and plans for the future. This made old timers increasingly reluctant to listen to them with feelings of good will:

Q: Does he make promises when he's in jail?

A: Everybody gets these promises. The men will say, "I'll straighten out. I'll never get into trouble again!" I never believe these promises. I know how he is. I feel sorry for him.

Old timers offered a number of reasons for reacting this way. Four were reluctant to believe their husbands were sincere in their expressions of love and repentance. They reported that this kind of behavior only emerged during incarceration. One old timer, whose husband was then incarcerated for the second time since their marriage, stressed this point:

Q: Was his behavior different in jail than when he was on the outside?

A: He was much sweeter when he was in jail. He was sweet because that was the only way to get the things he wanted. He couldn't treat me mean because I was the only one to come in to see him. It was the only way he was going to get his smokes. When he was outside, he didn't have to treat me sweet. In jail, he needed me and I felt helpful. I didn't feel totally shut out of his life. He needed me more when he was inside than outside. When he was outside, he could be mean because he could take care of these things he needed for himself.

A second reason was the belief that prison guards made judgments about the manner in which their husbands interact with them. These judgments

could influence future decisions concerning their husbands' early release. These old timers reported that their husbands could be very skillful in fulfilling the expectations of both their wives and the prison staff. Thus, the men went about acting contrite, loving and attentive to their wives. Arguments were avoided and wives placated. On the basis of their husbands' past behavior, they believed that they were running a con. The men appeared to be more interested in a short stay, and maintaining relationships with their wives than with positive adjustment. Promises and plans for the future, therefore, were not to be taken seriously.

What keeps wives returning to the prisons, then, is the chance to court their husbands and thus reaffirm themselves as women who are loved by their men. This promise of renewed courtship, with its focus on building a permanent relationship, re-ties most wives to their husbands, and allows them to wait for their release. However, the wives themselves want to believe that, this time, promises would be fulfilled. Thus, promises function to motivate wives to overcome the difficulties of prison visiting and to manage alone during their husbands' confinement. The difficulties of enforced separation, therefore, become worthwhile because wives can continue to believe that their husbands would eventually provide them with the kinds of conventional marriages to which they aspired.

7.4 DECISION-MAKING

Courting is often an important ritual in prison visiting. However, there are other ways that spouses can interact in order to soothe the "pains" of involuntary separation. Within the constraints of prison visiting, spouses do resume some elements of their marital patterns. In particular, making joint household decisions becomes satisfying for both spouses.

Many wives in the study population envisioned a family structure in which men were still symbolic heads of their households and therefore should be brought into every important decision. Twenty-one wives who visited their husbands frequently brought household decisions to their husbands for approval. These decisions were usually similar to those they would have brought to their husbands' attention prior to enforced separation: (1) household finances; (2) child-related issues; and (3) major household purchases. Some wives discussed every aspect of their lives with their husbands, made absolutely no decisions, and encouraged their children to ask their fathers for everything they wanted.

By involving their husbands in the decision-making process, some women were able to temporarily resume their roles as deferential wives. They therefore recognized their husbands' continuing position of power and authority within the family unit. In turn, husbands could reactivate their roles as dominant authority figures in their households. By assuming these kinds of domestic responsibilities, the husbands could, to some extent, neutralize their roles as prisoners. Thus, visiting provided the men with the chance to relieve some of the "pains" that stem from the loss of decision-making within the prison environment. For example, a neophyte stressed how bringing these decisions to her husband's attention underlined his importance to her and the children:

I put responsibilities on him. One problem of his is his facing realities. I'm trying to get the kids into parochial school and I have made up my mind that this is where I'd like them to be. But I more or less let him make these kinds of decisions. I gave him the pros and cons of parochial school and he then said that they should go to one. I brought Jenny a bike for her birthday and some kids broke it. I told Randy about it and asked him what should be done. Randy said to go and have it fixed so long as it doesn't cost more than \$40...I feel that I have to talk to him and confide in him. He is a part of our household. He agrees and he wants to know what is going on and he doesn't want me to hide anything from him. He says that he wants to help and feels terrible that he can't. I say that he does help. He listens to me and helps me make these decisions.

However, some aspects of this pattern of interaction are illusory. Not every household decision was referred to the men. Wives generally imparted information and concerns which reminded their husbands that they retained their identities as husbands and fathers. Thirteen wives reported that, before coming to the prison, they decided the kinds of household decisions they were going to reveal to their husbands. Their foremost thought was their men's position of helplessness. Many wives deliberately hid those decisions which were beyond the men's capabilities. For instance, it did not help the men to hear about how children had done something naughty at some time in the past, or that the plumbing had needed to be fixed, etc., when they could not do anything about these problems. One of the women made this point well:

We'd talk about what we did. But the conversation was not very much. I usually just bitched about my work, about the dishes and things like that. There was no sense in telling him about my problems with the kids. There would be a gap in between what happened to them and my seeing him. It could be a gap of five days and the issue would be all over and would have dropped out of the kids' minds.

Some wives were also likely to withhold information about financial problems. Knowledge of financial crises might confront the men with the painful reality that they were not sending money home to stabilize their families, much less to provide comforts.

Describing this form of interaction, six women reported that their husbands' requests to share in household decisions were unexpected. Prior to imprisonment, these men had rejected this kind of household responsibility. Because of this, these wives came to believe that some of their husbands' best qualities had finally emerged.

It is reasonable to assume that, as part of this form of interaction, both spouses could enact parts of their social identities that they

found satisfying; the women could resume their wifely roles by referring matters of concern to their husbands. The men could resume some aspects of their former position of power or authority. What the wives gained was some temporary relief from having to make a multitude of decisions alone. Therefore, involuntary separation and imprisonment encouraged the men to assume this decision-making role and in turn, encouraged the wives to see their husbands as the men they had expected to marry.

7.5 TRANSACTING BUSINESS

Although the Vermont Department of Corrections attempts to minimize prisoners' physical or material deprivation, the "pains of imprisonment" are structured into the prison environment. Consequently, independent of the prison in which they might be incarcerated, prisoners must adapt to the other deprivations of prison life. Two ways to "soothe" these pains of imprisonment are (1) to acquire material goods and services to mitigate material deprivation; and (2) to consume drugs in order to "cool out," i.e., relieve boredom and monotony and make time pass as quickly as possible. Visiting serves as a time when arrangements can be made to conduct various kinds of "business" related to acquiring the legitimate and illegitimate goods needed to do this.

7.5.1 Approved Material Goods

Following the precepts of community corrections, Vermont correctional centers have been designed so as to minimize the extent to which prisoners experience material deprivation. Prisoners can acquire some or all of the following goods depending on their security classification: their own clothes, items for body care, reading material, certain electrical appliances (stereos, radios, televisions, etc.), and other such items for recreational purposes, arts and crafts, decorative items

for their rooms, coffee, tea, snack foods which do not require cooking, and cigarettes. In the more "open" correctional centers such as the CCCC, prisoners classified as minimum risks can, for instance, acquire the full range of these items.

Thus Vermont prisons are structured in such a way that inmates are likely to make additional demands on their wives. The more "open" a prison, the longer what many wives call "the grocery list."

Inmates usually must rely on their wives to obtain items on this list. Twenty-six wives reported that they had provided their husbands with at least some clothing, snacks, cigarettes, and body care items. Eleven also assumed responsibility for their husbands' laundry; washing, ironing and mending their clothes. Nine wives reported that they assisted their husbands in acquiring stereos, radios, televisions, musical instruments, reading material, as well as new clothing, cigarettes, snacks and so forth. Seventeen other women reported that they only provided their husbands with the minimum necessary for survival.

Taxpayers save a good deal of money as a result of wives' efforts. During the field research phase of this study, the Vermont Department of Corrections spent an average of about \$12,000 a year to keep each prisoner incarcerated. A few wives spent up to \$2,000 to make their husbands more comfortable during the period when they were imprisoned. Assuming this responsibility can, however, become a burden for many wives. There are, ultimately, both satisfactions and drawbacks to be derived from providing their men with some of the amenities of living.

Wives frequently reported that they derived satisfaction from continuing to nurture their husbands. Many indicated how acting as

nurturers provided them with a sense of purpose and pride: even with limited financial resources, they could fulfill their husbands' requests. One wife who was receiving Welfare described, with pride, the kinds of material goods she provided for her husband at some sacrifice to herself and her children:

I brought everything - ringos, lollypops, cans of Tang, Kool-Aid, bullion cubes, hot cereals, munchies. I brought pot in. I stuck it down the baby's Pampers... I used to give him money and clothes, and at Christmas time, I'd have two garbage bags of gifts. I brought him a stereo, albums and tapes. He had his own pillow, lights, rug, sheets and fan. I went without for him but he had all that he wanted. I'd pay the rent and had my food stamps and I'd save \$20 for myself and I'd buy three cartons of cigarettes and give him the \$20. He always got \$40 a month from me. I never had any spending money and he never went without. He was inside and he couldn't have nothing and there was no reason for him to go without. I'd always give to Sandy and the girls before I had anything for myself.

Under these circumstances, providing for their husband simply meant that the rest of the family had to go without. Only six wives had little financial difficulty providing for their husbands.

Visiting day became the time when the men either placed or received their orders for approved goods. By accepting these orders, wives reported, they were able to legitimate their husbands' roles as heads of their households. As a result, the men were still able to tell their wives what to do, how to do it, and when - at least in some areas. By accepting their husbands' orders for material goods and services, the wives derived some satisfaction from resuming their roles as wives. Their acquiescence was based on the wives' interest in mitigating their husbands' diminished sense of autonomy. According to twelve wives, they felt great pressure to meet their men's needs because of their guilt over their husbands' imprisonment and their realistic worries about their husbands' present situations.

Enforced separation placed the wives in a position where they were more apt to support than be supported, nurture rather than be nurtured. Love and service became intertwined. Services symbolized love. In the main, twenty-six wives accepted this as an outcome of enforced separation. As wives they had already been trained for caring and service. Consequently, they often treated fulfilling their husbands' needs not only as an obligation, but as a desirable activity; something they wished to do.

The fact of imprisonment placed the men in a situation in which they were unable to reciprocate in very significant ways. It is rare that the men were able to give their wives money for their provisions - much less money to ease their families' financial burdens - from their institutional earnings. Resources typically flowed to the men. Ten wives mentioned that, occasionally, their husbands' demands had become excessive. Arguments could then follow. Couples often spent a considerable part of their time together dealing with these issues:

I don't have money to bring him clothes and food. He gets his coffee and cigarettes. I pay it. That's all he gets. It's all I can afford. For our anniversary, I'll get him a shirt and some other things. I take clothes for him when I can find them at rummage sales or friends give them to me. Not being able to give him some nice clothes makes me feel extremely low. I'm out of money. He keeps asking me for money for cigarettes. I have to pay for the transportation to see him. That costs \$6 and when I visit him it depletes my finances. I try to first pay my bills and my doctor bills. He doesn't realize that I have to pay bills. He's been in so long that he doesn't realize that since he's been gone the price of everything has gone up.

Most women eventually gave in to their husbands' demands, at considerable cost to themselves. Usually wives were exhausted and worried about finding enough money on which to live, much less support their husbands. Five flatly refused to exceed their already tightly stretched budgets.

Thirteen other wives found that filling their husbands' grocery lists placed a strain on them - but for a different reason. They described how visiting became a one-way process, and the grocery lists symbolic of this process. They reported that they found themselves in a "giving" role, and their husbands in a "taking" role. The normal give and take of marriage became so difficult when men were in prison that, by the second or third time, many of these wives came to wonder whether their husbands only valued them as emissaries to the outside world:

Q: Did you bring him stuff in?

A: I used to bring him cookies, coffee, cigarettes, and sometimes I'd surprise him and write a letter and stick that in. I brought him the TV Guide. I did his laundry. I brought him clothes when he needed them. He got the stuff for his own room through trading this and that. It didn't bother me to bring them in. At times, I felt used. Every woman wonders about being used at different times. Sometimes the relationship seemed more of a taking than a giving from one person to another. I used to get depressed and feel sorry for myself.

Those wives who felt "used" by their husbands, and those whose incomes could barely sustain them and their children, eventually became resistant to their husbands' demands. These wives generally used visiting days as an opportunity to confront their husbands with the fact that they could no longer place their needs first:

That was all he wanted from me. He wanted his smoke. When I first went to visit him, I'd bring him in books, cigarettes, toothpaste, cookies. Then it got to costing more to put food on table at home and the kids needed things and I didn't have the money. I told him that I didn't have the money to supply him with goodies. It was like telling a child that I didn't have it. I was dealing with a tempermental child and he fought the only way he knew. He fought very defensively. He was using self protection. Most of the time he threatened me. Then I'd say one thing and he'd say another. The magic was gone from us and only bad feelings were left.

Arguments based on this would then escalate over the course of a

series of visits. These differences were usually resolved in the wives' favor since the men were only "symbolic heads of their households." It was up to the wives whether or not to follow their men's decisions and demands. Twenty-four realized that they actually had the "final" say in these matters and used this fact.

7.5.2 Smuggling In Contraband.

Visiting was also the time when wives smuggled contraband into prisons for their husbands' personal consumption or when future arrangements could be made to continue smuggling activities and transfer money for drug purchases. The extent to which smuggling contraband was possible was dependent on the structure of various prisons and the extent to which wives were willing to assume the risks.

There are two ways that men can obtain recreational drugs within a prison system: (1) they can purchase the drugs from fellow prisoners and/or guards; or (2) they can obtain drugs from visitors who are willing to risk bringing them into the facilities. The wives in the study population reported that men would frequently add marijuana or mood altering drugs to their grocery lists. Of twenty-seven women who visited their husbands, twelve had smuggled drugs into various prisons. Among these, eight were old timers and four neophytes.

As a rule, wives learned how to smuggle drugs into prisons from their husbands. They, in turn, often learned this from fellow inmates. Their techniques were astonishingly simple. The most common technique was to carry contraband on their bodies: inside their pants, inside their bras, secured between their breasts, on their hips, in their socks, or, less frequently, in their vaginas. Only four wives reported having placed contraband on their children. An old timer described a favorite technique:

Q: Have you brought it in?

A: I've brought it in for Rob. I usually put it into a plastic bag and then flatten it out and tape it onto the kid's Pampers. I put it in the back of the kid's diaper. He then just holds the baby and puts his hand inside the diaper and gets it out. It's hard on him being locked up and not being able to do anything.

Once these wives had successfully smuggled contraband into the waiting room, they then had to transfer it to their husbands. Transfers usually took place at the beginning of a visit. Wives would go to the bathroom, remove the drugs or other contraband, return to the visiting room, and then inconspicuously pass the drugs to their men. Another wife described this procedure:

Q: How did the women bring contraband into St. Albans?

A: They would go to the bathroom and remove the stuff from where it was hiding and then bring it into their boyfriends in the visiting room. You can't miss seeing what's going on. The boyfriend would then shove the stuff up his rear end right in full view of everyone. They would shove it up so far that you can't find it when they are searched.

Husbands were usually able to avoid detection by hiding the drugs in the vicinity of their genitals. If the men wanted to be especially secure, they placed the drugs up their rectums. Many wives, out of pure nervousness, immediately passed the contraband to their husbands who placed the drugs on their bodies.

Most wives reported that their willingness to smuggle was primarily based on the likelihood of detection. Wives were more likely to be anxious about being detected during strip searching, than going through metal detectors. Many of these wives reported that, at Windsor Farm, security goals were de-emphasized and therefore they did not believe that smuggling was a high risk activity:

At visiting hours, I have seen these girls bringing in pot to their men. They don't care who sees them give it over to their men...They have no difficulty in pulling up their skirts in front of everyone and taking the pot out of their vaginas in front of everyone, no less!"

Eight wives assessed the risks involved by observing the extent to which other visitors smuggled contraband. When asked to explain why they risked detection and arrest, twelve wives said it was to help their husbands do "their own time." These wives believed that drugs would help their men pass through prison with the least amount of suffering. They could therefore soothe the "pains" of imprisonment. Smoking marijuana appeared to give men something to do and helped break the monotony of prison life. These wives also reasoned that, as long as their men consumed drugs, they were more likely to be "mellow," to "cool out," and therefore adjust to the prison environment better.

A secondary reason was that the wives, themselves, derived some satisfaction from smuggling. It allowed them to resume another component of their role as nurturer. Providing their husbands with marijuana, therefore, could become a commitment to "help" their husbands do "good time."

7.5.3 Short-Term Criminal Partnerships

Ten wives' accounts described how wives and husbands established short-term criminal partnerships. These were centered on distributing drugs for profit within the prison system. Small quantities of drugs were smuggled into the visiting site and given to their husbands who would then sell them for a profit within the prison's sub rosa economic system. For these couples, visiting became focused on transacting their "business:" drugs and money were transferred and new plans were formulated for obtaining more drugs. Seven old timers and three

neophytes reported that they did not smuggle drugs during every visit. Only three women smuggled contraband into the prison on a weekly basis. Both the wives and husbands involved willingly placed themselves in jeopardy since they felt that the stakes were high enough to warrant the risks.

This kind of criminal partnership could be highly profitable for both spouses. One old timer described dealing in drugs within a prison:

Q: Why did you bring him drugs?

A: I cared for him and I knew if he had it the time would pass away quicker for him. Plus he was making money because he was selling it. So he gave me most of the money he made. I brought the drugs to him when he was at the CCCC. I brought them when I visited. I brought it in about fifty times. I'd bring in half an ounce at a time and I paid \$20 for it and then he made \$60 off it. I made \$120 a week and he was trading things for it. He got this beautiful ring for five joints and he lost it.

Q: What did you do with the money?

A: He gave me most of it and I then bought more drugs with it and I'd pay my bills and get things for the kids.

As a result of the high volume of prison business, this wife managed to save over \$2,000 as well as contribute to supporting her household. However, most women reported that their profits were considerable lower: from twenty dollars to seventy-five dollars per unit of drugs smuggled into prison.

These short-term business relationships between spouses appeared to be primarily a response to the economic pressures that both were experiencing. Although the bulk of the money they earned was spent to cover wives' household expenses, a large portion of it went back to their husbands in the form of material goods needed to make their time "easier" in prison.

These transactions were also socially satisfying for the men and their wives. The men could, in effect, re-activate another aspect of their role as husbands: they could resume their role as breadwinners and make financial contributions to their households. Wives who received the money could also take up their earlier roles as consuming agents for their husbands and children. In this way, these criminal partnerships strengthened the couples' marriages.

Ironically, illicit partnerships were more prevalent in the "closed" prison, St. Albans, than in more open facilities. This was probably largely attributable to market factors: with tighter security, scarcity would occur, prices rise and profits become commensurately greater. Therefore potential benefits would tend to outstrip potential risks.

Criminal partnerships between husbands and wives, however, had a tendency to disintegrate over time. Partnerships usually were dissolved once wives became unwilling partners. Eight women reported that they decided to stop smuggling. Three women reported that this was because they eventually became disillusioned or disenchanted with the activity. The novelty and excitement wore off and they found that they no longer derived sufficient satisfactions from it. This was due, in part, to the fact that, for them, visiting had come to be primarily centered around drug-related issues, i.e., the quality of the drugs they brought in, future deals to be made, the kinds of drugs the men wanted their wives to deliver, etc. Two other wives refused to continue once they realized that providing drugs drained essential money from their own meager funds. Two other wives decided to stop when their husbands were transferred to St. Albans where they thought the chances of being caught were too high. Only one wife stopped as a result of being detected during a strip-search.

7.6 THE RESULTS OF VISITING

On the basis of wives' accounts, visiting does appear to strengthen marital ties since many wives and husbands come to share a common interest: the procurement and distribution of contraband, either for profit or recreational purposes. Also by smuggling drugs, the wives can soothe their own "pains" of enforced separation by resuming three satisfying components of their roles as wives: consuming agents, nurturers and procurers of personal services. In resuming components of these roles, wives were fully aware of their husbands' dependency upon them. They were their husbands' major connection to drug sources, and furthermore, they also knew that they could act independently: they could stop bringing drugs into the prison whenever they decided. In turn, the men could resume their roles as husbands by making demands for drugs and/or by providing some income for their families. But the extent to which the husbands could activate these aspects of their identities as husbands was, once again, dependent upon their wives' willingness to acquiesce to these demands. As long as the wives acquiesce to these demands, visiting becomes a time in which a sense of shared partnership can develop which soothes "pains" and reinforces marital ties.

Chapter 8

LIVING ALONE

I guess you've noticed that we smoke a lot. Prisoners' wives smoke a lot of cigarettes. We live on cigarettes, coffee and nerves.--a Prisoner's Wife

8.1 BACKGROUND

A recurrent theme in the literature is that men's imprisonment can be punitive for their wives and children. Wives perceive this punishment as neither needed nor deserved. This chapter explores one facet of the impact of men's imprisonment on their families: the consequences for the lives their wives lead. From wives' accounts we will examine how they manage to pursue their own lives yet continue to be involved with their imprisoned husbands on a daily basis. Within this context, we will evaluate the extent to which prisoners' wives believe that they, like their husbands, have been deserted by society and turned out of the relationships most important to them. Wives too, we will see, are, to varying degrees, stripped of some of their accustomed satisfactions, routines and everyday concerns.

Here discussion will center on how prisoners' wives also experience socio-emotional problems that result from what they consider to be their worst "punishment" - being deprived of their husbands. We therefore will look at how prisons structure the "pain of separation" into wives' lives and how wives go about accommodating to these pains in their everyday worlds.

Imprisonment usually interrupts, rather than ends, the relationships between prisoners and their wives. To be sure, imprisonment is a critically important interruption. However, partners are not cut off from each other nearly as much as most of the literature assumes. A specific aim of this study was to describe how prisons extend into wives' lives. Therefore, here I will show that incarcerated husbands often are not completely isolated or banished from their households as long as, for instance, prison systems permit inmates to have access to telephones or home visits. How freely inmates can communicate by telephone, we will see, does have an effect on the ways wives reorganize their lives and households, and the kinds of accommodative strategies they employ while waiting for their husbands to serve their time. In short, this chapter will attempt to present a focused examination of the extent to which prison shapes inmates' wives everyday worlds as well as how it effects their continuing relationships with their husbands.

8.2 PAINS AND BENEFITS OF ENFORCED SEPARATION

Sentencing and its aftermath presents a crisis in that wives are immediately confronted with reorganizing their households. Changes in family structure must be immediately initiated. Decisions whether to work or remain at home, whether to change residences or remain living where they are, or whether or not to apply for a welfare grant immediately become relevant. At the same time, most wives have to find time to deal with their own sense of loss and anxiety.

As a rule, under these circumstances prisoners' wives make a deliberate attempt to weather the crisis and to begin to pull their families together. As wives attend to their most pressing concerns, their sense of crisis generally subsides. This allows them to reorganize their lives, their households, and their relationships with significant others.

8.2.1 Reorganization

For the wives in the study population, reorganization primarily implied attempts to establish settled and conventionally-oriented lives. Once their men were incarcerated, all but two described themselves as pursuing conventional and settled lifestyles. Even those seven women who had previously lived hard now claimed that they had resumed a more settled style of living. Six hard-living old timers, for instance, reported that they had, over the years, acquired the necessary skills to shift from hard to settled living and back again when the occasion demanded.

Twenty-one women with children organized their lives around their children and their absent husbands. For these wives, household concerns, children and husbands continued to be not simply a job, but a way of life. These wives not only remained involved in caring for their children, but they continued to focus attention of their absent husbands: they visited, telephoned, wrote letters, worried about their husbands and performed as many wifely duties as the prison system would allow.

The everyday lives of the working wives were similar to those of the others: they centered around absent husbands and around a settled and conventional lifestyle. Most women in the study population did not consider taking a job. The number of working wives stayed nearly the same as that prior to separation. Five women with and five without children were employed outside their homes. Of these, only two found jobs after their husbands' arrests. One wife was a full-time student at a college. Nineteen wives with children said they chiefly relied on Aid to Dependent Children for their support.

8.2.2 The Pains of Separation and Imprisonment

Whether men are voluntarily or involuntarily separated from their families, their wives find that they must adjust to their husbands' physical absence. In order to make this adjustment successfully, wives must be willing to shift roles and take up many of their husbands' responsibilities. They must often also maintain their husbands' place in the family circle by correspondence, telephone calls, and visiting. Within this context, prisoners' wives must therefore be able to gain a measure of independence in making decisions. While enforced separation engenders hardships, it also seems to provide its own unique opportunities for women to begin playing a larger role in directing their own lives.

It is worth noting that the difficulties experienced by prisoners' wives are, to a large extent, experienced by other wives under similar circumstances; particularly ones with children. The literature documents the kinds of costs that wives incur when their husbands are absent, either temporarily or permanently, e.g. due to service in the armed forces, to divorce, to desertion and to death. Even though these wives may experience similar difficulties, we must, however, bear in mind that the problems faced by prisoners' wives are different in important ways because of the implications of conviction and imprisonment: the "pains of separation" and the "pains of imprisonment" are not precisely the same.

The majority of wives experienced at least one important hardship during their husbands' confinement. No single hardship, however, runs through the histories. Even the basic deprivation of having to do without their husbands was not universal: in some cases husbands have been so abusive and irresponsible that their absence is considered a

blessing. The four most frequently mentioned problems faced by prisoners' wives were: (1) managing time; (2) loneliness and deprivation of their husbands; (3) child care and discipline; and (4) finances.

8.2.3 Managing Time

After their husbands' imprisonment, twenty-six women reported that the most difficult problem that they confronted was handling the lengths of their husbands' sentences. Seventeen wives indicated that they felt as though they were "doing time": their lives were in limbo until their husbands returned. Only then could they resume active and meaningful roles as wives. What made waiting difficult for the women, therefore, was the suspension of their identities: they were their husbands' wives. They had no other significant roles to play. Their backgrounds, as a rule, had not prepared them for the work world. Their families in many cases were estranged. They were sometimes shunned by neighbors or were avoiding them. Thus, within this phase of imprisonment, the wives found themselves serving time with their husbands. Time was not a resource for them, but was used by others to control their lives. They, like their husbands, served rather than used it. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that prisoners' wives often lived for the present:

One day at a time. All I think about is getting through one day. The hell with tomorrow, yesterday is already gone. I can make plans for Cindy and myself. I don't think "x" number of days and "x" number of years. I think about today. I get through the night and then instead of saying one day longer apart, I think that we are one day closer together.

Thus, in at least one important sense, prisons extend into wives' lives: "time served" is substituted for "time used."

8.2.4 Loneliness and Deprivation of Husbands

Twenty-five prisoners' wives mentioned deprivation of their husbands, and the attendant loneliness, as an important hardship they experienced. They missed their husbands, first, as companions, fathers, bill payers or income providers, and as handymen around their homes. This form of felt deprivation primarily stems from their husbands' physical absence, rather than from their criminal behavior or convictions. Plausibly, at least, it could have resulted from any type of involuntary separation.

This sense of loss can be exacerbated by the types of communities in which wives live. In many towns in Vermont women are expected to be married. By not having a visible husband, women beyond a certain age become socially marginal. Many wives in the study population experienced this. They felt like "fifth wheels" at social gatherings; especially when these gatherings largely consisted of couples their own ages.¹ They lost status and a sense of place.

This sense of loneliness and disorientation was often compounded with the sexual frustration resulting from their husbands' prolonged confinement. Two wives talked about how they deal with sexual deprivation since they were determined to remain faithful to their husbands:

Q.: What do you mean by going downhill?

A.: The time is getting closer to his release. But where is my

¹Here is at least one important difference between the effects of enforced separation on prisoners' wives and those reported in studies of wartime separation or service couples: in the social environments in which prisoners' wives lived in Vermont they were often the only wives in their particular predicament. In wartime or on military bases a number of women in wives' immediate circles share the same situation.

sex life? I do know that I must have done it once because I have Debra to show for it. I feel that the first few months is when you feel the horniest. Then you get used to it.

A.: When Buddy comes home, that's when he loses weight. I just wear him out. But when the men are in, the women just try to shut off their sexual feelings. You can use Rosemary and her five sisters - that means masturbating.

Loneliness also was magnified by the fact that wives must experience crisis provoking events alone. For instance, thirteen women reported that they had been pregnant during at least one of their husbands' imprisonments. However, seven wives had their husbands present at one of their deliveries. It is up to prison personnel to decide whether married prisoners can have supervised or unsupervised passes in order to be present at deliveries and/or to visit their wives and their babies.

Their husbands' presence at births can be both joyous and soothing but it can also be both tension-producing and stigmatizing. Usually men appear with arms and legs chained, closely followed by guards:

I feel lonesome and deserted. He's missed almost every pregnancy except Ann Marie. He missed Jesse because he was in jail. They did bring him up to see Jesse. They brought him up in handcuffs and shackles. I was shocked to see him that way. They wouldn't even take the handcuffs off so that he could hold the baby. He couldn't hold the baby with them on. And everybody was looking at him and saying, "Look at that criminal!" Some people even pointed at him. I felt terrible. I didn't want him there like that. They brought him there like that because he was an escaped criminal. I felt terrible.

Child Care and Discipline

Many child management problems are not merely a function of the women's status as prisoners' wives, but can be placed within the larger context of problems experienced by single mothers. Of the twenty-one wives with children, seventeen reported that having full responsibility for raising their children - together with the special strains created

by children's responses to their fathers' imprisonment - is a severe hardship. Prisoners' wives readily admitted that their children had problems dealing with separation and loss.

It appears that imprisonment functions as a precipitating factor, rather than a cause, of these children's problems since imprisonment was only the most recent of a series of crisis-producing events they had experienced. In most homes, family life had been marked by frequent upheavals, alcohol and drug consumption, violence and prior separations. All wives claimed that involuntary separation had adverse effects on their children. Many reported that children went through periods of insomnia, nightmares, and bedwetting. Others reported that children experienced loss of appetite - or overeating - temporary withdrawal, fretting, clinging, etc.

About half of children who attended school had problems: temporary falls in grades, truancy, or dropping out of school. One child, whose father had been home for fourteen months out of her seven years, became suicidal:

I don't trust Debra. If it goes through a six year old's head that she wants to commit suicide, I'm really scared for her. Frank was home for 14 months and she really became attached to him. Now she's having a lot of problems at school. They told me her hyperactivity could be emotional. She's been kicking the teacher, disrupting the class and won't follow through on her book work.

Only two children, both adolescents, had become involved in delinquent behavior since their fathers' imprisonment. Both children had experimented with stealing. Generally speaking, prisoners' wives reported that fathers are missed. The children talk about them and usually remember the good things that their fathers did with them. Often discussions centered around their fathers' return.

An important source of problems for wives was the restrictions placed on their freedom of movement as a result of having sole care of their children. Nine wives reported that their tolerance was reduced. At times when their energies were absorbed by their own concerns or daily tasks, childrens demands seemed to drain already reduced reserves. This could cause them to react by yelling at, shoving, shaking or slapping their children. When stress became overwhelming, children became targets of wives anger and frustration. Whether or not prisoners wives worked outside their homes, sixteen women with children complained about the task overload. Two parents are hardly enough to deal with many of the demands of child care. Prisoners' wives often encountered a succession of days filled with too much to do. Unrelieved responsibilities can be especially depleting if there is no one to attend to the wives' needs, i.e., no one with whom to talk, share household responsibilities, etc. Many wives reported that this often led them to despair.

8.2.5 Finances

Twenty wives experienced extreme financial pressures. Even where finances had not been a major concern before their husbands imprisonment, it became one afterwards. Seventeen women reported that they were "just scraping by"; living at or below the poverty level. Of these, thirteen had collected welfare before their husbands' imprisonment. They had adjusted to having low incomes and little cash at their disposal. One new source of financial strain, however, was that, before imprisonment, they had been accustomed to having their husbands provide some cash for "extras." After imprisonment, these extras stopped.

Only five women reported that the family income had not been reduced. The remaining twenty-five said that their financial situation had been

either reduced or improved as a result of enforced separation. Ten women reported a sudden drop in the total monthly income. Three of these had, themselves, been the victims of the crimes which had led to their husbands' imprisonment. Three other women reported that, despite a severe reduction in income, after imprisonment their income was at least regular and they could control it. Four women who had been married to husbands who had been steadily employed indicated that the problems arising from loss of income far outweighed any benefits from increased control:

I chain smoke now. That's new since October. I have been eating badly and sleeping badly. I feel there's no time to do anything but exist. I have to find out if I'm eligible for medicaid and food stamps. I have to make out on a very small amount of money and I keep saying to myself there's no way I can do it. I have to find a way to make extra money. I know I can make \$200 a month extra. I don't want to work nights and do this to Joyce. His parents will help me. It's hard to say to them that I need \$200 a month for three months. But I'm going to have to. It's easier for me to ask them for a hug and some support, but not for money.

Four wives who received welfare, however, claimed that their financial situation had improved. All these women built their incomes by combining a number of sources. Their new income packages included additional income from part-time work, welfare assistance, help from relatives, profits from smuggling drugs into prison, and rent from boarders. While these income packages were better, in some sense, than those they had had before their husbands were imprisoned, in many cases they were still not sufficient. Seven women said that they had a sense of having more after their husbands were in prison, even though their incomes were actually reduced. Having control over their money made them feel "better off." This control made a great deal of difference to them since they had had little say in these matters before their husbands' were imprisoned.

8.3 THE BENEFITS OF ENFORCED SEPARATION

There is a paradoxical aspect to the notion that prison can extend into the lives of prisoners' wives. Although the "pains" of separation can be extreme, real benefits can accrue to wives from enforced separation. These "benefits" can soothe some of the pains, as well as strengthen marital bonds. Separation can, for instance, provide (1) freedom from domestic routines, (2) peace and quiet, (3) personal autonomy, (4) a new sense of competence, and (5) the effects of the "Queen for a Day" syndrome.

8.3.1 Freedom From Domestic Routines

Fourteen of the wives in the study population found that they gained freedom from restrictive domestic routines - revolving, in many cases, around their husbands' needs - as a result of separation. Prior to imprisonment, these wives had been forced to take them into account in everything they did. Afterwards, they no longer had to consult or please their men unless they chose to do so. Consequently, many wives began to enjoy the opportunities for personal control "living alone" entailed:

I don't enjoy being alone, but I like living alone. I like to have dinner when I want it, and when you have a man around you have to cook certain things that he wants. I'm not picking up after any man and my boys pick up after themselves - they're pretty good about that. A man is a lot of work though. When he's not around, then I can say "good, he's not as much work." I do my own washing and ironing. When I was with Burton, I'd stay up nights and wait for [him] to come home. If he was out, I'd stay up and wait and wait. Now that is all ended. Now I can go when I want to go. There is a certain amount of peace and tranquility about going to bed by myself. There is no more anticipation about whether he's coming home or not.

Many wives noted that, without their husbands, it was often easier to organize their lives. They could cook simpler meals, did not have to pick up after their husbands, ran their own errands, etc.. A number of

wives found that, without their men around, it was easier to maintain their standards of household cleanliness as well as to develop their own schedules for child care and domestic duties.

8.3.2 "Peace and Quiet"

Twelve wives' accounts noted that they had more "peace and quiet," as well as freedom from their husbands' drinking and/or drug use, after they had been separated. Imprisonment of their husbands allowed these women to remain married, but without the domestic problems their men created. All these women had had the experience that their husbands' alcoholism, drug use and absences from home had disrupted or nearly destroyed their lives. Once their husbands were in prison, they knew "where [they] were" and this reduced anxiety and tension. This was especially true of seven of these women.

As a result of their husbands' repeated imprisonments, three old cons established what they considered to be satisfying marital relationships similar to those of service wives. They reported that they enjoyed being in control of their own lives; free from worry about their husbands' comings and goings. Under these circumstances, they could pursue a settled style of living, free from anxieties about drug or alcohol problems, etc.. At the same time, they could enjoy the status of being legally married.

8.3.3 Personal Autonomy

Although their responsibilities may be burdensome, prisoners' wives can also benefit from the increased personal autonomy that comes with greater responsibility. They can exercise greater control over their children, their households, and their resources. Consequently, 17 women reported that even with reduced income, they often felt better off. They

also reported that they could exercise more control over "social time": select friends and sexual partners, determine where to go, select the kind of social activities in which they participated.

8.3.4 New Competence

As single-but-married women, ten wives reported that, by dealing with new areas of responsibility, they developed a greater sense of competence and self-worth. This self confidence, they reported, emerged not only from the process of redefining their roles and opportunities within their households, but from changing their patterns of social interaction outside their homes. Four wives had made decisions about the kinds of work or education they wanted for themselves. Two had decided to enter the job market and establish careers. One returned to school in order to "better" herself. Another was reinstated as a student at a college near her home.

8.3.5 The "Queen for A Day" Syndrome

Another benefit derived from enforced separation, has been characterized by Holt and Miller (1972) as the "Queen for A Day" syndrome. Five wives cited their husbands' convictions and imprisonment as proof positive that their husbands were responsible for any problems in their marriages. By placing blame squarely on their husbands, it was possible for wives to assume roles as silent sufferers who stuck by their husbands when they were "down":

Another payoff might have been that, because Tim was in jail, I had an excuse for being paralyzed, inactive and not doing things. I had an excuse to make to people so that they felt sorry for me and in a way it was an attention getting device. You're getting a payoff from this. You can feel bad about yourself. You can say, "I was doing well before this and now look where I'm at and it is all because of him. He has done this to me.

By staying with their husbands as loyal and long-suffering wives, they obtained some measure of respect based on how well they bore the pains of separation:

On the inside I got to play the martyr and so did Slim, and I could convince myself that we were such martyrs and therefore that we were good people. I was valuable since I played it well. The payoff for staying in the relationship was that. I guess that's it. The martyr role was the big payoff. I think all the women get this payoff. They suffer with strength.

8.4 WIVES' REACTIONS TO THE PAINS OF SEPARATION

Although there were some benefits, most wives' accounts focused on the pains of separation. Wives' responses to the husbands' absences, moreover, varied considerably over time. These fluctuations were not apparently a function of the length of separation, although there was a tendency for certain responses to increase as prison terms stretched into months. Generally, changes in the wives' response-sets depended on the kinds of daily events with which they were coping. For example, if a child were severely ill, a wife might feel very resentful about being left alone by her husband. One another day, when the same wife had just given birth to a baby, she may well feel proud about how well she was coping with separation.

Four common response patterns were reported by wives: illness, depression, anger, and resentment. Twelve wives indicated that they experienced a higher rate of "attacks of nerves," headaches, indigestion, ulcers, shortness of breath, etc. after their husbands were imprisoned. Ten of these had had some form of tranquilizer prescribed for their nerves. Depression tended to occur when wives were overwhelmed with tasks and conflicting demands by their children, husbands, and kin.

Five wives thought their marked increase in smoking was attributable

to depression. Four wives also mentioned that they smoked marijuana more frequently during their husbands' absences. However, none of the wives reported that they drank alcohol more frequently, or that alcohol and/or drugs had presented a serious problem.

Three wives described problems of depression so severe that they had become almost incapacitated as family heads. As Goffman (1961: 61) observed, their reaction of restricting their attention to events immediately around their bodies is a radical form of situational withdrawal:

Six months ago, I started getting very depressed and despondent. The kids irritated me and anything they did I would yell at them. It's called situational depression. The house started getting the best of me. I didn't neglect the kids. I fed them! I'd get up in the morning and get the kids their breakfast and get them off to school. See that high chair over there? I'd put Justin in his playpen and sit. I didn't answer the phone. My mother and my mother-in-law could call and I'd tell them I didn't want company if they wanted to come and visit. The house was a mess and I didn't want them to see it like that. So I sat until the kids came home and I'd feed them dinner and put them in bed and sit in that high chair until it was time for me to go to bed."

Other women coped with stress by sleeping most of the day, and five reported thinking about suicide.

Ten wives reported that they sometimes experienced anger and resentment when they believed that their men's lives in prison were better than theirs on the outside. Looked at from the outside, the prison system sometimes seemed preferable to being overloaded with stresses and strains. These wives came to believe that their men were both well cared for and free from responsibility:

He's up there and he gets three good meals a day. He's eating food like steak and roast beef and I'm eating hot dogs and hamburgers. What worries does he have up there? I used to tell him that I would like to trade places with him. I'll go up

there for five days and he comes here and he would have all the burdens. And I'd have a much needed rest. He can pinch the pennies and worry about the kids, and wonder if the bills are being paid. Those guys have the best of everything. They have their own rooms, color TV, and wall-to-wall carpets. I get very hostile. I don't have these things. Let me take a vacation. Then I hear their gripes. They are in there locked up and they can't go anyplace. But they go places. They get passes for work release. And when they get the work release passes, they don't really look for work. They go out and pass the day. But none of the men have any worries. They don't have to face the bill collectors, wonder where the food is coming from, go to the hospital and really face the responsibilities of their families.

In many cases, these wives reached the conclusion that prison was a more positive experience than it is. When their husbands participated in prison programs - such as group counseling, education, Bible study, and arts and crafts - their anger and resentment intensified. These contrasted markedly with what they perceived to be a dearth of services that they could draw upon:

All I hear about are all these support groups for these 'poor men in prison'. Then the bleeding liberal hearts come in and fight for the men so that they can have color TV and nice food and all the comforts of home. No one cares about the families on the outside. We're hurting. We're resentful. We're trying to feed our kids and all these bleeding liberals are crying for the men and no one cares for us. I feel resentful.

8.5 ACCOMMODATIONS TO ENFORCED SEPARATION

These reactions to enforced separation can help define the way wives go about adapting to the "pains" of managing alone. To make their lives more bearable and to maintain their marital commitments, prisoners' wives primarily employ two accommodative strategies: (1) making time pass; and (2) re-creating their homes as prisons.

8.5.1 Making Time Pass

As I mentioned earlier, prisoners' wives have to deal with the issue of how to occupy their time without their husbands, as well as how to cope with the "pains of separation." The most common strategy employed by seventeen wives was to "do time": find those activities that made the time waiting for their husbands as easy as possible.

"Doing time" in most cases consisted of little more than attempting to forget about the past and future, and to concentrate on making each day pass as quickly as possible. Thus, wives tended to live their lives from day to day, from one small event to the next: watch their children develop, make special treats for them, go to birthday parties or family gatherings, and so on. Time then becomes a series of days to be marked out and "gotten through." They may choose to "lose themselves in their jobs" or to "retreat into their families." More commonly, wives managed time by "keeping busy;" involving themselves in domestic chores, planning and carrying out activities, and taking on work-related activities which fill time. Wives employed in the work force frequently rushed from work to home and - when the last household chores were done in the evening - fell into bed exhausted. When work and domestic activities could not fill up the hours, these wives generally turned to television for distraction.

Finally, ten wives reported that they "did time" by absorbing themselves in domestic activity during the days and partying at the bars at night. This sometimes led them into sexual liaisons.

8.5.2 Making Their Homes Into Prisons

Prisoners' wives often remarked that they, like their husbands, were in prison. Although their prisons had neither walls nor guards, the wives felt that their homes had become prisons. To make imprisonment, enforced separation and waiting more bearable, some wives accommodate by confining themselves to their homes.² Like men in prison, they experienced a sense of isolation, lack of stimulation, continuous pressure from other people, boredom, and monotony. As in prison, wives had a sense of the sameness of their days, with little break in their day-to-day domestic chores.

During enforced separation, twenty-six wives pursued few outside social activities. These women's involvements in their homes and/or jobs intensified along with a concomitant reduction in social activities such as visiting friends and relatives, going to bars and movies, and so forth. Instead, there was a marked increase in home-centered activities such as knitting, looking at television, and having friends and relatives visit them. Eight wives frequently visited with relatives and friends in their homes. Only three said they occasionally played bingo, went bowling or went to the movies. Those wives who did not participate in informal or organized social activities were the most likely to experience the structure of the prison in their everyday worlds.

The reasons given for adopting this strategy varied. Twenty wives mentioned that their child care responsibilities tended to keep them at home. Thirteen of these emphasized that they regarded confining themselves as symbolic proof of their love, loyalty and faithfulness to

²At various intervals during their husbands' sentences, all wives reported feeling that their homes were like prisons.

their husbands, i.e., centering their lives almost exclusively on their husbands and placing friendships, night life, and other social activities on the shelf. Five wives mentioned that they avoided possible confrontations with new stimuli which might induce them to change either themselves or their commitments to their husbands. Therefore, confinement, these wives believed, was the best way to place their images of themselves, their husbands, and their marital relationships in cold storage for the duration of their husbands' sentences.

At the time, I had this philosophy that I shouldn't do anything at all and I should keep to myself. I should try to stay the exact way I was so that when John got out there wouldn't be any changes. I wouldn't go to bars and I kept away from any kind of wild things that might be going on. I didn't want to be the life of the party because I didn't want to give myself any opportunity to meet anyone. So I decided to lock myself away from the world and I would stay the same way so that two years later I'd emerge just the way I was when he went to jail. I wanted to settle down and get a job and I didn't want to avoid the realities of our situation. I got the job and initially used it as a mechanism to keep myself the same. I'm not sure what I was escaping from but the job and my home life became my prison.

8.5.3 Plans to Terminate Marriages

Prison places a great deal of stress on couples and this fact has a decided impact upon how they negotiate their relations with each other. Both spouses undergo a series of emotional reactions to the stress imposed by separation - feelings of loneliness, isolation, blame, anger, sexual frustration, suspicion, and depression.

In many cases, the wives and husbands in the study population were unable to support each other in coping with these feelings and the stresses which produced them, because of the inadequate means of communication they had at their disposal. In response to this, eight wives made plans to divorce their husbands.

Not one woman cited imprisonment as the sole reason she was seeking a divorce. In all cases, however, wives saw their husbands' imprisonment as the "straw that broke the camel's back." The other reasons for divorce which wives reported centered around their husbands' "hard living."

All eight wives reported that conditions related to separation exacerbated those marital conflicts that existed prior to their men's imprisonment. First, such factors as wives' infidelity, their financial difficulties, and their problems as heads of households, could drive spouses further apart. Second, confinement to their homes could cause some wives to attempt to widen their social activities. Nine prisoners' wives decided to do this against their husbands' specific wishes. Third, waiting, and what it entails, could become too difficult to endure. Two women whose husbands had been in and out of prisons reported that "doing time" had dried up their reservoir of good will towards them. This time they found themselves unwilling to continue waiting for them because of disappointment over their husbands' past failures to reform:

You're by yourself and no woman should be in jail like that. He had a choice and his choice is to be there instead of here. It wasn't my choice. He knows that I don't like the corrections and I don't like visiting there. He has known this all along. I feel as though I've paid my dues and maybe a few more. I want to have something that is my own now. I want to take the chance of living and not be dead from waiting and waiting. And he's done it all over again.

Finally, two wives reported that, during separation, they and their husbands had developed different interests. Both spouses were unwilling to resume pre-prison patterns. However, only three of the eight women who filed for divorce actually obtained them. The other five temporarily separated from, but were subsequently reconciled with, their husbands.

8.6 MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS ON THE OUTSIDE

By allowing inmates the use of the telephone and mails, prison personnel hope to increase the likelihood that prisoners will maintain close ties with their families. However, there is little empirical evidence as to the actual impacts of this kind of access on prisoners' wives.

All Vermont prisons allow inmates and their wives to communicate through visiting, telephone calls and mail. Regardless of which prison is involved, all inmates have access to public pay phones by which to receive an unlimited number of calls at specified times of the day. Only in rare instances are telephone calls monitored, and prisoners are informed in advance when this is done. Nevertheless, the more "open" prisons - such as the community correctional centers - are more likely to permit prisoners' greater accessibility to telephones. All Vermont prisons place no limit upon the number of letters prisoners can write or receive. Letters are opened only when prison personnel are suspicious that they might contain contraband.

Two patterns of telephone use emerge. When men were transferred from one prison to another, the frequency of contact by telephone with their wives varied. When their husbands were incarcerated close to their homes, nineteen women reported that they had spoken to their husbands at least once, and often as much as three or more times, a day. I defined these women as being "in regular contact with" their husbands. By contrast, when their husbands were incarcerated far from their homes, fifteen wives reported that they had unpredictable and infrequent contact by phone. Under these circumstances, telephone contact between the couples was generally not maintained on a daily, or even bi-weekly basis since long distance telephone calls can be expensive. Most of

these couples kept in touch by mail. These women were defined as being "in infrequent contact with" their husbands.

8.6.1 Use of Telephone and Marital Relationships

Independent of whether they were in frequent or infrequent contact with their husbands, wives reported that telephone conversations allowed the couples to (1) reinforce as well as undermine marital ties; and (2) mitigate the pains of separation for themselves and the pains of imprisonment for their husbands.

Marital ties, the wives reported, could be reaffirmed by phone no matter how regularly the spouses had contact with one another. The use of a telephone encourages the renewal of intimacy and the renewal of courting. Wives reported that they and their husbands mostly used telephone calls in order to communicate about intimate matters - emotions and sex - that are difficult to put into writing. Telephone conversations could therefore help couples to gain or rekindle elements of their relationships. By telephoning, the spouses restated their plans for the future, gave information about their own lives and shared their concern about their children and homes.

It is through communicating with their husbands that "waiting" became worthwhile for many wives. Most came to believe that marital ties had been strengthened by it. This belief was rooted in apparently increased interest in family well-being on the part of their husbands, and in plans for a conventional life. In effect, use of the telephone and visiting allowed wives to place their men in the role of understanding-but-distant observers in their lives. This helped them to sustain their beliefs that their relationships to their husbands were worthwhile, and that it was worth waiting for them. Regardless of the type of prison,

no prisoners' wife reported that she had sufficient opportunity to interact with her husband in a realistic way. This meant that wives had to form judgments about the likelihood that their spouses were prepared for conventional life after release on the basis of very little - and often distorted - information.

In most instances, wives reported that telephone calls are like visits: they were planned for, looked forward to during the day, and thought about after they were over. These conversations, therefore, created a diversion from wives' domestic and work-related ~~chores~~ and the tedium of prisoners' lives inside.

It was also clear from wives' reports that allowing prisoners ready access to telephones enabled them to continue remnants of their former roles as husbands and fathers. In exile, they could continue to shape their children's lives. As one wife related, husbands could continually remind their wives of their presence within their households:

The phone calls help. He wakes me up in the morning. He is the first person I talk to in the morning, and the last person I talk to at night.

Of the nineteen wives who have regular contact with their husbands by phone, fourteen reported that their husbands used it to maintain some aspect of their roles as heads of their households by demanding that wives demonstrate their love, loyalty and faithfulness and stay confined to their homes. Working class men were the most likely to want their wives to stay at home and mind the children. Their set of demands frequently included the requirement that their wives have minimal interaction with friends and relatives, and report - by telephone or during visits - minute details of their lives. If wives left the house for any reason, accusations of infidelity and arguments would invariably follow.

To ensure that their wives stayed at home, ten husbands called as frequently as possible to check up on them. One woman described how her husband controls her life:

Q: Did you feel he was trying to control your behavior?

A: He was very bossy. I couldn't go to the movies or to concerts. When I would get my welfare checks, I had to go somewhere to cash the checks and pay bills. I had to do this. He more or less had to know where I was. When I went to my mother's house, I called to tell him where I was. Whenever he called, I was usually here. If I went shopping and took longer than I thought, I'd call to tell him where I was. This way, there would be no arguments that I was away longer than I was supposed to be. I have had him yell at me for not being there when he called.

Q: Why did he need to control you like that?

A: He was worried about what I was doing. He asked what I did and at times he didn't believe it. He wasn't in the house and he didn't know. It was kinda hard to reassure him. It was hard because he'd say, "I'm here and you're not here with me."

Most wives were aware that they were their husbands' major contacts with and emissaries to the outside world, and that this increased their fears that illicit sexual affairs with other men could lead their wives into making long-term commitments to other men. In this context, any social activity could become suspicious if it could provide wives with opportunities to meet other men.

On the surface, prisoners' wives generally seemed to accept their husbands' authority in these matters. But the cost of compliance is high: by muting their own needs, they were left dissatisfied and socially isolated. Thus, one can detect a great deal of ambivalence about this issue just below the surface. Fifteen wives said that their husbands' attitudes contributed to their own sense of being in prison. The more "open" a prison system, of course, the better able men were to control - or attempt to control - wives' lives since they had greater

access to them. By using the telephone as frequently as possible, men could assume roles as prison guards; constantly alert to any possible infraction of "the rules." Ten men utilized the technique of calling at "unpredictable" times - in effect, the prison strategy of spot-checking:

Q: How frequently did you phone him?

A: I never phoned him. He phoned me. He phoned maybe once or twice a week. If I wasn't home when he called, the next time he'd ask me where I had been and whom I saw. If he knew I'd planned to go somewhere and I wasn't there, he'd call later. Sometimes he reacted so violently if I wasn't home but if there was a legitimate reason, like I had to go to the doctor, then he was fine. He wanted me to do the things I had to do.

Of the nineteen women in frequent telephone contact with their husbands, only four reported that husbands seldom or never appeared to be checking up on their activities or whereabouts. All these wives were expected to act in the same manner as they had always done, that is, to pursue a square jane lifestyle, have their own interests, to be active in the community, and to pursue their own recreational interests. In effect, these husbands continued to be more egalitarian and less obsessively jealous in their relationships with their wives. According to two women, their spouses insisted that they "get out and have some fun."

8.6.2 Contact and Family Role Structure

The extent to which wives were able to reallocate their absent husbands' duties and responsibilities varied by the extent to which they and their husbands had access to one another by phone: when they had easy access, they were less likely to assume all their husbands' former duties and responsibilities. Usually wives reported that men could reactivate only one aspect of their former roles, i.e., making major household decisions. By referring these issues to their husbands, they

were able to share responsibility for theirs and/or their children's lives. In turn, husbands could demand that their wives follow these policy decisions and, thus, preserve some sense that they played a dominant role in their households. Eleven women also reported that their husbands reasserted their dominance by demanding that they reorganize their lives and households around their husbands' own needs - both material and emotional: relaying messages, handling their legal affairs, running errands for them, and filling their "grocery lists." One woman made this clear: "He'd ask me for things every time he'd call. I'd say to myself, 'What am I, a grocery store?'" When prisons permit, the most common means of communicating these demands is the telephone.

Since telephones promote communication, they can also undermine or weaken marital ties. When couples regularly converse over the phone, marital conflicts can erupt about exactly the same issues which often strengthen marital ties. Wives' accounts indicate that disagreements and verbal clashes generally centered around husbands' attempts to retain their dominance and authority and wives' resistance to this. For instance, twelve wives reported that, as they developed greater confidence in their own abilities to exercise judgements and formulate decisions, they became increasingly likely to challenge the legitimacy of their husbands' authority. Hence, they were less likely to seek their husbands' "permission" to do things, defer to them, or rely upon their judgements in handling household decisions. This led to clashes over household budgets - how far to go into debt, kinds of appliances to buy, etc. - child-rearing, wives' work, and the scheduling of visits to the prison. In four cases, serious conflicts arose over wives' educational aspirations.

In the course of these disagreements, many of these 12 wives began to adopt the position that they, too, were qualified to make decisions and

should share equally in doing so. This was seen as extremely threatening by their husbands. As a compromise, most prisoners' wives were likely to establish some areas of personal autonomy for themselves, but still defer to their husbands concerning aspects of theirs and their children's lives. It is interesting that, whether or not couples were in frequent and regular contact by telephone, the lowest rate of marital stress was found among those where decision-making was jointly shared. In all cases, this was a continuation of a marital pattern established before imprisonment.

The patterns which emerged among couples with infrequent access to one another was somewhat different. Fifteen wives reported that they were unable to predict when, and to what extent, they could depend upon their husbands' companionship and support. Phone calls were so infrequent that their husbands were often uninformed about important household events and strains experienced by their wives. Further, wives seldom knew with certainty which household decisions to "save" for their husbands, and often could not afford to wait. Nor were they certain when to leave or stay at their homes for fear their husbands would call. Under these circumstances, thirteen wives reported that their husbands were unable to accurately assess their wives' loyalty, fidelity, etc. Although these women were not under constant surveillance, they generally accepted their husbands' requests as legitimate. Most of these women - like those in more regular contact - centered their activities around their homes. Thus, they swung from attempting to include their husbands in details of their lives to excluding them. It appears that, given the limitations of infrequent communication by telephone, wives were more likely to share broad policy matters, rather than the daily day-to-day decisions, with their husbands. Wives in this position were less likely than the others to refer household decisions to their husbands and to consider them active heads of their families. They were also more likely to bury

themselves in child-rearing and domestic activities. They could receive socio-emotional support from their husbands, but it differed in both kind and degree from that provided to wives in closer contact. Therefore, these wives were less likely to depend upon it.

8.6.3 Home Furloughs

Vermont correctional policy, as we have noted, attempts to bring about prisoners' re-entry into the larger community in a series of gradual steps. A program of home visits was designed to help ease the prisoner into the community by reducing the pressures of re-entry. Formally, home visits are also intended to enable prisoners to: (1) maintain contact with their wives and families; (2) solidify marital bonds; and (3) briefly experience the demands and responsibilities of freedom prior to release. Instead, wives reported that home visits primarily provided wives and husbands with some respite from the pains of separation or imprisonment. Prisoners released for home visits may be on supervised or unsupervised passes. They are allowed to visit with family and friends, and to participate in social and recreational activities. As a rule, prisoners make these visits in the final months of their confinement.

Prisoners can obtain temporary release on the basis of need and/or merit. Supervised passes are only issued to prisoners who can find a willing guard or approved volunteer to take them into the community. Guards or volunteers are never supposed to let prisoners out of their sight. Their main charge is to keep prisoners under surveillance. Prisoners released on unsupervised passes are free to leave prison without surveillance for a day or a weekend. Both supervised and unsupervised passes are an on-going part of the program of the community correctional centers and Windsor Farm. St. Albans only occasionally allows prisoners to be temporarily released on supervised passes.

Eleven wives reported that their husbands had received at least one supervised pass during their confinement. Seventeen men had received more than two. Some husbands obtained these passes irregularly, while others received them at least twice a month. Only a few husbands had had weekend passes.

All the wives whose husbands were furloughed reported that they cleaned their homes, cooked special meals, and dressed up in anticipation of these visits. At the outset, home visits were often like honeymoons: both spouses tended to try to look their best and to be on best behavior. Couples were likely to seek the kind of intimacy that emerges only when everyday concerns are minimized and they can give each other undivided attention.

As with honeymoons, home visits also became a period of rest and relaxation. Usually, wives reported, the couples relaxed at home - sometimes with their children. Eight reported that they and their partners smoked marijuana or drank alcohol during these visits. If guards were present, they often smoked marijuana or drank alcohol with the couples.

Within the context of a visit, prisoners' wives went out of their way to place no pressure on their men's new-found freedom. In order to achieve this, all the wives cooked meals, prepared their children for the event, planned activities and attempted to create an atmosphere of cordiality. Wives did not ask their husbands to take on responsibilities within their homes. Although husbands frequently spent time with their children, wives assumed actual child care responsibilities. This allowed the men to enjoy their children without having to supervise or care for them:

Things are working out good now. He's getting passes home now.

He's spending time with the kids and me. He never spent much time with the kids before. Like this weekend, we had a birthday party. Before he never went to the kids' parties. Now he was home for Josh's birthday. We had a cookout and then Sunday we all went to Smuggler's Notch and we went hiking and fishing. And he played with the kids. He's trying to make the marriage work.

Home visits became a time in which couples reaffirmed their faith in one another and achieved some degree of intimacy in a more private setting than prison visiting rooms. What all wives found most pleasureable, of course, was the opportunity to mitigate a major "pain" of separation: sexual deprivation. It was only through home visits that couples could resume sexual relations under normal circumstances. If men were visiting on a supervised pass, this could only occur if the guards or volunteers were willing to let the rules slide so that spouses could have some time alone:

At St. Albans, when he first got them, they were supervised and they were for an afternoon. The guards took him where he wanted but he had to be at his mother's house. I'd go there and have dinner and the guard let us go into the bedroom for an hour and we'd have sex and be intimate for a while. It was so strange. We knew we only had a certain time. No one else was around and we were ourselves. Then we'd come out and deal with the reality of the guard. When we were in the room, we were just ourselves. We'd talk about ourselves and not about jail.

In the privacy of their bedrooms, the spouses were shielded from "real life" for a short while.

8.7 THE SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR MARITAL RELATIONS

It is clear from wives' accounts that home visiting is simply the final extension of the general unreality in marital relations engendered by the prison system. At no point in the process were husbands allowed to confront everyday domestic life. In-prison visits were unreal to the extent that wives selected issues to be raised with their husbands, prison visiting procedures kept certain issues from being discussed and

imprisonment itself made it more difficult for husbands to engage in the kind of "hard living" which had been at the root of many domestic conflicts on the outside. Home visits, because of their limited frequency and duration, encouraged a kind of honeymoon atmosphere in which couples were constrained to avoid sources of conflict. Rather than providing "dress rehearsals" for later reintegration into the larger community, they simply allowed wives to retain idealized notions of their husbands' abilities to assume roles as conventional husbands and fathers.

From the wives' accounts, however, it is also clear that both in-prison visiting and home furloughs facilitate the strengthening of marital ties. Home visits, wives' accounts agreed, improved family morale by adding intensely pleasurable events to the couples' collection of memories about their relationship and helped them weather the difficulties involved in "waiting" for their men's release date. According to thirteen women, family morale was also heightened by the break in the monotony of confinement to their homes and/or jobs which home visits provided.

Communicating with their husbands became a vital part of the lives of prisoners' wives for another reason: each chance to interact with their husbands, whether by telephone or during home visits, temporarily released the wives from the persistent structurally widened illusion that they, too, were in prison. It enabled them, because of this, to reaffirm their commitment to waiting for their husbands' release. As we will see in the next chapter, many wives' expectations were not met when these long-awaited events actually occurred.

Chapter 9

REPEATING THE CYCLE: WIVES ACCOMMODATIONS TO
PAROLLED HUSBANDS' RE-ENTRY

There are certain things that you're not going to like about your man when he comes home from the joint. Accept it. I expected a story book ending. I expected that I would have a Prince Charming with a 9-5 job and he'd leave in the morning with his lunch box and then he'd come home every night. I expected he'd be like that once he left the joint. What a complete asshole I was. I'd do it again though. - An Old Timer

9.1 BACKGROUND

After months of planning and dreaming, many prisoners' wives and their husbands are reunited. Although such reunions can be joyful, there are often problems and dilemmas associated with them. This chapter will explore how prisoners' wives experience their husbands' transition from prisoner to civilian status. In this context, we will pay particular attention to some of the difficulties encountered by wives in (1) attempting to establish the kinds of marriages they had planned during their husbands' imprisonment, and (2) attempting to support their husbands' reintegration into family life.

Once again, it is worthwhile to note that the problems and dilemmas of re-entry faced by couples after a period of imprisonment are not, in many ways, categorically different from those which emerge after other types of enforced separation. The literature documents the extent to which returning servicemen and repatriated war prisoners disturb the on-

going flow of their families' lives.¹ But, what is unique in the kind of cases described here is that husbands return to their families as officially convicted criminals who are still being supervised by the prison system.

There is virtually no research on the impact of parole on the wives of former prisoners. Some attention, however, has been paid to released prisoners' perceptions of domestic and family life.² These studies have consistently reported that there is a strong positive relationship between parole success and the maintenance of family ties while in prison. This result has held up across diverse populations of offenders and in very different locales.³

Irwin (1970) specifically looked at how returning prisoners perceived domestic life and provides a possible explanation for the relationship between parole success and strong family ties. He points out that the types of support, both practical and relational, provided by families had implications for the kinds of adjustments prisoners made to their status as parolees. Specifically, families can act to buffer newly released parolees from immediate problems by providing economic, material and social support. With this help parolees show a better chance of succeeding on parole.

¹See Boulding, 1950; McCubbin and Dahl, 1976; Metres, et. al., 1974.

²See Erickson, et. al., 1973; Irwin, 1970; Morris, et. al., 1975; Studt, 1967.

³Ohlin, 1954, initially found that the positive relationship between parole success and maintenance of family ties holds up across diverse populations. Similar findings have been made in more recent research: Erickson, et. al., 1973; Glaser, 1969; Holt and Miller, 1972; and Irwin, 1970.

The literature also maintains that there are factors operating in the family setting which can exacerbate parolees' problems. In his classic study, Glaser (1969) argues that "the absence or presence of conflict within the family, conflict between the parolee and his family, the compatibility of the parolee's and the family's commitments, the total character of the family's and parolee's past history together will have an important bearing on the solution of problems...In many instances, the family may be the major force driving the men back into systematic deviance."⁴ Specific evidence indicates that post-prison success is explicitly related to discord with wives. Oddly, there is no extensive description of how wives perceive their husbands post-prison performance. Here we will see that whether or not released prisoners establish conventionally-oriented lives, their wives have their own personal reactions to the necessity of continuing to play a supportive role in their husbands' reintegration into the family.

9.2 THE HONEYMOON

Prisoners' returns to their wives can often be dramatic. Of twenty-nine men, fifteen left prison for their homes and families. The time had come for couples to put into practice the plans made during the months of enforced separation. Here we will begin by describing what wives anticipate about what would happen at this time. This will allow us to explore the interpersonal dynamics at work during the initial stage of the couples' reunion: the honeymoon. With this as context, we will explore the extent to which wives perceive release as crisis-provoking.

⁴Glaser, 1969: 245.

9.2.1 Anticipations About the Reunion

At the time the field research reported here was completed, seven of fifteen men had initially been released from prison under the provisions of the "extended furlough" program. This program allows prisoners to adjust to working and living within their communities, while still under the general supervision of the correctional system. Extended furloughs are usually given to prisoners classified as minimum security risks who have performed satisfactorily in work-release programs. Extended furloughs can be revoked when prisoners violate community rules. When extended furloughs are revoked, prisoners are returned to prison to resume their sentences.

The other eight men had already been paroled. Parole, in effect, allows prisoners to serve the remaining parts of their sentences while living in the larger community. Parole is a privilege, and can be revoked if parolees violate conditions of their parole. If it is revoked, they are returned to prison to serve the remainder of their sentences. If parolees commit crimes while on parole, they may be tried, sentenced if found guilty, and returned to serve additional terms.

Prisoners' wives generally have mixed feelings about their husbands' release from prison. First, they look forward to their husbands' return with eagerness. They are initially optimistic about the chances that their husbands will stay out of trouble. Second, they believe that their husbands are going to fulfill their promises to establish settled and law-abiding lifestyles, so that the women can establish their roles as traditional wives. Most believe that their chances are better than average that they will be able to live this way.

At the same time, they have some misgivings. First, according to nine wives, they were anxious about whether or not they and their husbands

were going to be "strangers;" that their husbands would disrupt the kinds of lives they had established for themselves. The source of their anxiety was the fear that enforced incarceration and separation had encouraged them and their husbands to develop in very different directions.

Second, seven neophytes and one old timer reported that they had no idea what to expect in the role of parolee and parolee's family. Wives had no sense of what their husbands would expect from them. Thus, they were likely to speculate about possible re-entry problems.

Finally, seven wives worried that their husbands would simply resume the cycle of unemployment, hard living, and criminal activity:

A: I don't want to be a police woman for the rest of my life. I seem always to be telling him that he shouldn't be doing this or that. And I know that whatever he does, is going to reflect back on me.

Q: What do you mean by police woman?

A: I certainly have been quite adamant about his activities in the past. He couldn't do anything illegal around me now. I don't want him getting high around me now. But when he does get high, I hope he is discrete about it because I feel now that it's his problem. I've gotten completely paranoid about him and what he does. Like he's not supposed to drink and I worry when he does drink. I feel like his mother and I don't want to be in that position. Under no circumstances would I stay with him if he got arrested again. I'd leave. I told him that.

9.2.2 The Honeymoon Itself

* With parole or extended furlough papers in hand, prisoners return home to what is usually a joyful reunion. From wives' descriptions, this initial period seems to be similar, in certain ways, to a honeymoon. Immediately after they are reunited each member of the couple goes through a transition from a status as "married-but-single" to "married."

While they are making this transition, they have an opportunity to rédefine or resume aspects of their previous roles, establish new patterns, and explore new possibilities.

Of fifteen wives, eleven claimed that in the early days of their reunions, they experienced extreme elation, pleasure, and shock at having their men in their homes again. Reunion was a time of celebration in which most couples established a moratorium on dealing with everyday stresses and strains and on outside social activities. Like a honeymoon, couples sometimes took extended trips together; with or without their children. Others, who stayed at home, took a vacation from the routines of home life. Wives reported that they tried to extract as much relaxation and enjoyment from this period as possible.

Given the "pains of imprisonment," wives - especially neophytes - expected that the euphoria of reunions would overshadow any initial difficulties; at least for the first few days. Instead, twelve wives reported that the honeymoon initiated a period of crisis in their lives.

All twelve reported that, although they were elated, they also reacted with shock, bewilderment and disbelief at the behavioral patterns their husbands displayed. Many were disoriented and appeared to be ill-prepared to fulfill their wives' expectations, at least in the short term. This disorientation stemmed from a sense that they were "strangers" in the "free world." Thus, they were uncertain, anxious, and self-conscious. Wives also reported that the men sometimes experienced acute anxiety, sleeplessness, trouble talking to people, difficulties in making decisions, and difficulties in adjusting to their own homes, much less their communities. Old timers expected that their husbands would be disoriented and temporarily suspended expectations that their husbands' would resume their former roles. Six neophytes who were unprepared for

this kind of thing responded with bewilderment at their husbands' abrupt and sometimes dramatic changes:

He got this apartment in St. Johnsbury. I went up there for a weekend when he first got out. It was a bad weekend. He acted real strange. I was so excited that we wouldn't have to sneak around to talk to each other. But he was completely freaked out. He was terrified to leave the apartment. So we hung around there for four or five hours. He tried all the locks on the door and the windows and he was completely edgy. He wanted to have a beer but he was afraid to go to the store to get some. I went and brought him a bottle of beer and then he had me sneak it into the house. Then he locked the door and closed the curtains and drank his beer. I wanted to go out and buy things for his apartment. The next day we went to Zayres and he was so nervous. He was completely paranoid. I spent most of my time trying to find him. He at one point hurried to the bathroom and threw up. I didn't know what was wrong with him. I just went ahead and bought everything. I bought the store out - pots, pans, dishes - and he just stood next to me and watched me buy these things. We went home and he just sat there and looked at these things. He looked like he was from outer space. He kept staring at the things that I had bought. I didn't realize that he only saw plastic knives. And now he was looking at real knives. For two years, he hadn't seen real plates and things like that. Now I understand but then I felt that he had lost his mind.

Seven women observed that their husbands tended to remain close to home during the early phase of the honeymoon period. The old timers were more likely to recognize that their men were not used to having freedom and found it disorienting to place themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. If nothing else, home is familiar territory. Neophytes were more likely to interpret this unfamiliar behavior as a sign that their men were really ready to settle down and enjoy the companionship of their wives and children.

By contrast, three old timers reported that, instead of being disoriented, their husbands spent little time at home and moved easily into their old familiar scenes with their peer group. These old timers suggested that imprisonment can reinforce husbands' inclinations to "make up for lost time:"

We talk a lot about what it's like when the men come out. I tell them that the men are going to want to go partying for a couple of nights and that this is normal. They can't keep their men home right off. I had a girlfriend who was going through this and we talked about it. I told her that he wasn't rejecting her, but he's going from no freedom to too much freedom and he's only trying to learn how to handle it.

Many wives' accounts note that the correctional system prepares neither the men nor the women for re-entry. During imprisonment, men are socialized into roles which they must discard when they are released. Prison systems, no matter how opened or closed, are, in some sense, total institutions. Prisoners are socialized to behave as conforming members withing the prison community. After release, the men experience a sharp discontinuity between their inmate status and those as husbands and fathers, which bear little relationship to it.

All the wives functioned as heads of their households during their husbands' incarceration. As a consequence, all fifteen wives expected their spouses to settle down and resume at least some of their previous responsibilities. Twelve wives desired some relief from economic as well as child care responsibilities. Their husbands, however, were often ill-prepared to deal with either of their wives' demands or the demands of community living:

In jail, he didn't have any responsibilities and for the men who have wives and families, that's difficult for them. When he's released, she sees him coming out and she wants him to take the responsibilities over now. And she then pushes these responsibilities on him and he's not ready. He's not had any responsibilities or made any decisions for a long time. How can he do it instantly just because he's been released. He's had no preparation for it.

Although the honeymoon period eases the transition for all concerned, it is nevertheless a disruptive event in wives' lives. Eleven women reported that marital conflicts erupted. These problem areas emerge from

forced separation and the fact that neither spouse found the other to be exactly as fantasized during involuntary separation. They therefore perceived the others as changed. Six wives reported that arguments erupted over their new-found independence and their husbands' demands that they return to the old familiar dependent role. Another issue which provoked marital conflict was the settled or square jane lifestyles that wives established during enforced separation.

Only four wives resumed their family life as if it had never been interrupted. In effect, both spouses seemed to give minimal evidence of disorientation in making the necessary re-entry transition. These wives reported that neither they nor their husbands had undergone any permanent changes. However, they did recognize modifications in their personalities and expectations for their marriages which had made re-entry relatively easy. Enforced separation, these wives claimed, had been beneficial for both spouses insofar as they had gained time to reflect on their marriages, to come to terms with their possessiveness and their jealousies, and to develop as separate people.

How abruptly husbands are released from their prisons affects wives' ability to handle these problems. When husbands were gradually reintegrated into their homes and communities through the home furlough and work release programs, they were more prepared for parole. Seven women mentioned that they were able to observe some changes in their spouses, and to cope with them. Release therefore can be both beneficial and crisis-provoking for both wives and husbands, depending on a variety of circumstances.

9.3 PATTERNS OF REORGANIZATION

Honeymoons do not last forever. Afterwards, couples encounter the problems and dilemmas of reorganizing their families. Reorganization was seen by wives as essential for establishing settled and conventionally oriented lives. Common elements emerged in the kinds of reorganization couples undertake. Either they (1) settled down or (2) resumed hard living and criminal activities.

From wives' accounts we learn that enforced separation encourages wives to develop certain behavioral patterns which either increased or decreased their ability to establish satisfying marital relationships. Whether or not they resumed old patterns, negotiations with spouses were based on the expectation that shared dreams were to be finally realized.

Nine wives reported that they and their men had resumed some old marital patterns, but within the framework of a settled lifestyle. They further reported that their husbands actively attempted to transform their identities from ex-convicts to ordinary citizens, and to establish a more settled or square john lifestyle. These men frequently followed a very narrow and exacting path. For instance, they often adopted steady work patterns. When not working, they spent most of their time at home watching television, listening to their stereos, etc. If they drank or consumed drugs, they did it moderately. They looked to their wives and families for support, and avoided contacts with criminally-oriented friends and family members.

Six of this group reported that their marital roles were based on traditional sex roles: their husbands continued to be the economic providers, with their wives primarily responsible for the domestic and child rearing chores. The women saw these kinds of marriages as settled or "doing good." In all these cases, new mutually satisfactory ones were

established. Whether or not wives had had intimate and satisfying marital relations before prison, they reported that they and their husbands discovered new values in family life and established a more cooperative relationship. Their husbands approved of their wives' management of the households and children during separation. In turn, these wives approved of their husbands' ability to handle the hardships of re-entry as well as their newly acquired commitment to a conventional lifestyle.

As the months went by, however, more wives were astonished, bewildered, and sometimes driven to despair when they learned that their husbands had resumed the old and all-too-familiar marital patterns they had established before prison. Shortly after release, six women reported that their husbands were "not doing too good." Three more made this observation six months later. Their husbands' commitments to settled ways of living had apparently been short lived: in particular, they were unemployed, associating with criminally-inclined friends, staying out late, drinking and consuming drugs, or perhaps having short term extra-marital affairs.

9.4 PROBLEMS OF RE-ENTRY

The major problems paroled prisoners face center around getting and keeping a steady job. Twelve men were steadily employed shortly after they were released from prison. However, most of these men had been released from prison with no training, and few, if any, employable skills which would qualify them for jobs which provide a steady income. Few prisoners actually received serious job training inside Vermont's correctional facilities or through arrangements with outside agencies. Most work within the prisons, or on work release, was unskilled, or, at most, semi-skilled. According to wives' accounts, only three men actually received some kind of job training while serving their time.

Three men had been released from prison with no jobs in hand, and remained unemployed. Their wives reported that they did not appear to be motivated to find work. The most frequent explanation given by the husbands for this was that they needed a "rest from prison" or that they were taking a "little vacation" before looking for work. By contrast, the three wives, who worked outside their homes during their husbands' imprisonment, continued to be employed. The wife who was a college student continued her studies. The remaining ten wives continued to be housewives and kept their welfare grants as supplements to their husbands' incomes. Three arranged to have their unemployed husbands included in these grants. None of the women who remained at home were totally dependent on their husbands' incomes. Most looked to their husbands to provide for their families' economic well-being, which they saw as necessary for a settled lifestyle. Thus, all women felt that "settling down" did not simply mean spending time at home listening to the stereo, watching television, or providing them with companionship, but that it necessarily involved steady employment.

By the end of the field research, eight of fifteen men were unemployed. The reasons for this were, in three cases, that the men had been laid off since they had been hired as temporary workers for government-sponsored or seasonal jobs. Two men quit because they really did not want low paying, unskilled jobs under poor working conditions. The three men who were unemployed on release simply did not look for jobs.

Unemployment was a source of problems and stress for most women. Six said that their unemployed husbands would consider accepting jobs which offered them more status and prestige or that their physical ailments prevented them from searching for work. Often, they reported, the men simply avoided the subject by being home as little as possible. Contrary

to what we might expect, most men did not find themselves stigmatized when seeking employment: only two women reported that their husbands' statuses as "ex-cons" interfered with their obtaining satisfactory employment.

In the case of all six wives, unemployment meant a continuation of grinding poverty. All these wives either continued their welfare grants or reapplied when their husbands became unemployed. One wife, who received public assistance when her husband was in prison, reported that when he was released her grant was automatically terminated. This was most acutely felt by her family, since her husband was not working.

They stopped our welfare and medicaid and everything. He didn't earn enough money in prison to qualify for Aid to the Unemployed Fathers...We're at rock bottom. I've been writing bad checks to eat. I still get a small amount of food stamps. I've been working myself sick. I have to go to work whether I'm sick or not. There is only my income to feed the three of us. I can't afford to take off a day from work or we'll starve to death. I'm working and I'm responsible for Frank now, but he's not working. It hurts me bad. I make \$2.99 an hour. I'm the working head of the household and I support the family. General Assistance won't help.

It is interesting to note, however, that wives whose husbands were working were not significantly better off: even if husbands were employed, their families could continue to be extremely poor. Four wives reported that their husbands' incomes were far less than what they had previously received from welfare. Moreover, wives were now not just maintaining themselves and their children, but also their husbands. However, almost all wives expected that their husbands would eventually obtain adequate employment.

By contrast, only three women did not equate unemployment with poverty. They were employed, and provided the economic foundation for a middle class life style. Hence, their husbands' incomes were not

necessaty. Another wife, whose husband had a highly skilled position in a water treatment plant, reported that her family is economically better off as a result of her husband's job and a welfare grant that covers her handicapped child.

The stresses and strains of poverty took an immediate toll on twelve wives. Moreover, the long-held dreams which sustained them during enforced separation were rapidly disintegrating. Their husbands' inability to achieve one primary aspect of their dreams built old familiar resentments in these wives:

One of these days I'm going to be fed up. When I go back to work and he sits on his fat ass at home, I'm going to kick him out. I don't want to change him. I want the lazy bastard to work. I'm not supporting him - not anymore. I see my mother's life all over again - supporting a lazy bastard. I'll go back to nursing until I can't work there any longer.

9.4.1 Repeating Hard Living Patterns

Within six months, nine of the unemployed men had resumed hard living. Eight wives observed that they were most disturbed by the fact that their husbands resumed their old patterns of alcohol and drug use. Six of these wives also noted that when their husbands reactivated old prison friendships it indicated to them that trouble was about to happen. These wives emphasized that dissociation from friends or acquaintances who are criminally involved was an important component of "going straight."

Four wives provided an explanation for their husbands' resuming their old criminal ties. They indicated that their husbands gravitated back to these friends because they believed that other people cannot appreciate their prison experiences. Thus, once again, wives who dreamed about evenings spent in front of the television with husbands, spent evenings

alone waiting for their husbands. Husbands' "night out with the boys" all too frequently became "nights out with the boys." Four wives believed that their husbands were not only associating with questionable peers, but with women of questionable intentions.

Six wives reported that their husbands physically abused them. No matter how severe the batterings, all wives were reluctant to inform either the police or their husbands' parole officers. They simply did not want to be responsible for sending them back to prison.

This hard living severely threatened the lifestyles wives had established, often at considerable cost to themselves. Yet, they continued to accommodate to their husbands' problems and to the marital conflicts related to these re-entry problems. They coped because they continued to believe that their husbands would eventually come around to a settled lifestyle.

9.4.2 Repeating Cycles of Unemployment, Hard Living and Crime

Within six months, nine women reported that their husbands were involved in crime again. Nine husbands had violated at least one condition of parole - such as associating with known criminals, possession of guns, drinking excessively and drug consumption. Six had resumed chaotic, careless, unskilled and opportunistic crime; such as burglary, check forging, aggravated assault, or shoplifting. In all cases, these crimes were alcohol or drug-related:

He went and got me some slacks, three pairs of shoes, a jacket, a digital clock and he got himself dungarees and jackets. I broke my sandal and he said, "I'll get you a pair of shoes."...That's Frank's way of taking care of us. It's the only way he knows.

I went to the car and waited for him to come back. I told him "you're crazy!" He said that this store is the easiest and I

shouldn't worry...That petrifies me. He sat Debra on top of the meat in the grocery store and wheeled her out on top of it. What would happen to the kid if he had been caught?

In another case, the husband resumed his sexual patterns, e.g., masturbating while watching couples' sexual activity on television, reading pornography, and so forth:

It was so dumb. We had had a good steak dinner. We had decided to watch a movie on the TV. When the movie was ready to come on, he changed his mind. He wanted to watch Juke Box. Here I am all ready to watch this movie and we're going to see Juke Box. He went to get a beer and I associated beer with sex and sex with watching something like Juke Box on the TV. I immediately felt that I was back in the same old spaces. I think that Juke Box is stimulating, like sex. He said that he'd go upstairs and watch it alone and I could watch my movie down here. I felt that he wanted me to get him angry so that he could go and masturbate.

All these women were afraid that their husbands were going to return to prison. Six had become reconciled to this eventuality. Within six months four husbands had had some type of encounter with the police which had not led to arrest, e.g. they were searched, questioned, warned by the police, or stopped for a traffic violation. It came as no surprise to four wives when they learned that their husbands had been picked up by the police. Two of these wives reported that their husbands' status as ex-convicts was not at issue and that the police had some other basis for suspicion. Only two old timers indicated that their husbands had been picked up by the police because of their extensive criminal records.

By contrast, six women whose husbands rigorously conformed to a settled or a middle class lifestyle, also encountered old and familiar problems. Once again, these were related to unemployment.

9.5 PROBLEMS DUE TO ENFORCED SEPARATION

Reunion is a period in which husbands can begin to move back into the family circle and resume familial responsibilities. In order for this to occur, the family unit itself must reallocate roles by realigning power and authority, reworking the division of labor, and sharing home and family activities.

9.5.1 Reallocation of Roles

We learn from wives' accounts that they, themselves, played the central role in this reallocation. Twelve wives indicated that this involved negotiations with their husbands. Eight reported that these were done consciously and carefully. Wives tried to remember to consult their husbands about household problems, children management, and to defer to their husbands' authority. In these cases, they reported that they initially forgot to do this: "I'm used to doing it all by myself," they said.

The eight couples that began to establish settled working class lives reported that when husbands immediately resumed the role of economic provider it facilitated their assumption of others. The wives reported that when husbands did this it made it easier for them to accept them as at least partners in family management.

Although husbands assumed some household responsibilities, they seldom fulfilled the entire range of responsibilities. Instead, as a young woman reported, they were likely to do just what was demanded of them:

I told him to make out the bills at least every other month. If I died, he'd know nothing about how to run the house. I've been doing the bills. He agreed to do this. But then he told me that he didn't even know where I kept the bills. I told him to figure that out. I had him take the baby out for a walk a few times. He did and actually enjoyed it. He's trying!

Wives claimed that they encouraged "traditional" divisions of roles and responsibilities: children and home were the wives' domains and the occupational world was their husbands'. Wives reported that husbands accepted what they considered to be an old and familiar division of labor with a minimum of resistance.

This process was more problematic, however, where husbands were gravitating back into unemployment and hard living. Of the nine women involved, seven reported that their husbands had, to varying degrees, resisted participating in day-to-day household responsibilities. Once again, these wives found themselves gradually encountering similar marital patterns to those they established before involuntary separation, together with the additional responsibilities they assumed during enforced separation:

He didn't want the responsibility of the bills and household decisions. He was scared. He never told me why. I asked him to help me pay the bills. He said he didn't want the responsibility. He still doesn't. I'm worried because I don't know what it's going to be like in the future and if he is ever going to want to take responsibility.

All these wives eventually stopped trying to negotiate with their husbands about these issues.

9.5.2 Division of Authority

Questions of authority within family units were exacerbated by enforced separation. Husbands' failure to participate in household decisions was not the only issue raised by women whose men were gravitating toward hard living: it was part of a larger failure of husbands to assume authority within their families. Most wives found that, after the period of reorganization, they retained some authority they would have liked to hand over to their husbands. They reported that

authority and involvement in family life were related. In order to get more power, their husbands would have had to get more involved: as long as they remained uninvolved, their husbands were "guests" in their own homes.

According to eight women, while their husbands wanted minimal household responsibility, they did want to resume control over household finances. Wives were reluctant to relinquish this for several reasons. First, as a consequence of "forced" separation, they had discovered how competently they could handle money. Secondly, money was a scarce resource. They felt that if their husbands controlled it they would absorb too much of it. However if they did not relinquish control they were aware that it would only reinforce their husbands' positions on the fringes of family life. These wives recognized that money could be a crucial factor in their husbands' ability to participate in conventionally-oriented forms of recreation. Yet, these men came to realize that, because of lack of money, they could not participate in activities they had fantasized about during imprisonment except by eating into scarce family resources. Wives reported that they could see that many of their husbands got so frustrated by this that they resumed some of their criminal activities.

By contrast, wives of conventionally-oriented husbands were concerned about maintaining their own sense of independence. Six women indicated that they had learned to manage their lives and households to their satisfaction during separation. This gave them satisfying lifestyles as well as a sense of independence and competence. Many husbands were unwilling to accept the changes that this implied. The working class women in the study population were most often determined to continue to make decisions about some household and children management policies; to retain the right to choose their own friends; and to decide when to

visit relatives and friends. Whenever their men decided to reassert their authority as fathers and husbands, these women were likely to regard their husbands as potentially disruptive forces in their households:

It's funny but Mike said to me the other day that "I think you have lived alone too long. You don't need a man in the house." I've learned to survive but I do need a man. I can do these things for myself and I have the house the way I like it. He says that I get in the way of his relating to the kids. When he tells them to do something and then scolds them, I tend to stick up for them. I try to protect them from him when I think he's not doing it right. He says that I'm always interfering with the children and him and that I am always judging how he is doing with the kids.

In two cases, the issue of maintaining a new sense of independence centered around the women's unwillingness to change aspects of their "square jane" lifestyles. These wives were quick to point out that incarceration can and did undermine some marital relations. Those women who had lived in common law relationships before separation, but had not conceived children, found that enforced separation had made it easier for them to move to new communities and establish satisfying life patterns. According to these women, the major issue was not whether their husbands were going to resume their old ways, but whether they themselves could continue to maintain their independence and lifestyles. Hence, they needed to be assured that their husbands were willing to pursue their wives' lifestyles and to establish more egalitarian marriages. As long as each partner could independently decide to choose their own careers and have equal authority in domestic decision-making, marital conflicts were minimal. In most cases, this meant continual negotiation and renegotiation of these issues.

Thus we can see that enforced separation actually encouraged some couples to drift apart so that wives and husbands could pursue their

respective lifestyles. Reunion had become a difficult process: having developed divergent lifestyles, spouses could not fall back on old familiar marital patterns.

9.6 PAROLE SUCCESS AND PAROLEES' WIVES

The literature indicates that parole success is closely associated with strong family ties. In the early stages of re-entry, there appeared to be differences in the kinds of support the fifteen women provided for their husbands. All not only wanted to help their husbands to keep the conditions of their paroles, but to increase their motivation to settle down. Given their belief in the therapeutic effect of imprisonment, they all thought it would change their husbands for the better. Five women felt that it had encouraged the men to grow up.

9.6.1 Wives' Responses to Settled Husbands

The six women whose husbands adopted a more settled lifestyle claimed that they were not overly concerned about their husbands resuming criminal activities. Instead, they were preoccupied with assisting their husbands to fit into a new pattern.

At this writing, not one of these men had been charged with a parole violation or arrested. Although wives of these settled husbands are sure that their husbands are going to stay out of trouble, they also describe preventive strategies they employed in order to prevent any further "troubles:"

Q: Do you ever feel concerned that he's going to get into trouble?

A: If I bring it up and ask, "Alfred what are you doing?" when he's been out, it would make him feel that I don't have any trust in him. I don't worry about it anyway. I don't ask him any questions about where he goes.

All six women also claimed that nurturing could act as a preventive mechanism. To reinforce their husbands' conventional behavior, these wives attempted to build up their self-confidence, to assist them in transforming their social identities, to advise them about their character defects, and so forth. One young woman described how she nurtured her husband:

I gave him a lot of positive reinforcement about his job. Anything positive that he does, I try to recognize it. When he told me about going to see the people in Burlington, I interrogated him and he got the full inquisition and I don't let him off the hook. A lot of times he talked to me and as I quiz him, he begins to see the reasons why he got involved in something. But I'm sure all this has to do with trying to rebuild his identity.

Wives also resorted to the pain-in-the-ass strategy. All six repeatedly pointed out that future non-conventional behavior would result in the loss of their wives and children. Furthermore, these wives undertook at least one of several preventive actions, e.g., not allowing alcohol or drugs in their homes.

Nevertheless, these wives claimed that their husbands' successful parole performance could not be ascribed to any of these strategies. Instead, they saw more important factors at play. First, these husbands had returned home more stable than they were before prison. This stability, they noted, increased their husbands' determination to avoid criminal activities. Second, four wives reported that prison had equipped their men to avoid "troubles" by providing them with vocational skills and/or educational training. Some gained insights into their drinking problems and others acquired a strong distaste for prison.

Although six men had not been returned to prison for parole violations or crimes, they did not all re-establish stable marriages. Of the six, two wives filed for divorce. According to the wives, they and their

husbands had drifted apart as a consequence of the changes in lifestyles during enforced separation. Many patterns established during enforced separation no longer seemed satisfactory to one or both partners and the spouses were unable to adjust. Over the months since reunion, they had grown increasingly distant from each other. Further, these wives had become increasingly indifferent to whether or not their husbands were going to perform successfully while on parole: their own sense of independence had assumed priority over supporting their husbands.

9.6.2 Wives' Responses to Husbands' Hard Living and Crime

During imprisonment, dreams and promises served as a vehicle for sustaining wives' commitments to their husbands. On release, many wives realized that their husbands were becoming increasingly pre-occupied with hard living. During re-entry, most wives reported that these dreams and promises became tarnished, but, nevertheless, remained a vital mechanism they utilized to reinforce their beliefs in the permanence of their marriages.

In order to maintain these dreams, wives once again employed accommodative strategies designed to divert their husbands away from deviant behavior.

Nine wives had not changed their interpretations of their husbands' hard living and criminal activities throughout the stages of the criminalization process. At each stage they were preoccupied with convincing themselves - and, perhaps, me - that their husbands' behavior could be attributed to external or situational factors. They therefore, once again, emphasized that such outside factors as alcohol, environmental forces, family crises and so forth - alone or together with internal forces such as character flaws - or they, themselves, were

to blame for their husbands' deviations from proper patterns of behavior.

To prevent troubles with the law, the wives frantically searched for some kind of effective strategy. They often tried several. As time went on, wives were less and less likely to respond to their husbands' hard living with nurturing. In general, old timers were less likely than neophytes to nurture their husbands. When wives engaged in nurturing, it was usually to avoid physical battering, to deal with husbands who were drunk, to deal with the resumption of sexually deviant behavior, and so forth. "Nurturing," in this sense, took the form of providing emotional support, listening attentively to husbands; as well as attempting to strengthen their self-confidence.

Nurturing was generally ineffective in breaking the cycle of arrest, courts, and prison. When wives tried nurturing and found it ineffective, seven of the nine once again turned to the pain-in-the-ass strategy. Since all the wives had had experience with their husbands' hard living prior to prison, they knew what to expect and acted accordingly. They quickly took control of the family income; hid money, refused outright to give money to their husbands, etc. Four reverted to hiding the car keys or the car's spare tires. Three wives nagged their husbands about maintaining contact with their parole officers. One wife even pinned the parole regulations on the wall so that her husband could continually see them. An old timer described why she acted like a pain-in-the-ass:

I just won't stand for Ruddy to be drunk. I feel good about that. Since he's been home, he's been drunk twice. And he always has an excuse for being drunk. I don't take it. I blow up. He came home drunk and he gave me a lot of crap. I told him to suffer. I said, "Just suffer!" We went to court about my daughter and after court he went out and celebrated. When he got home, I told him to suffer. And then I gave him some Digel and he got terribly sick. He suffered.

Frustrated and fearful, these wives argued with their husbands in hopes that this strategy would change their behavior. Arguments centered around their husbands' failure to provide satisfactory incomes and around their inability to fulfill their dreams for a settled life. Marital conflicts also erupted around the wives' fears that their husbands would return to prison. Accordingly, they were more likely to escalate their demands as time went on. Their increasing frustrations were often expressed in angry outbursts and statements that came as a surprise to their husbands:

A lot of us assume this mother figure position with our men. We keep telling them all the things they can't do because they would get in trouble. We get so uptight over what they do and so fearful that they are going to get back into trouble again that we end up nagging them about all the things they shouldn't be doing. So to them it feels like they're still in prison because they have someone else who is telling them continually. And the more you tell them what to do, the more they rebel.

In five cases, the more argumentative the women became, the more their husbands got into hard living. Seven wives considered informing parole officers about their husbands' violations. Two were afraid to do so. Four actually did. They thought that parole officers could relieve them of some responsibility for their husbands' behavior and also control their husbands to the point where they would not get rearrested. Initially two old timers attempted to abide by the prison code of "no snitching." But once their husbands' behavior began to interfere with their roles as mothers, they used parole officers as a last resort.

These four wives reported that parole officers did not respond as they expected. Many wives complained that parole officers were indifferent to their situation and did not even attempt to pressure their husbands into changing their behavior. None of the men involved were returned to prison for parole violations. In only one instance had an officer put

pressure on a man to abide by parole rules and regulations. Only one husband was charged with parole violation. From the wives' accounts, it appeared that parole officers were more likely to respond when an event had blown up than they were before this had happened. In one instance, the wife, whose marriage has been conflict ridden, described how she and her husband argued at a night spot. The husband, quite drunk, damaged his wife's car when she attempted to leave. While staying at a friend's home, her husband called her to inform her that he was destroying their home. She promptly called the police:

I got on the phone and he told me to get my ass home. I said, "Where are you?" He said, "I'm at your house." I told him that I was afraid of him and that I wasn't going near him. He told me to come home or he'd kill me. I told him not to come here. Then I heard all this crashing and he came back to the phone and said, "There goes your stereo, you'd better come home." Then he changed his tune and started pleading, "Please come home." And he kept going back and forth like that; from violent to pleading. He wouldn't hang up the phone. I could hear all the noise and crashing. Then he picked up the phone again and said, "Are you coming home now? I'm making a nice wreck here!" Then he said, "Okay, I'm gonna kill myself!" And he hung up. I called my neighbor Bruce, and asked him to check on Tim for me. He said he would but then he came back and said that he wouldn't go in there with a ten foot pole with all that noise. It was then I called the police.

The parole agency recommended that this man's parole be cancelled and that he be sent back to prison. His wife filed for divorce.

Separating from their husbands was not a new strategy for most wives. Flight was one seemingly logical way to control what they perceived as their husbands' failure to fulfill their expectations. All nine wives had tried separation; sometimes more than once. However, they had usually returned to their husbands within a few weeks.

Separation serves several functions for wives. First, it appears to be a way out of the cycle of arrest, courts, and prisons. Second, they

think that separation can teach their husbands the value of family life, and therefore encourage them to renew their commitments to the dream of settling down. Finally, it can be used to make a strong statement that the wives will no longer tolerate their husbands' behavior.

Enforced separation contributed to wives' ability to initiate separations. During their husbands' imprisonment, they saw how manageable life could be without them. This encouraged wives to believe that their husbands were "luxuries" they could no longer afford:

Q: Are you planning to leave him?

A: I have my own furniture and I still have welfare. I don't need no guy. I can live without a guy. It doesn't bother me anymore. Him being in jail so long. He's been in and out of jail these seven years. I'm used to living without a guy.

All these ways of acting like a pain-in-the-ass usually bring some relief. But they also only yield temporary results. For a period of time, household money is more effectively controlled. For varying periods, husbands are reminded that they can be returned to prison for parole violations. Some stop their "troublesome" activities. Yet the costs of acting as a pain-in-the-ass are high. When wives employ this strategy, their husbands become increasingly resentful, further alienated from their wives, and eventually resume hard living.

When their husbands did this, five wives then reverted to another familiar strategy: passive distance. By withdrawing into silence, these wives avoid arguments which could lead to violence. However, in assuming this coping strategy, they once again encountered their husbands from a position of perceived powerlessness:

Q: How are you trying to work things out?

A: Mostly, I keep my mouth shut. And I'm not a person to keep

my mouth shut. He comes and goes as he wants. When he is home, we sit here at night and we don't talk. I'm doing this for the kids. I don't want the kids without a father. I was brought up without a father.

Once the wives employed this strategy, they had given up any responsibility for their husbands' actions: as far as they were concerned, their husbands were out of their control.

One of the least frequently employed strategies was co-deviance. To preserve her marriage, one woman resumed the pattern prior to her husband's arrest: drinking heavily with him, and issuing bogus checks to raise money for alcohol and drugs. Co-deviance allowed this wife, once again, to normalize her husband's behavior by joining him in his marginal status. Finally, one wife hoped to deter her husband from participating in criminal activities by independently initiating her own.

9.6.3 Wives' Reactions to Re-Arrest

Re-arrest came as no surprise to the wives involved. Of the nine husbands who gravitated towards hard living, seven were arrested again. Five of these husbands had subsequently been imprisoned, while two had charges dropped. All these men and their wives were old timers, except for one neophyte who was instrumental in having her husband's parole revoked.

Although their husbands' arrests were generally anticipated, these seven wives faced them with mixed emotions. The feelings of grief and sadness at involuntary separation were similar to the kind of grieving these wives experienced during previous arrests. At the same time, their husbands' arrests were also welcomed with relief, anger and resentment.

Wives' accounts provided several reasons why their husbands' arrests would be greeted with some degree of relief. First, wives perceived that arrest would break the cycle of alcohol and drug abuse, battering, and irresponsible behavior and might return their families to some degree of economic solvency. Their husbands' return to prison was felt to remove what had become a destructive force within their households. Re-arrest appeared to be functional. On the one hand, husbands were no longer being reminded that they had failed to achieve their dreams and promises. On the other, wives gained some relief from having to deal with their husbands.

Second, seven wives indicated that, prior to re-arrest, their husbands had begun to lead somewhat segregated lives, i.e., their husbands began pursuing hard living while the wives remained caught up in child care and other domestic concerns. Their husbands' arrests and imprisonment brought with them the satisfaction that they and their husbands could, once again, have a common interest. They had previously discovered that the criminalization process became one of the few major on-going events which they could share with their husbands. With re-arrest, they could, once again, share their husbands' passage through the criminal justice system, shape future plans, and renew their faith in their marriages. The new sentence and incarceration served as a welcome reprieve from having to assess how realistic their dreams were and how likely it was that their husbands would change.

Three old timers also reacted with relief, but for somewhat different reasons. These wives epitomized the service wife syndrome: they had discovered that they were uncomfortable in their roles as wives whenever their husbands were in their households. They reported that their husbands' presence interfered with their performing their roles as wives to their satisfaction. For these women, their husbands' arrests came at

an opportune time. They were ready to, once again, resume their settled lives as independent wives with all the privileges of having absent husbands, but with few responsibilities to them. Enforced separation would allow them to reduce friction in their marriages. Marital relations were reported as more satisfying. They were more likely to enjoy their husbands and feel closer to them once they were at a comfortable distance:

A: I don't have a hassle and no one to answer to except myself when he's in jail. I feel like a martyr. I enjoy it.

Q: What's the payoff for you when he's out?

A: I'm still a martyr. But I'm not as happy a martyr as when he's inside. When he's out, I can't seem to control anything and usually I can control anything. He's a sleeping partner - my stud service. That's about it. It's true that I get greater payoffs when he's in than when he's out.

As with this wife, two other old timers also reported that imprisonment provided them with the opportunity to resume some satisfying patterns. First, their husbands' imprisonment provides them with a chance to "get out socially" by visiting their husbands at prison, and once again see old acquaintances, both prisoners and their wives. Further, they could once again serve prison time which, for them, was a pleasant, although somewhat annoying experience. They now had a goal which they could reach with some degree of satisfaction: they could begin, again, to control their own lives, mark off days of having lived alone successfully, and gained some satisfaction from their ability to faithfully visit their husbands. They derived, in the final analysis, satisfaction from observing their husbands' progress within the prison community, e.g., the number of prison activities in which their husbands participated, their husbands' movement from one classification level to another, etc. When their men were on the outside, their reintegration into society was fraught with failure,

e.g., the struggle to survive financially, drinking, and bickering with their wives. Prison offered these wives, as well as their husbands, an opportunity to forget struggle.

Despite these "benefits," all seven wives reacted with anger and resentment when they learned about their husbands' re-arrests. They triggered a period when these wives endlessly re-enacted the events that had warned them that this would happen. Once this period was over, they began to play out the pros and cons of separation and reconciliation.

Husbands' departures from settled living did, in some cases, significantly erode wives' support for their husbands and could subsequently provoke divorce. First, previous separations and reconciliations had encouraged seven wives to establish their own lives. These wives were not sure that their marriages were going to last. However they were more sure after re-arrest that they could establish settled and satisfying lives for themselves once their husbands were removed from the scene. Second, all these wives had become used to separations, so why not make this one permanent? Only one woman, who had reported her husbands' violations to his parole officer, did initiate divorce proceedings. She had relegated her man to a status of "differentness." She saw him as incapable of changing because of his inherent character flaws. To minimize her husbands' potentially disruptive behavior, she divorced him. Of seven wives, only this neophyte actually carried through.

No matter how many separations and reconciliations occurred, and no matter how many times the men had gone through the criminalization process, old timers struggled to remain committed to their men. According to them, they have no security other than what they could obtain through a permanent "love relationship." Reconciliations were,

therefore, primarily based on the notion that they really loved their men, and that "this time" was going to be different:

Q: Is this separation any different from his being in jail?

A: I feel lonesome. But I know that I can make it on my own. I have done it when he was in jail...I'm hoping we can work out our problems and that he comes home and gets a job. That's what I'm hoping for. I even hope that some day we can own our own house.

The wives also mentioned that they were determined to remain in what they considered to be not-so-satisfactory marriages for the sake of their children. This motivation was, perhaps, understandable since these wives had often been deprived of one of their own parents due to death, divorce or desertion. Thus, wives' accounts agree that prison marriages were remarkably resistant to such crisis-provoking events as re-arrest and reincarceration. Of fifteen women, only two filed for divorce. While the others' belief in the permanence of their marriages might waiver, the marriages tended to endure no matter how burdensome marriage to men who persisted in the cycle of hard living, crime, arrest and imprisonment might be.

Chapter 10

THE WORLD OF PRISONERS' WIVES: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS,
AND IMPLICATIONS

I get so mad when I look at how the TV stereotypes prisoners' wives. These movies that were done in the fifties really make me mad. They show the wives as playing one guy against another guy. They show the wives as either cheats or as illiterates who are browbeaten and cringe from their husbands. You never see the woman who makes it even though her husband is in prison. They're shown as either know-nothings or tramps. Every time I watch I get angry inside.

In earlier chapters, we have examined some important dimensions of the social worlds of prisoners' wives. We have seen the kind of ingenuity and perseverance they have used in making their marriages to men who engage in criminal activities work. As husbands pass through the various stages in the criminalization process, wives find themselves coping with a series of transitions between them. Each of these transitions demands new forms of accommodation and new strategies from the wives.

Male criminality is a vital issue with which prisoners' wives struggle at home, with their children and parents, and in their communities. We have seen that, when engaging these issues, wives must enter into painful interpersonal negotiations about what is or is not acceptable about their husbands' behavior. The purpose of these negotiations is to limit opportunities for encountering stigma and to normalize both their husbands and themselves.

What we have learned about prisoners' wives fits well with what we

know about "traditional" women who endure their marriages no matter how unsatisfactory they may be. This orientation is clear in wives' attitudes towards the roles that women, in general, ought to play within marriage. They readily accept its "permanence", the view that a "woman's place is in the home," that men ought to be the breadwinners, and the belief that males ought to be heads of their households. Their marital expectations are similar to those of other women from similar social backgrounds: stable, conventional lifestyles. They want their husbands to work. They want neat and clean houses. They want material goods. They want companionship. Unfortunately, neither they nor their husbands have, as a rule, the kinds of skills which would enable them to pursue this kind of settled living. Instead, they often find themselves living hard: hard living provides men with a means of avoiding the pressures and difficulties involved in "settling down."

We have also learned something about the interpersonal techniques and the mechanisms involved in dealing with a spouse's troublesome behavior - mental illness, alcoholism, physical abuse, gambling and so on. What is particularly interesting in the study population examined here is that, almost universally, it is women who must cope with men's problems. We know from wives' reports that, throughout their lives, they have been faced with difficulties rooted in male criminality.

These problems do not end when husbands are incarcerated. They do not simply vanish when the men disappear behind prison walls. Instead, we have seen that husbands continue to have real impacts on their wives' daily lives which are as important as those generated by dramatic encounters with police, courts and prisons. Prisoners' wives are not simply "separated" from their husbands - although they share similarities with others facing "crises of separation." They must also continually deal with the problems of minimizing opportunities for

stigmatization - particularly in prison towns. Old timers also often face hostility from their families, who feel betrayed by husbands' histories of imprisonment.

10.1 MAJOR FINDINGS

The social worlds of prisoners' wives, then, are rooted in those of the social groups out of which they are drawn. The accommodative strategies they adopt, moreover, are those suggested by these backgrounds. While the social pressures with which prisoners' wives must cope depend, in some measure, on whether or not they live in crime-tolerant communities, all wives have a sense that they are "different" from those around them. It is this sense of "differentness" which motivates the stances they adopt towards the larger social world and towards the criminalization process.

10.1.1 Domestic Life and Arrest

Whether or not women married men with criminal records, they generally entered marriage anticipating that they were going to establish settled and square jane lifestyles. Before marriage, wives were not overly shocked about their husbands' criminal pasts, nor about the discovery that they had been involved in a cycle of unemployment, hard living and deviant behavior. Both crime and the pursuit of hard living were quite familiar to a significant proportion of the women. Events such as unemployment, crime, marital instability, violence and alcoholism were part of their early development. Therefore, early in their lives they learned how to cope with life crises as well as the specific effects of crime, jail and imprisonment.

During courtship, wives did raise the issue of their husbands' stigmatized status. To solidify their intent to marry them, the women

who later became prisoners' wives, devised various apologia which rendered their potential husbands not fully responsible for their criminal activities: either they disavowed this criminality (e.g., "it's the man that counts and not his criminal record"), or they devised "sad tales" which conveyed an image of their men as pathetic and in need of being rescued, or they avowed their husbands' behavior, and thus presented their criminal activities as non-threatening.

During their marriages many wives attempted to understand and cope with their husbands' hard living and criminal escapades. As during courtship, a distinct pattern emerged. Most wives continued to delay assigning a criminal label to their husbands. Unlike courtship, however, these post-marriage interpretations more often centered around placing blame on such "outside" forces as alcoholism, environmental factors and significant others. Other interpretations located the source of blame within their husbands' characters, e.g., immaturity. Many wives searched for the causes of their husbands' criminality within themselves: somehow, they were inadequate as wives and women.

From wives' accounts, we learn that they devised a succession of accommodative strategies directed at changing or ameliorating the situations they faced so that they could remain married to men who were less able to perform conventional roles than they had expected. However, none of these strategies brought consistent results. Wives usually oscillated from nurturing their men to taking more assertive and punitive actions like behaving like "pains-in-the-ass." When all other strategies proved futile, many wives shifted towards passive distance.

Although wives usually anticipated their husbands' arrests, they often provoked crises in which wives were called upon to play new and unaccustomed roles, e.g., raising bail, acting as emissaries to lawyers,

visiting their husbands in jail, responding to inquiries about their husbands' situations, and attending court sessions.

Most wives knew their husbands were guilty and expected them to be sentenced and incarcerated. Yet on sentencing day, many left court feeling angry and resentful. This anger was directed toward their husbands' lawyers - especially public defenders - and at judges. A major reason for these feelings was the kind of sentences their husband received. If husbands did not receive the "going rate," wives felt that their sentences were "unjust." These subjective evaluations were often closely related to wives' estimates of how long they could manage their households on their own.

10.1.2 Living Alone

Involuntary separation forced wives to reorganize their households. In many respects, the experiences prisoners' wives encounter during separation parallel those of other women left to run their lives and households on their own. There were some readily apparent hardships, and some less obvious benefits.

The most serious hardships wives encountered centered around finances, deprivation of their husbands' presences, loneliness, and child management. A significant number of women also had difficulties handling the length of time their husbands had to serve.

Wives could also derive real benefits from their husbands' imprisonment: freedom from domestic routines which revolved around their husbands' schedules, "peace and quiet," increased control over their lives, household finances, and children, and an enhanced sense of personal autonomy.

10.1.3 Stigma

At the time of arrest and initial incarceration, a significant number of women were more likely to worry about the possibility of experiencing stigma from family members and significant others within their communities than actually experienced it.

To deal with both anticipated and actual stigma, most wives employed at least one technique such as: (1) affirming their husbands' situation to significant others; (2) avoiding situations likely to provoke stigmatization; (3) covering up their husbands' situation; or (4) "jailing" - primarily associating with other prisoners' wives.

We found, in contrast to suggestions in the literature, that courtesy stigma was more difficult to eradicate or neutralize when wives dealt with prison systems than when they had to deal with people in their communities. Wives' accounts revealed that the extent to which they felt stigmatized and discredited varied by the kinds of house rules prisons established for visiting. Prison guards played a major role in dispensing stigma.

Wives adopted two distinct accommodative strategies to neutralize it: "putting on a performance" as conventionally-oriented women, or dissociating themselves from other prisoners' wives.

10.1.4 Larger Impact of Prison On Wives' Lives

Wives' experiences with enforced separation are shaped by the prison system through its policies concerning visits, telephone calls, and other forms of contact.

We have found that prison visiting and telephone calling can both

strengthen and undermine marital bonds. We learned from wives' accounts that, whenever couples had frequent and regular access to one another, husbands continued to shape the reorganization of their households by demanding that wives lead socially restricted lives, defer policy decisions to them, and schedule their household routines around telephone calls and prison visits. By using these means of contact, husbands could reactivate their roles as heads of their households. A significant proportion of the men used the telephone to check up periodically and unpredictably on their wives' activities. In response, their wives generally reported that they had no lives of their own and were forced to create "prisons" for themselves.

Prison romances and renewed courtships flourished as a result of prison policies which allowed women to perform personal services for their men and to deliver approved material goods and/or contraband to them. Both forms of interaction provided the husbands with opportunities to enact dominant roles, while the women could defer.

These accounts also revealed that these same patterns of interaction could produce their own stresses and strains. For instance, courting could erupt into arguments which centered around husbands' jealousies and anxieties about their wives' infidelity or their decisions to limit the supply of contraband or other goods they delivered to the prisons.

10.1.5 Reunion

Their husbands' release from prison presented both the paroled husbands and their wives with new problems in status transition with which they were unprepared to deal. Couples anticipated that reunions would be much like a honeymoon. This was typically true for a while. Within a short period of time, however, some unique problems, and also

some old and familiar ones, came to the fore. First, both the wives and their husbands not only experienced re-entry as a crisis, but suffered from extreme disorientation and anxiety. A significant number of wives were also unwilling to forfeit some of the responsibilities and roles they had acquired during separation.

Most wives expected their husbands to establish settled and stable lifestyles after release. Within seven months, nine of the fifteen paroled men were unemployed and gravitating back toward their pre-prison patterns. Wives then resorted to pre-prison accommodative patterns, but with some differences. Instead of other strategies, wives quickly moved towards the "pain-in-the-ass" pattern in order to deter their husbands from further hard living and crime and to encourage them to reintegrate into their households. However, these accommodative strategies appeared to lead husbands to resist actively assuming roles in their households, and to drive them further into hard living and crime. Households, therefore, tended to be reorganized along the lines of their pre-prison patterns.

By contrast, other wives reported that their households had been reorganized on the basis of new marital patterns where: (1) husbands were steadily employed or highly motivated to find work and (2) they conformed rigorously to a settled lifestyle. Once these women had decided to reallocate household responsibilities, their men tended to assume these responsibilities. There was wifely support for settling down. Significantly, there appeared to be little wives could do, one way or another, to determine which set of paths their husbands followed.

My research focused on the extent to which prisoners' wives, along with their husbands, went through all the stages of criminalization. It is within this context that I showed the kinds of stigmatizing events

experienced by the wives during their encounters with police and the various prison systems. Attention was thereby focused on the wives' perceptions and reactions to these events as well as the several accommodative strategies they employed as they went through these stages.

10.1.6 Courtesy Stigma

The stages in the criminalization process - from arrest, to sentencing, incarceration and release - set up a series of changes in the roles wives find themselves enacting; "wives of accused," "prisoners' wives" and finally "wives of ex-convicts." The current literature has primarily documented the extent to which stigma is displaced to wives enacting roles of "wives of accused" and of prisoners. It has been assumed that whenever wives fill these roles they will become stigmatized unless they live in crime-tolerant communities. My research confirms findings in the literature in that wives who reside in crime tolerant communities do not appear to suffer from shame or stigma. The wives in the study population were likely to report numerous stigma-producing events when they lived in non-tolerant communities, such as prison towns.

Families' hostile reactions to husbands' arrests and incarceration has been widely documented in the literature. Here we went further and described how family reaction is not static, but changes in response to events in the wives' lives. For instance, a high proportion of wives' parents initially reacted negatively to their daughters' impending marriages to men with criminal records. This initial reaction was tempered by the fact that they had to continue to interact with these men. By contrast, when the same men were arrested and imprisoned, most family members responded to these events as crises, and therefore, extended emotional and practical support to the wives.

This suggests that stigma, as Struckhoff noted, is not cumulative. Instead, wives were more likely to experience stigma-inducing situations when dealing with their communities or the prison system than they were in their relations to their relatives or close friends.

It is important to note that, although stigmatization is not central to their lives, wives do attempt to insulate themselves from it by controlling information about their husbands' situation, by employing accommodative strategies to reduce its effects or turn them aside, and by participating in a normal round of life. These findings suggest that wives also actively stave off labelling themselves as "wives of accuseds" and "wives of prisoners." They have a stake in maintaining their identities as "normal" in order to sustain their relations with others and to reinforce their own notions that they are "ordinary" wives and mothers. Participating in a settled or square jane round of life not only lends a sense of normalcy to the wives, but provides them with the means to resist stigmatization by actively dissociating themselves from hard living activities which might possibly indicate that they are connected with their husbands' criminal activities. Other wives resisted the application of stigma by simply terminating their affiliation with their officially-labeled husbands and dropping out completely. Those who were not committed to being prisoners' wives resisted learning how to make the psychic adjustments needed to perform this role.

10.1.7 The Larger Context

Much of what we have observed here about the texture of the relationships between prisoners and their wives is not unique. We have reason to believe that their patterns of interaction may constitute only one specific example of a more general type of marital relationship.

There is an increasing body of literature that describes the kinds of reactions wives formulate toward husbands who pursue some deviant lifestyle. The findings reported here are consistent with what we have learned about the family lives of alcoholics and the mentally ill, gamblers, and so on. Nor are the accommodative strategies utilized by prisoners' wives much different from those employed by others, e.g., the "pain-in-the-ass" strategy, and nurturing.

Other conclusions drawn by earlier researchers are similar to those reported here: these strategies are seldom effective in deterring husbands' deviant behavior. Wives do not appear to have much influence on whether or not their paroled husbands participate in criminal behavior, get re-arrested, and returned to jail.

A variety of researchers have noted that the failure rate for parolees is more than ten times higher among those reporting conflict in their homes than among those whose homes are not conflict-ridden. This study lends credence to this finding in that marriages where husbands are living hard are likely to be conflict-ridden. However, the underlying dynamics are not what we might expect: we have seen that the wives in the study population act as pains-in-the-ass in order to deter their men from violating their parole status. Hard living, we found, precipitates marital conflict, and not vice versa. Further marital conflict can then encourage further norm-violating activity by husbands.

10.1.8 Various Prison Systems

Recent research suggests that prison systems may not be as closed as we previously assumed. Many studies have specifically focused upon the extent to which prisoners are able to maintain relationships with their families on the outside. Some attention, although fragmentary, has been given to the kinds of contacts that prisoners maintain with their wives.

This study not only supports Holt and Miller's (1972) position that renewed courtship can serve to reinforce marital ties, but also shows how it can weaken marital relationships. We have specifically examined the role played by patterns of interaction - such as business arrangements, sharing household decisions, and performing personal services - in this paradoxical aspect of prison visiting. We have also seen that certain prison policies believed functional for the prison treatment program can lead to dysfunctional consequences for prisoner-wife interaction. Prison policies regarding visiting, telephoning and home visits can serve to maintain men's contacts with the outside world and provide additional incentives for men to "do time" and not stir up trouble. By contrast, these same policies can lead to another series of consequences: home furlough can lend itself to vacations from marital responsibility, prison visits and frequent use of the telephone can lead to marital discord and weakened marital ties.

Specific prison policies can set the wives up for encounters which they find distasteful. For instance, the policy which permits prisoners to have "legal goods" makes wives vulnerable to stigmatizing and punitive encounters with prison personnel.

The current literature indicates that prisoners' attitudinal and behavioral changes are more closely related to men's adaptation to the prison environment than to how they perform once they have been released. It is significant that wives generally come to believe that their husbands have undergone sufficient attitudinal and behavioral changes so that they are prepared to be released and to lead conventional lives. Prison visiting becomes a time when the wives search for cues which indicate significant behavioral and attitudinal change. We have found that prison, as an institution which emphasizes punishment, unintentionally encourages men to be contrite and repentant,

to make promises never to get into trouble again and to make future plans with their wives for release and renewal. In turn, most wives come to believe that these promises are viable - unaware that they have been made in response to prison life, and not as a consequence of a realistic appraisal of what the men could achieve.

10.1.9 Settled Living

The majority of wives seek conventional, stable and settled lifestyles. For a high proportion of them, however, a settled way of living cannot be achieved as long as their husbands are "presences" within their homes. It is interesting to note that many wives' lifestyles shift dramatically from hard to settled living in response to the presence or absence of their husbands. These findings confirm Howell's (1973) observation that life events can cause shifts in working class lifestyles.

However, a theme emerges from wives' accounts to which Howell (1973) has only alluded: the majority of working class wives longed to be able to live traditional and settled lives. Their failure to do so stemmed partly from the fact that the settled norms prescribe ways of living which do not fit their circumstances. The major factor which kept them from achieving their desired lifestyles was a lack of opportunities for the development of marketable skills, and the acquisition of significant amounts of capital.

10.1.10 Traditionalism

As traditional women, prisoners' wives believe that, through love and marriage, their husbands can change and it is up to them to support them so that desirable changes will take place. It is interesting to note that some wives persist in these visions through all stages of the

criminalization process. Hence, they employ definitions which suggest that their men's criminality is not permanent, and not centrally important. With encouragement from their husbands, most wives manage to reinforce their beliefs that change is imminent. As traditionalists, prisoners' wives view marriage as a career and believe that they are somehow responsible for the criminal acts perpetrated by their husbands. This serves to reinforce their determination to maintain conjugal relationships despite arrests, imprisonments, and the pains of separation.

10.2 NEW DIRECTIONS

Throughout this manuscript we have viewed prisoners' wives' social worlds primarily through their verbal accounts. These accounts contradict the public image of prisoners' wives either as stoic women who passively and helplessly stand by their "troublesome husbands," or as "fast-livers." Instead, we have seen how they actively manipulate and interpret their environment, while continuously attempting to establish stable conventional lives for themselves. Often they are unable to reach their goals. In this sense they may well have a great deal in common with other women tied to men in the marginal work world. While a full examination of this issue is beyond the scope of this study, there is an obvious need for further explorations of the relationship between "hard living" and the life crises and modes of adaptation of people living at the margin.

The study population used here was biased towards wives whose husbands were serving relatively short sentences. Most men had been incarcerated for less than a year. Consequently, this project did not explore the extent to which prisoners' marital ties erode after several years of imprisonment. Another bias is that the study population did not include

wives who, themselves, lived hard. Future research efforts need to be directed at overcoming these biases in order to be relevant to a more diverse group of women.

The extent to which the women in the study population were resistant to extricating themselves from their marriages was startling. Here I presented some factors which reinforced wives' determination to remain married to men who were less than what they had wanted. Since, by definition, the study population primarily consisted of women who remained married to their husbands throughout the criminalization process, we learned little about how these factors affected the women who did not. A great many women - even very traditional ones - must walk out on their husbands the first time they get arrested and imprisoned. The women in the study population, after all, were a product of the sixties, and even the working classes were more touched by the stirrings of women's liberation than the attitudes and behavior of these prisoners' wives would indicate.

Further work is needed concerning the kinds of interpretations and accommodations made by wives to male criminality and imprisonment. I am impressed by the variety and the similarity of accommodative patterns. This variety reminds us that there is still much to be done to capture the full range of these patterns of accommodation.

I contend that the various prison systems do extend into the everyday worlds and concerns of prisoners' wives. We have seen how prisons, themselves, encourage wives to both loosen and tighten affective ties to their husbands, and how prisons induce behavioral changes in women which subsequently make their husbands' reintegration into civil society more stressful than it need be. We have also described how incarcerated husbands continue to influence and shape their wives' lives. However,

scant attention has been given to the way in which wives shape or influence their husbands' in-prison behavior. Within the literature some fragmentary insights emerge. Freedman and Rice (1977) argued that marital strains or marital break-ups had a decided impact on prisoners' conduct. But these issues are far from resolved. Holt and Miller (1972), for instance, disagree. There is obviously room for further research on how the "outside" world extends into prisons. Here I have suggested that interactions between prisoners and their wives during prison visiting and telephone conversations may be crucial to understanding this.

In the future I urge that new correctional programs and policies be analyzed not only in terms of how they affect prisoners, but also in terms of their impact on the wives and families of offenders. My findings can provide some insight into these issues - but a great deal remains to be done. Wives' accounts reveal that the men who do and those who do not do well on parole make their own adjustments regardless of the kinds of support wives provide. We need a closer look at the relationship between prisoners' ties to their wives and their achievement of stable life patterns on the "outside."

Finally, throughout this manuscript I have attempted to explain, illuminate, and generally make sense out of the careers of prisoners' wives as they do their own time on the "outside." The women who participated in this study wanted to be a part of it in order to "tell it like it is" to people who would come to know exactly who they were - and the texture of their struggles.

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