COMMUNICATING SUPPORT:
WHERE AND HOW ARMY SPOUSES SEEK COMMUNITY

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COMMUNICATING SUPPORT

Dedication

To all the men and women who serve either as military members or as support to those who do.

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Abstract

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Army spouses, both male and female, experience life stressors unparalleled in other populations. This thematic analysis of qualitative data from the 2004 US Army Research Institute’s Survey of Army Families V uncovered ten main themes while exploring how Army spouses communicate and constitute social support. Through grounded theory framework, suggestions are made for supporting this understudied population (96% of whom are female) from the 1,823 open-ended responses received. Ten themes radiate out from the heart of the research question, how do Army spouses communicate and constitute social support? These are: the level of support perceived (or lacking), the types of support perceived (and lacking), support providers, information, knowledge, Family Readiness (Support) Groups, consistency, attitude toward the military lifestyle, media and the internet, and issues with the military itself. This study discusses those ten themes and then focuses on five additional findings.

As the first of those findings, utilizing a pentad of social support aspects (emotional, informational, instrumental, belonging, and nurturing social support) allowed for a legitimate assessment of the construct of social support; all five aspects applied in this study are necessary and sufficient. Also, future focus group research of this population ought to contain consistency, hypocrisy, rank, and FRG reform to be thorough. Additionally, extrapolation of findings to other populations might be acceptable, given certain considerations uncovered in this research. Communication scholars can and should apply their knowledge to assist army spouses in a myriad of ways discussed in the study in detail. Perhaps most importantly, social support of the army spouse could and should be increased by using a cultural lens which considers the Military Culture and the Military Dependent Culture as distinct and interrelated entities.
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Preface

Army spouses\(^1\) experience life stressors unparalleled in other populations, and their abilities to cope impact themselves, their active duty, service member spouse, their dependents, and the societies around them. Military family policy has evolved from the time of the Revolutionary War through eras of neglect, ambivalence, grudging acceptance of family needs to serious pursuit of partnership with military families (Albano, 1994). The recognition of the importance of a community of spouses associated with the Army was openly acknowledged by the military beginning in 1965 with programs such as Army Community Services. With the recognition that this community is worthy of study, came efforts such as those of the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI), which periodically surveys Army families through questionnaires such as the Survey of Army Families I-V.

The content of the Army Families surveys makes it clear that those responsible for their design expect that interpersonal relationships and the media are both implicated as partners in the support networks, both formal and informal, of Army spouses. This appears in questions asking about whom the spouse would turn to with a personal or family problem and how the spouse is doing in obtaining needed communication. But, while scholars from anthropology and psychology have devoted some attention to the study of military families, communication researchers have so far concerned themselves only with aspects of communication within the military itself. The communication of experiences of military dependents is uncharted territory. Thus, this project set out to explore how Army spouses use communication both to construct community and to accept and constitute support.

\(^1\) At the time of SAFV, 96% of spouses were female and 4% were male.
Questions as to how these individuals understand their world through communication were explored using secondary data analysis of surveys returned by a large sample (n=6,759) of Army spouses (Westhuis & Fafara, 2002, p. 4). The qualitative data in this snapshot of the lives of army spouses totaled 1,823 open-ended responses from the comments page of the survey. The responses varied in length from less than one line to an entire page (typed, single-spaced), and were garnered from the entire sample, utilizing keyword searches. The keywords searched were sometimes root words, so that all permutations of the term could be captured. The number of responses in which each keyword appeared is as follows: communica* (140); community (132); friend* (202); informat* (266); know (550); support (553). As each of these keyword searches were conducted on the entire data set, there is necessarily overlap between the subsets whenever a respondent used more than one of the keywords in a response.

Given the nature of the research topic, the survey findings were analyzed in the context of literature from interpersonal communication researchers, media theorists, and scholars from additional several fields who have written on the development and maintenance of support and community. More specifically, this project drew on interpersonal inquiry concerned with relationship dialectics and social penetration theory. It drew from media scholarship concerned with how audiences use media to meet their needs and how audience members generate their understandings of the meaning of media content through consultation with others. It is hoped that this study will provide a foundation for future communication studies as it calls attention to the topics with rich potential for future study.

The 1973 transition to an all-volunteer force has produced an Army comprised of capable soldiers in whom the nation has invested sizable resources in education and training. The transition has also meant that the military must make accommodations for those soldiers, such as
allowing them to marry and have children while remaining on active duty. Over 60% of the 1.4 million active duty soldiers are married and they and their spouses are directly linked to military and civilian communities across the nation (DoD, 2003). It is no exaggeration then to say that the health of dependent families is of vital interest to the Army and beyond. Thus, there are larger societal interests in the robustness of their support systems, which are an integral part of the larger fabric of American society.
Military family policy has evolved from the time of the Revolutionary War through eras of neglect, ambivalence, and a grudging acceptance of family needs, to serious pursuit of partnership with military families (Albano, 1994, Introduction, para. 2). The 1973 transition to an all-volunteer force has produced an Army comprised of capable soldiers in whom the nation has invested sizable resources in education and training. The transition has also meant that the military must make accommodations for those soldiers, such as allowing them to marry and have children while remaining on active duty (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 5).

The Army’s 1983 report, The White Paper: The Army Family, drew a clear connection between mission readiness and family life. Out of this report came the FAP, the Army Family Action Plan, which sought to examine family support structure in order to develop “a coordinated, standardized, and functionally realigned family support system.” The plan also advocated that the Army frequently “review and recommend improvements in policy areas directly affecting families, such as resource allocation, housing assignment policy, and future directions for the family support system” (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 10, 11). This dissertation aligned itself with that objective. This introduction briefly presents an overview of the study and the research question addressed within it. It describes the professional impact of this research endeavor, especially to the field of communication, and identifies the methodology utilized. The section concludes by noting the limitations of this study and addressing the definition of key terms. These issues will all be revisited in greater detail in later chapters.
Overview of the Study

This dissertation offers a qualitative examination of open-ended responses to the SAFV – the Army Research Institute’s 2004 Survey of Army Families V. This survey queried spouses about their perceptions of and satisfaction with the facilities and services provided for their support by the Army. The 2004 survey was particularly important and interesting because it was the first to occur after Sept. 11, 2001 and thus reflected feedback from military spouses experiencing the intense tempo of unprecedented military deployments connected with the War on Terror in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq. The highlights of this survey as reported by ARI can be found at http://www.army.mil/cfsc/documents/research/safv/SAFVSummary.doc.

At the heart of the dissertation is a thematic analysis of the comment section of the survey, which respondents were urged to use as a means of providing feedback on the current support offered to them as well as suggestions for what else the Army should be doing. In all, 1,823 of the responses, (14%), utilized key terms that were seen as relevant to this study. These were analyzed to identify prevalent themes in the responses that dealt with communication (140), community (132), information (266), knowledge (550), friendship (202), and support (553). The smaller data sets based on those six themes were then used as the basis of a systematic analysis of the survey responses.

Research Question

Grounded theory is the theoretical approach taken for this study due to the preliminary nature of the endeavor. Grounded theory is especially well established as an approach for exploratory studies (Mazur, 2004). Generally speaking, grounded theory studies emerge from research interests that are usually formulated as a question that is expected to evolve over the course of the study. For this study, it is at the nexus of the Army Spouse and the construct of
social support that is located the driving research question of this dissertation: How do Army spouses communicate and constitute social support? The answers to questions such as those that follow provide stepping stones to a greater understanding of the answer to that question. How do Army spouses generate a sense of well-being? What are the biggest hurdles to well-being faced by spouses? Which interpersonal relationships are important to that sense of well being? How do spouses draw on different sources of information and communication systems? Where do they turn to get information? How do they combine traditional and more advanced technological forms of communication to communicate with their support networks and spouses? What is the impact of demographic factors such as age, gender, race, rank of service member and time in service of the service member?

**Professional Impact of this Study**

To date communication researchers have concerned themselves with aspects of communication within the military itself, leaving the communication experiences of military dependents uncharted territory. The topics communication scholars have studied have included the rhetoric of war (German, 1995; Parry-Giles, 1994; Smith, 1999) and leadership in the military environment (Burgoon, Bonito & Kam, 2003). Other scholars have pursued deception research utilizing military samples (Burgoon & Buller, 2003). In addition, communication scholars have begun to look at the interaction of computer mediated communication, small group communication and interpersonal communication (Bonito, 2002; Bonito, 2003a; Bonito 2003b). None of these studies, however, have come close to the realm of military dependents, especially Army spouses. Thus, this study begins to fill in that gap for the communication discipline.

The Army spouse population merits study not only because of what can be learned from it and applied to other settings, but because of its own merits. At the time of the data collection
for this study, over 60% of the 1.4 million active duty soldiers were married. They and their spouses are directly linked to military and civilian communities across the nation (Army Personnel Survey Office, 2002; DoD, 2003). It is no exaggeration to say that the health of dependent families should be of vital interest to the Army and beyond. These spouses and their families are an integral part of the larger fabric of American society, as are the spouses of the other Armed Services. Thus, there should be larger societal interests in the robustness of their support systems.

While distinct from the civilian population in some very intrinsic ways, Army spouses are also very similar to the civilian population. Thus, the lessons learned can be applied to anyone whose spouse travels often for business, or whose spouse is a civil servant whose job puts that spouse in harms’ way--such as police, fire-fighters, FBI, secret service members, and others. For example, the fact that many army spouses find support by helping each other; that they gain support from the sense of family born of necessity with one’s colleagues – these are valuable insights for the civilian population. The spouses of firefighters could follow the lead of the army and offer meetings for information and emotional support. Knowledge gained from this group about how spouses deal with medical and mental recovery could be extrapolated to non-military sectors. The families of cancer survivors or heart patients could use information delivery mechanisms similar to those of army spouses. The strengths exhibited by this population may be able to bolster others. In short, what helps one group may be able to help another, saving larger and divergent populations the need to duplicate efforts.

This dissertation adds to the extant communication literature a foray into an essentially unexplored population, the Army Spouse. This dissertation also offers support for the assertion that social support can best be evaluated through a cultural lens – in this case, the culture of the
military spouse. This dissertation emphasizes that five aspects of social support (emotional, informational, instrumental, belonging and nurturance) are necessary and sufficient to the perception of social support. Additionally, this dissertation makes the claim that social support is a very revealing and useful construct in assessing lifestyle satisfaction for Army spouses. In all these ways, this dissertation adds to the field’s body of knowledge.

**Methodology and Limitations**

This study employed qualitative content analysis referred to as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is often used in exploratory studies, and the themes generated can often form the foundation for later questionnaires and other focus group instruments, such as in Reidlinger’s (2004) analysis of group processes in organizations. The essence of thematic analysis is full immersion in the text. This type of analysis allows a researcher to get to the supporting framework behind values and core beliefs.

It is important here to establish some parameters regarding what this study can and cannot do--based both on the nature of data at hand and the scope of this dissertation. As with any study, the results are not generalizable beyond the sample from which the data are drawn. There was a population of 218,536 Army spouses at the onset of this study in 2004. Of the sample surveyed, a response rate of 43% resulted in 24,793 useable responses. Open-ended responses were included in 6,759 of these surveys. Given such large numbers, only being able to make statements about the sample is really not a sizeable limitation. It does serve as a reminder, however, that the results garnered are from Army spouses, not from the spouses of any other branches of the armed services. Also, it must be remembered that the survey responses come from a particular moment with a particular historical context which can never truly be recreated. So, while much about the military life can be assumed to remain constant across time,
there is a slight risk inherent in the assumption that the needs of Army spouses in 2004 are necessarily the same as the needs of Army spouses at a later date. If there are large changes in the sources of support, or changes to the stressors they face, these findings would need to be updated. Another important aspect of the analyzed survey data that needs to be kept in mind is that they were derived from self-report, which has inherent limitations of self-awareness and memory recreation. Finally, the ARI instrument was not directly created to elicit information about social support, so it is possible that feedback from such a questionnaire would uncover a greater volume of responses about support with a more focused character. All of that taken into account; however, it must still be noted that in this more naturalistic setting, respondents whose feedback is being analyzed deliberately chose to address issues of social support and did so in substantial numbers as noted above.

**Discussion of Key Terms**

The military is well known for its use of jargon. Every attempt has been made to eliminate all unnecessary slang where possible; none the less, it is a part of the culture of the Army, and hence, part of the culture that engulfs the Army spouse, who demonstrates a natural use of and understanding of these terms. Thus, the jargon shows up in the survey responses. Understanding it is key to understanding the culture of Army spouses. As a result, a section of the background chapter is a primer of terminology.

Social support is the foundational concept around on which the dissertation research was centered. According to an address given by Cobb to the American Psychosomatic Society (1976), social support is “information leading the person to believe that he or she is cared for and loved, is valued and esteemed, and belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation” (Vaux, 1988, p. 7). It is widely accepted that social support is multi-dimensional,
even though individual theorists are at odds as to which dimensions truly are inherent to the concept, and which are ancillary. The working definition utilized throughout this analysis combines elements from three models. As utilized here, social support has five components, the emotional, informational and instrumental aspects, (Newcomb, 1991, p. 29), belonging (Uchino, 2004, p. 17), and as Weiss expressed (1974), the opportunity to provide nurturance. The literature review explores in depth the development and framework for this operationalization within a rich historical heritage. The construct has a broad presence in the current literature within many social scientific disciplines.

In sum, this section has served its role as an introduction to the dissertation at hand. Chapter 1 provides the background for this study, and provides contextual definitions for much of the jargon to be discussed in later portions of the dissertation. A review of historical and contemporary literature relevant to this research is found in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the thematic analysis methodology used to analyze the responses. The study findings are found in Chapters 4 and 5, and are summarized and discussed in Chapter 6, where a call for a future research agenda and the conclusion to this study are also located.
Chapter I. Background

The Army Wives Seal, developed in 1976 by Ida True Terry, depicts an eagle perched on a crest encircled by a gold band. “The eagle at the top of the circle represents the Army Wife, who in protecting her nest, also protects the flag and the future it represents. Alert and poised, she is ready to defend either when the need arises” (The Army Wives’ Seal, n.d.). This dissertation explored what it is that allows contemporary Army spouses of both genders to handle the unique demands placed upon them and their successors generation after generation. This chapter provides background for the study in several ways. Its first segment offers an entry point to the study for non-Army readers with a primer on relevant Army terminology. The chapter’s second part examines what is known about the Army spouse. The final section provides information on the Army Research Institute.

Primer on Army Terminology

A primer is probably a prudent first step toward explaining Army terminology to readers who do not have military backgrounds. This section explains some basics of military structure and makes sense of the “alphabet soup” that is Army jargon. It focuses particularly on the jargon and those military structures most central to the lives of Army dependents, both spouses and children. The abbreviations and acronyms are organized in alphabetical order and are followed by a discussion of Army rank and structure. Each entry begins with the abbreviation to be discussed for ease of locating the term.

Abbreviations and acronyms.

*ACS* stands for Army Community Services, a central clearing house located at each base that provides services to military dependents. Its mission is to help each Army unit keep all those associated with that unit at a state of readiness by “developing, coordinating, and
delivering services which promote self-reliance, resiliency, and stability during war and peace" (Army Community Service, n.d.). ACS programs address issues such as financial readiness, deployment preparation, family advocacy programs, scholarships, employment, and relocation assistance -- issues which are always vital to Army spouses.

*AFTB*, Army Family Team Building, takes spouses through three levels of training to help family members gain knowledge of the world their service members inhabit. These classes, led by volunteers (mostly army spouses), range from familiarization with Army acronyms to leadership and mentorship for others. A basic tenet of AFTB is that, “Strong families are the pillar of support behind strong soldiers. It is AFTB’s mission to educate and train all of the Army in knowledge, skills, and behaviors designed to prepare our Army families to move successfully into the future” (AFTB, 2005). Of course, AFTB trainers hope to convince some participants to become trainers themselves, and many army spouses do just that.

*EFMP*, the Exceptional Family Member Program, is a program of ACS. It focuses on dependents with special medical, psychological, or educational needs. EFMP was developed as a way to protect the exceptional dependent and the soldier from having to make decisions that would not be in the interest of the family member. For example, because of the EFMP, a soldier with an exceptional dependent can only be assigned to a base that has the facilities to provide appropriate care. This program does not preclude a soldier from being deployed, or sent for unaccompanied tours where the dependent would not have been going anyway, but it does keep the soldier from being routinely assigned to remote locales where such care would be inaccessible. For families facing these exceptional challenges, the EFMP can be a good place to turn for assistance and support.
FRGs, perhaps the most important acronym in this section, stands for Family Readiness Groups. Formerly called Family Support Groups, these groups meet once or twice a month at the discretion of the commander or the FRG leader. The FRG leader is almost always the spouse of the commanding officer or the spouse of the next highest ranking soldier if the commander happens to be single. The role of FRG leader is a volunteer duty expected of the military leader’s spouse. At their best, FRGs are invaluable assets for information dissemination, socialization and support. There have been cases where input from FRG members has changed and even saved lives. However, in some units, these groups exist in name only due to apathy on the part of the commander, his or her subordinates, or the potential members. In most cases, the FRG is available for those who want to take part. Members often report that individuals who actively participate find the group rewarding, while those who only participate minimally often do not find the group to be useful.

Coffees/Teas are another social group similar to the FRG. This meeting generally takes the form of a coffee or tea and the list of invitees is typically restricted to the spouses of the leaders of the unit, usually numbering between 10-20 spouses. This gathering is often held at Battalion level as a way of disseminating information that is to then go down the “Chain of Concern” to the FRG leaders for further dissemination to the FRGs. Coffees and Teas can be helpful in gathering information and providing socialization, but they can also be stressful, depending on the interactions between the participants.

LES is a financial statement. All soldiers receive either a hard copy or e-mail of their LES, or Leave and Earning Statement, every two weeks or once a month, depending on their preferences. This form lists all military incomes and withholdings, and tracks the amount of leave a soldier has accumulated that can be turned into vacation time at the discretion of his or
her commander. Due to the prevalence of acronyms on this form, an entire AFTB workshop is devoted to learning how to read it. The info on the LES is equally important to spouse and active army member.

_MWR_ stands for Morale, Welfare and Recreation. Its goal is to support leisure services in order to enhance the lives of all eligible participants, including but not limited to active duty soldiers and their dependents. MWR works to accomplish this goal in areas of general recreation, sports, entertainment, travel, and leisure activities (MWR, 2004). These programs range from organizing outings and summer camps for children to providing camping gear and campers for weekend rental. With more than 37,000 employees stateside and overseas combined, the Army charges MWR with providing leisure programs and activities for service members, families and their children at virtually all installations. MWR is a constant, not dependent on the vagaries of volunteerism.

_A post_ is a military installation. The Army officially has posts, and other branches have bases, but the terms are often used interchangeably. If a spouse asks for help finding the _post exchange_ (retail store) on an Air Force base, where it is actually called a _base exchange_, everyone will know what she means, but it will draw attention.

The _OER_ is the Officer Evaluation Record. This file contains all the information utilized to determine promotion and, if necessary, any punitive actions for officers. Mistakes on this form may mean the difference between an officer’s early or late promotion, or even finding that the active duty member is no longer eligible to serve. Considerable care must be taken in the preparation and careful updating of this record as any inconsistencies may have a great impact on the officer and his or her spouse.
TDY stands for temporary duty. To be TDY is to be on a temporary duty, usually for a period of only a few weeks or months. A TDY assignment does not require the family of a soldier to relocate. The family continues to live where they are, or moves on to the next duty station if the TDY is assigned as a TDY en route. These TDY en route assignments are usually schools or short-term missions. A training mission can also be referred to as a TDY.

A PCS, on the other hand, is a permanent change of station. This action is a full-blown move with a change of assignment for the member, and almost always a change of location for the family. These moves vary in frequency and desirability, and each spouse learns to deal (with varying degrees of success) with this underlying stressful and exciting constant of the military lifestyle.

**Structure and rank.**

A brief discussion of structure and rank will assist readers in understanding later segments of this dissertation. The Army is strictly structured, with the smallest unit being a soldier. Soldiers are organized into squads (9 to 10 soldiers), squads into platoons (16 to 44 soldiers), platoons into companies (62 to 190 soldiers), companies into battalions (300 to 1,000 soldiers), battalions into brigades (3,000 to 5,000 soldiers), brigades into divisions (10,000 to 15,000 soldiers), divisions into corps (20,000 to 45,000 soldiers), and corps into an army (50,000 or more soldiers) (Army Force Structure, n.d.). Each of these groupings has a chain of command, an organizational chart of who is in charge of whom. This chain of command is often directly related to rank, as it is in all Department of Defense (DoD) branches. The size of each of these subunits is amorphous, with different types of units needing more or fewer individuals at some levels.
The Army has three tiers: enlisted, warrant officers, and officers. Enlisted ranks include, in ascending order, Private, Private First Class, Specialist, Corporal, Sergeant, Staff Sergeant, Sergeant First Class, Master Sergeant, First Sergeant, Sergeant Major, Command Sergeant Major, and Sergeant Major of the Army. Ranks up through and including Specialist are considered to be Junior Enlisted, whereas Corporals and up are considered to be Non-Commissioned officers (NCOs). On another note, warrant officers are not frequently encountered and hold a place in-between and separate from everyone else. For a Warrant Officer, rank is only differentiated by their W1-W5 number designation; they are all Chief Warrant Officers. Finally, an officer starts out as a Second Lieutenant, and can progress through First Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, Brigadier General, Major General, Lieutenant General, General, and finally, General of the Army (Prepare for U.S. Army Basic Training, 2005). In the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), the Army forbids fraternization between officers and enlisted. Any interactions that jeopardize the good order and discipline of the armed forces can be prosecuted under the UCMJ.

Within the military, there is a general perception that those married to members of each of the three tiers will also mostly socialize with members of their own tier. Whether used as a convenient excuse, or whether it is partly the reality, the Army’s policies against fraternization are assumed to be a core of this de facto segregation. While these policies essentially forbid interactions outside of the military venue only between officers and enlisted service members, spouses are affected by extension. To have a social event with couples of mixed ranks is just not feasible due to these policies. To a considerable extent, then, if a couple prefers to socialize as a couple and not as individuals, the possible pool of friends is limited by these policies against fraternization.
On a related note, there is also a perception that some spouses of higher ranking soldiers “wear their husband’s (or wife’s) rank.” If this action is done by the leader of a FRG to support the spouses of lower ranking individuals, then it can be seen in a positive light, where she or he is seen to be “going to bat” for those for whom she or he is responsible. More often, however, “assuming” the rank of a spouse is seen as a negative, the equivalent of name-dropping and or playing favorites. The reaction to a spouse using the rank of her or his sponsor (soldier) for gain or preferential treatment is the same at essentially every military installation.

**Army Spouses**

Given that the target population of this study is the modern day Army spouse, it is important to provide some explanatory information on what it means to be an Army spouse, what differentiates this population from others, and what the wider community can gain by examining this population. This section pulls information from military and external sources both as it begins by discussing who Army spouses are today demographically. It continues by tracing the history of the Army spouse to edify the reader about the historical precedents the current culture is based upon, then moves on to explore the Army spouse in today’s context, and, finally, examines what the future portends for this population.

**Army spouse demographics.**

The SAFV found that, as of 2005, the military spouse is by definition, married, while females of the same age groups are not as likely to be married. In the civilian population, only 54.1% of adults are married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Also, the military spouse is more likely to be female (96%, whereas in the civilian sector, this number is approximately 50/50) (SAFV Summary, 2005). The military spouse is younger than their counterparts in the civilian sector, who would be the “average aged individual.” The army spouse, on the other hand, is, on
average, 32 years old (SAFV Summary, 2005). The military spouse is much more likely to have children living at home with them. Of all spouses, 79% say they have dependent children, while the percentage of households headed by a married couple who had children under 18 living with them declined to 21% in 2010 (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). For the military spouse, a racial breakdown is within 2% of the national demographics (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). Of the spouses in the army, 64% have been married for less than 10 years, whereas only 59.5% of married females in the general population have been married for less than 10 years (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). When it comes to education, 23% of army spouses have a high school diploma, 48% have some additional coursework, and 27% have a bachelor’s degree or higher; just over 80% of the general population has a high school diploma or equivalent. Three percent more army spouses have a bachelor’s or higher education than does the general population (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

Previous research on the experiences of military spouses suggests several demographic factors combine to make their lives distinct from those of civilian populations (Harrell, 2000a). These factors are gender, race/class, education, employment status, and age. As of 2005, 6.7% of Army spouses were male (Military Homefront, 2008, p. 44), but as far as research concerned with military spouses is concerned they might as well be non-existent. In most of the relevant literature, the issue of the gender of the Army spouse is dismissed with: “There are not that many male spouses,” “They don’t seek support the same way women do,” or even “While biologically male, male spouses of active duty women are gendered female.” Even the most recent Rand report, “Working Around the Military: Challenges of Military Spouse Employment,” notes that “due to the small number of male spouses, [the analysis] included only female spouses of male
service members” (Rand, 2005). In a new book, the two military spouse authors express the hope that at least one of those few male spouses is writing a book to address the “unique challenges” they face (Cafazzo, 2006).

Gender concerns are unpacked and discussed in Harrell’s study (2000a, pp. 149-154). Harrell argues that cultures construct the roles of spouses within them, and that the role of military spouse is culturally defined as feminine. This definition does not imply a male cannot accomplish the requirements of the role. In fact, Harrell lists numerous examples of successful males who perform tasks that are culturally considered female—chefs, entertainers, networkers, and nurturers, to name a few (Harrell, 2000a, p. 154). Nonetheless, it remains true that the story of the Army spouse is essentially the story of the Army wife.

According to the study “Army spouse coping and the impact of ethnicity,” the American military is a microcosm of American society and reflects its growing multiculturalism (Westhuis & Fafara, 2002). Approximately 30% of Army spouses belong to a minority group, with African-American and Asian-American spouses over-representing the national average while Latina spouses are under-represented (Harrell, Lim, Castaneda, & Golinelli, 2004). Formal networks within the services are very careful regarding issues of race, with strict regulations against racism and unequal treatment based on race; however, no such formality exists among the spouses (Harrell, 2000a). The local communities (previously referred to here as ‘less cosmopolitan’) may not be used to such diversity, or may not be accustomed to mixed marriages.

Further, Harrell (2000a, pp. 130-144) finds that among the spouses of enlisted soldiers, the experience of race is not able to be separated from the experience of being a “class” – enlisted. Among the wives of officers, however, it seems that assimilation of minorities and accommodation by them is the rule. A “white culture” is the accepted norm, and those who
conform don’t see race as an issue. Those who strive to keep separate and distinct racial identities do experience race as an “issue.” One senior officer’s African American wife reported she was lonely because her husband’s rank locates her at the top of the military social hierarchy. The frequent moves necessitated by her husband’s position have prevented her from making many friends, and those companions she had in the past have long since gotten out of the service. She feels as though the few women of color she knows who are in anything like her position are sell-outs who do not remember their roots; however, she also does not feel comfortable discussing issues related to the higher ranks with those of her ethnicity in the lower ranks (Harrell, 2000a, p. 140).

A lack of mentorship for minority military spouses is also often seen as a problem. With few high ranking minority spouses available to take junior members under their wings, navigating social issues such as what events are “mandatory” and what sort of attire is appropriate can be more difficult. For wives for whom English is a second language, a whole host of other issues also come into play. For example, communication expectations and cultural differences compound issues of race in ways that are difficult to measure, in part because of the language barrier (Harrell, 2000b, pp. 122-124).

Educational opportunities can also be limited for military spouses. As of 2005, almost half of the 1,100 military spouses polled felt the military lifestyle had adversely affected their educational opportunities through frequent moves and service member absence (Rand, 2005). This being said, according to Harrell, the military spouse of 2004 was two times more likely than her civilian counterpart to have graduated from high school, and more than 10% more likely to have some college education. More than half of the population of military spouses had some college education (Harrell et al, 2004). Despite the higher-than-average education rates, the rank
of the soldier supersedes the spouse’s education as a determinant of the social circle a spouse finds herself included in. Harrell reports that a professor married to a junior enlisted admitted she does not fit in with the other junior enlisted’s spouses, some of whom do not have high school diplomas, yet she is not invited to “jump ranks” and socialize with others who have more similar educational backgrounds (Harrell, 2001, p. 56).

The issue of employment can be problematic for spouses. Most employment for most spouses comes in the form of off-base jobs. Approximately 50% of Army spouses work outside of the home (Army Community Service, n.d.). This number is considerably lower than the 80% of the civilian wives who are employed outside of the home (Harrell et al, 2004, p. 26). The temporary nature of their residence in any one place can make employers hesitant to hire military spouses or it can mean that the spouses who do find work have never been in one place long enough to gain extensive experience. On the other hand, many spouses find they are overqualified for the employment they can find what they can find in the local economy surrounding the Army bases where their spouses are posted. There are many explanations, but the result is that Army spouses who are unemployed but seeking work, outnumber the unemployed but seeking work civilian spouses three to one (Harrell et al, 2004). Denial of outside employment and a successful career rob military spouses of a meaningful sense of social network, and that loss of social interaction can increase feelings of isolation and doubts of one’s self-worth (Litwack & Foster, 1981, p. 386).

When Army spouses are employed, they usually earn less than their civilian counterparts. Offered as an explanation for this discrepancy are the constant relocation that prevents advancement and the accrual of seniority, as well as family care issues that the spouse must be able to handle without the constant presence of a second parent. Annually, Army spouses earn
approximately $6,000 less than civilian spouses in the United States as a whole, based on information from the US Census Bureau. Considering there are complicating factors to comparing annual incomes (moves, part-time work, etc.), it was important to analyze hourly wages between Army and civilian spouses. Yet again, the Army spouse earns about $3.50 less for every hour of work than does the civilian spouse. The situation can be even worse, depending on the baseline being used and what factors are controlled for. One calculation shows civilian spouses earning twice as much per hour as Army spouses (Harrell et al, 2004).

The average military spouse is younger than the average civilian spouse. Among the civilian population, only 10% of spouses are between the ages of 16 and 24. Contrast that figure with the Army spouse population where over 20% of spouses fall into that range, and it becomes clear that the Army spouse population may face different concerns based on age (Harrell et al, 2004). One of these concerns is having a young family, which implies childcare responsibilities and costs (Rand, 2005). Army spouses are just over 10% more likely to have a child at home who is less than six years old than are their civilian counterparts (Harrell et al, 2004).

**Historical precedents.**

The history of how of U.S. military policy toward dependents developed is an important context for the current experiences of Army spouses. This section explores that history and outlines the research efforts of the various branches of the military to make sense of dependents’ experiences. Due to necessity, this section draws heavily on Albano’s 1994 essay, “Military Recognition of Family Concerns: Revolutionary War to 1993.” This article, which appeared in the journal Armed Forces & Society, is the single, definitive study on the history of military family policy. For the most part, organization of the military itself is tangential to the
community of spouses and, thus, to this study, but where changes in the force have necessitated changes in conceptions about Army spouses, those changes are indicated here.

Military family policy has evolved from the time of the Revolutionary War through eras of neglect, ambivalence, and grudging acceptance of family needs to serious pursuit of partnership with military families (Albano, 1994, Introduction, para. 2). During the Revolutionary War, soldiers were young, single men, thus, there was no recognition of, nor provision for, a soldier’s dependents. In the pre-Civil War era it was not uncommon for a soldier’s spouse and children to follow the Army in its westward expansion. In fact, there was even an Army regulation from this period that referenced "camp followers" in what is apparently the earliest formal recognition in a broad sense of military families (Albano, 1994, Revolutionary War, para. 5). As the Civil War started, U.S. Statute 268 was passed. This statute provided allotment tickets for subsistence to family members during a soldier's absence (Albano, 1994, Civil War, para. 1). At the turn of the 20th Century, there was a grudging recognition of military families with formal acknowledgement of the need to provide for their basic needs. This era also saw the beginning of formalized wives’ organizations (Albano, 1994, Revolutionary War, para. 5).

From World War I to World War II, the Army was ambivalent about its soldiers’ families. Marriage was discouraged, but limited stipends were made for family support. Wives’ groups began filling in the holes of official programs with benevolent charitable activities to provide for the physical needs of military families. The tremendous need for the enlargement of the Army during this time did not allow the force to remain mostly single; instead, more and more married soldiers served. An important change came with the institution of AER, the Army
Emergency Relief fund, in 1942, which formalized the recognition that caring for families was now a part of the military’s mission (Albano, 1994, World War II To 1960, para. 1).

After World War II, the deplorable post housing conditions and lack of basic services available to Army families became a focus of President Eisenhower’s military policy. After the Korean War, Operation Gyroscope was initiated to help “reduce attrition among career personnel by alleviating the problems of army family life” (Albano, 1994, World War II To 1960, para. 3, 4). This forerunner of modern services was only operational for six years; and, Albano suggests that the rapid decline of Operation Gyroscope was due to its lack of efficacy and expense (Albano, 1994, World War II To 1960, para. 3, 4).

By 1960, with more family members than soldiers, the military family was no longer possible to ignore. Sheer numbers of spouses and children required the recognition of the importance of a community of spouses. This community was openly acknowledged by the military beginning in 1965 with programs such as Army Community Services (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 3). ACS, the Army Community Service organization, was formed as a catch-all organization for family support programs (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 3). The 1973 transition to an all-volunteer force has now produced an Army comprised of capable soldiers in whom the nation has invested sizable resources in education and training and the transition has meant the military must make accommodations to those soldiers, such as allowing them to marry and have children while remaining on active duty (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 5).

The early 1970s saw a rise in social scientific research to analyze the needs of families. The Rand Corporation and the Army Research Institute (ARI) became important research partners as the military hierarchy made a conscious effort to discover what needed to be done to
improve the lives of military families. The Air Force and Navy deliberately followed the Army’s lead in the military family support movement (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 7). The Air Force’s major contribution was the *Families in Blue* study. This detailed the connection between family satisfaction and mission objectives and was the catalyst behind the development of a network of Family Support Centers at bases around the world. Publication of this document prompted all branches to sponsor military family conferences as the 1980s arrived. These conferences led the DoD to issue “directives on family policy that issued guidance to all branches of the service on responsibilities, standards, and procedures for implementing effective family support programs and policies worldwide” (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 9). Many of these programs still exist in today’s armed services.

The Army’s 1983 report, *The White Paper: The Army Family*, drew a clear connection between mission readiness and family life. Out of this report came the FAP, the Army Family Action Plan that:

attempted to (1) examine its current family support structure to develop a coordinated, standardized, and functionally realigned family support system and (2) review and recommend improvements in policy areas directly affecting families, such as resource allocation, housing assignment policy, and future directions for the family support system. (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 10, 11)

Deployments in support of both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom kept military families closer to the forefront of the military’s planners’ thinking, where organizations such as ARI became invaluable.
**Today’s context.**

Current deployments and the issues soldiers bring home from overseas deployments create challenges to systems and individuals who are sometimes ill-prepared to cope with these struggles. Force-wide reorganization efforts produce uncertainty, which is one unfortunate temporary side effect of unit life-cycle manning. This is a restructuring effort currently underway that will ultimately allow for longer tours for more families. Each of these issues has the potential to drastically alter the experience of what it means to be an Army spouse in the future. Additionally, there are currently many lifestyle differences that differentiate the Army Spouse population from their civilian counterparts.

When soldiers come back from overseas tours, especially tours in which combat has been involved, there are often issues regarding reintegration and even reactions to the war environment that have psychological impacts. While these concerns (as they relate to the military member) are outside of the purview of this study, the way spouses are impacted by them is of interest. When a military member is having flashbacks, nightmares and other sleep difficulties, or is shutting himself or herself off emotionally, there are going to be impacts on a marriage. One hundred twenty thousand soldiers have sought mental health care upon finishing a tour in Iraq. Of these 120,000, 31% are currently under review for psychological disorders, of which the most frequent diagnosis is PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). Many of those in treatment experienced sexual trauma or survived head wounds that in years past would have been fatal (Kennedy, 2006). These substantial numbers indicate that the concerns addressed here are consequential.

An article on the American military trend towards being a “total force” asserts that since most military spouses are so aware of the impact of their actions on their spouse’s career, the
social stigma associated with reaching out for help, especially mental help, can be an obstacle to getting the help the spouse needs (Knox & Price, 1999, p.129). Normalization and facilitation of access to these mental health services would make a real difference to Army spouses by allowing them more confidential access to help, encouraging more people to get the help they need. Albano (2002) notes that many posts are finding great success in the effort to normalize and facilitate care. They are achieving this by placing many services in one centralized location so that going to a particular building does not imply what sort of assistance one is seeking or what kind of administrative paperwork one is filling out.

Current military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan also keep Army spouses closer to the forefront of the general population, which has resulted in quite a bit of current popular press for military spouses, about military spouses and by military spouses. This attention has taken the form of books, newspaper and magazine articles, as well as internet sites. Many of these highlight the changes in the expectations of modern Army spouses and in the roles they play.

Many of these publications take the form of self-help books, from other Army spouses who are in, or have recently been in, “the trenches.” Almost by default, the books are dated by press time as the military changes so rapidly. However, many of the overarching principles behind these books are nonetheless useful, particularly, their deep analyses of the stressors of military family life, and their suggestions about as well as coping mechanisms. A general feel can be gained about many of these publications just from their titles: *Married to the Military: A Survival Guide for Military Wives, Girlfriends, and Women in Uniform* (Leyva, 2003); *Heroes at Home: Help and Hope for America’s Military Families* (Kay, 2002); *Defending the Military Marriage* (Fishback & Fishback, 2002); *Hope for the Homefront* (Waddell, 2003); and, *Today’s
Military Wife, 5th edition (Cline, 2003). The existence of a market for these books implies an audience, implying societal interest in military spouses.

Articles in magazines and newspapers can more quickly address problems in real time and offer instantaneous support. Their analyses are typically more superficial than those in books, but this forum allows for rapidity of communication. Freelance articles in this genre tackle subjects like careers and helping children deal with separation. Other related articles in weekly The Army Times often appear in a recurrent column titled “Married to the Military.”

The factor of timeliness holds even truer for the myriad of internet sites, chat rooms and web-rings devoted to military spouses from all services. These virtual sites allow friends who have been separated by military moves to stay up-to-date about each other, and for individuals at the same post to find each other for support and answers to location-specific inquiries. If one wanted to search these sites for real time conversation and/or support, good starting points are listed in the references at the end of the dissertation.

There are many facets of the military lifestyle that differentiate military spouses from their civilian counterparts. These facets include a concern about rank; the spouse’s contacts outside the military; the spouse’s geographical location; and his or her soldier’s deployment status. Probably one of the most sensitive areas to discuss is the rank of the soldier. As discussed in the background section, soldiers fall into three categories: enlisted, warrant officer, and officer. Those categories are further divided. The term enlisted covers junior and senior enlisted; the term officer is inclusive of company grade, field grade and general officer. While these firmly regimented distinctions apply to the soldier and not to the spouse, there is bleed-over and stereotypes persist. Harrell asserts (2000a, p. 3) that the military allows for a system that is kinship-based and which is strongly impacted by class. This kinship system sets up expectations
of the ideal officer: preferably white, heterosexual, male, in a parental role over enlisted personnel (the enlisted are seen as children or adolescents). This system also leads to expectations of the ideal officer spouse: white, privileged and upper-class, who devotes hours of (her) time volunteering for the good of the Army. In one of the three ethnographic interviews, Harrell discusses in great detail, the “ma’am barrier,” an “accepted chasm between the officer and the enlisted community that pervades the social network in the military community and dictates the social relationships” (2000a, p. 168).

One enlisted soldier’s wife, asked about officers’ wives says:

She’s so nice. She’s the only one I know. Most of the officer’s wives think they are better than the enlisted wives. I guess because they get more money and they live in better housing and they get this and that (Harrell, 2000a, p. 3).

So, even though the interviewed wife’s one experience belies the stereotype of how an officer’s wife will behave, she still believes it. While certainly, there are officer wives and junior enlisted wives who conform to the stereotypes, there are also those who do not fit the stereotypes.

One of the most pronounced areas of challenge a spouse encounters is “outside the gate” in the local community. Contacts outside the military play a large role in how she or he manages friendships. By and large, military spouses are displaced from the area of the country from which they were raised, and find themselves in social settings with members of the local community, especially if the family lives off base. Inevitably, the local community has a love/hate relationship with the post. For, while the community is economically dependent upon the base, the very transitory nature of base life is unsettling to civic and social life. Some local people pull no punches upon meeting a new military neighbor, making statements such as, “I cannot afford an emotional investment in friendship with you. You could be reassigned at any
time” (J. Fanman, personal communication, May 2004). On the other hand, Shellenbarger (2002, p. B1) relates a wife’s story of her last day of work before a reassignment, when she was amazed that 45 coworkers showed up to a surprise going-away party and presented her with a plaque.

The impact of location is highly dependent on the geographic location of the base. If that location isolates the spouses from their families of origin, there are automatically stressors involved. Overseas assignments add new strata of concern for spouses, where speaking the language, knowing the customs, navigating unfamiliar systems and roads, all add to the stress, and sometimes the enjoyment, of the military spouse. But even regional differences can make a stateside post seem remote. Posts are usually placed well away from urban centers, areas which are not so, “cosmopolitan” (Harrell, 2000a, p. 131). For some spouses, the unavailability of previously taken for granted necessities or even luxuries can be a culture shock. These are the same assignments that pose the most difficulties for parents when a spouse deploys for a year or 18-month overseas assignment (Lamberg, 2004. p. 1541).

Another lifestyle difference is geographic dislocation. It creates a great deal of stress for military children, whether it is when a family moves from one posting to the next or when a one spouse is sent overseas and the other decides to move “back home” for support from their family in the face of an extended deployment. In either case, the children are taken away from friends, schools and familiar surroundings, and their issues become issues for their parents.

**Future portents.**

Army efforts at unit life-cycle restructuring are intended to give soldiers and families more stability and more predictability about upcoming assignments (Cox, 2005). The head of the Army’s Human Resources Command, Maj. General Hernandez, opines that though the rate
of moves has not yet returned to a pre-9/11 level of move frequency, the service is starting to recognize the benefits of this restructuring. Benefits of restructuring the unit life-cycle can include circumstances such as “increased time on-station for soldiers and their families” (Tice, 2006). A plan was set in place in 2004 to ensure that by the end of the 2006 fiscal year, 14 brigade-level combat teams would be restructured to a modular force structure, eight more would be managed in this manner by 2007, with an anticipated 40 brigades under life-cycle management by 2010. As of the Army’s 2007 Posture Statement, in the 2004 fiscal year two active components were converted, 18 more converted in the 2005 fiscal year and 31 converted in the 2006 fiscal year (Posture Statement, 2007). With 51 brigades now under life-cycle management, and with three fiscal years remaining in the plan, the Army has already overreached its original goal.

The changes arising from unit life-cycle restructuring help to assure stability, while changes to the orders process aim to increase the amount of notice a family is given prior to a job change. In the past the length of time from delivery of move orders to the report date at a new duty station has been as small as three to five months for enlisted and officers, respectively. With the implementation of changes to the order process, those numbers should have increased to at least six months for both groups (Tice, 2006).

The Work of the Army Research Institute

The United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) periodically surveys Army families through instruments such as the Survey of Army Families I-V. This section discusses what the ARI is, what its Survey of Army Families (SAF) is, and why SAF-V is historic when compared with its predecessors.
Describing ARI.

While ARI can trace its roots to a meeting of experimental psychologists at Harvard University in 1917 and to personnel testing which was a major push in World War One, it is more certain to say that ARI’s heritage is tied to World War II preparations and the formation of the Committee on Selection and Classification of Military Personnel (U.S. ARI, n.d.). A subcommittee of this committee, the Personnel Research Section, was formed in 1939 to take on the tasks that ARI would assume under the name Army Research Institute that was given this subcommittee after World War II. By the 1970s, research into recruiting and retention research had become major concerns at ARI, as the Army and other military services struggled to meet the manpower requirements for the All-Volunteer Force (U.S. ARI, n.d.). ARI currently pursues three distinct types of work (a) leader development studies; (b) training research; and, (c) investigations into soldier selection, assignment, and performance (Survey of Army Families IV, 2002, p. 2).

The Survey of Army Families.

The importance of doing research with Army spouses became clear in 1983 when an Army White Paper, focused on the Army family, drew a clear connection between mission readiness and family life. The white paper findings triggered generation of the Army Family Action Plan, which was intended to (1) examine family support structure “to develop a coordinated, standardized, and functionally realigned family support system” and (2) make recommendations on areas of Army policy that had a direct impact on Army families--polices dealing with issues such as resource allocation, housing assignment, and development plans for the family support system (Albano, 1994, Turning Point: The Sixties, para. 10, 11).
Deployments in support of both Operation Desert Storm and Operation Iraqi Freedom have kept military families closer to the forefront of the military’s planners’ thinking, particularly as family well-being impacts the larger health of recruiting for the all volunteer force. In that context, the SAF has become a particularly important data collection tool. The ARI has administered the Survey of Army Families in 1987, 1991, 1995, 2001 (Survey of Army Families IV, 2002, p. 2), and most recently again in the fall of 2004. Its purpose is the discovery of Army families’ attitudes regarding not only the Army way of life, but their well-being. It is designed to track changes longitudinally, and to identify new issues as they emerge. Participation in the survey is voluntary, but encouraged as participants are assured that Army leaders will use the results in decision making and policy development. Respondents are specifically urged to use the comments section of the survey to raise issues that were not addressed in the closed-ended question section of the survey and to provide insights that might aid Army planning (Survey of Army Families IV, 2002, p. 2).

The 2004 survey, SAF-V, is particularly meaningful because it is the first SAF administered post September 11, 2001 and the first to reflect the impact of the era of the war on terror. Because this study is based on data collection from the 2004 survey, it is positioned to explore the impact of the War on Terror on the Army. The highlights of this survey as reported by ARI can be found at http://www.army.mil/cfsc/documents/research/safv/SAFVSummary.doc.
Chapter II: Literature Review

While few researchers have focused on the experiences of military spouses, there is no scarcity of publishing in the other research fields relevant to this study. This chapter is broken into several larger sections, which examine the relevant literature in the areas of support and community building, secondary data analysis, grounded theory, and thematic analysis, the methodological choice of for this study’s analysis.

Support and Community Building

To explore how Army spouses use communication both to construct community and to accept and constitute support, it is essential to establish what is meant both by community and by support. This component of the study focuses on the history of social support research, relevant findings regarding social support, some findings specifically from the field of communication, and the study of community building through communication.

History of social support literature.

The study of social support has its roots in antiquity. Plutarch wrote that the attention of friends could ease grief and pain (when administered wisely). Tully wrote that letters from a friend could be calming, and the physician Galen wrote that “many have been cured by good counsel and persuasion alone” (Brugha, 1995, p. 2). Confucian philosophers maintain that the idea of individual development apart from a supportive community is inconceivable and support must be sought after (Jacobson, 1991, p. 203). The Old Testament book of Sirach (6:14-15 New American Bible) states, “A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he who finds one finds a treasure. A faithful friend is beyond price, no sum can balance his worth.” The common emphasis on support permeates across time, with ready evidence from popular culture even in song lyrics such as Henley and Silbar’s “You are the wind beneath my wings” (Vaux, 1988, p. 1).
With the established informal recognition of social support, it seems intuitive that social scientists would turn to a more formalized study of social support. One of the earliest sociologists, Durkeim, turned to the significance of enmeshment in the “social fabric” as a predictor and explanation for suicide in 1951. These social ties were examined by other sociologists (primarily those from the Chicago school such as Burgess, Park, and McKenzie) throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Vaux, 1988, p. 2). Through a search of *Social Science Citations*, Bruhn, Philips, Levine and Mendes de Leon traced the first mention of social support as a construct in a 1966 paper presented at the American Psychological Association’s 74th Annual Conference (1987, p. xxi), but it took the cross-disciplinary works of Cobb, Cassel, and Caplan in the 1970s to strike the match that ignited interest in the study of social support (Vaux, 1988).

One need only examine the output of scholars to identify the growing trend of research on social support. For example, from the 1950s through 1982, there were 1,340 citations referencing social support found by bibliographers Biegel, McCardle and Mendelson (1985). Compare that thirty-year total to the five-year period from 1983 through 1987, in which Biegel, Farkas, Abell, Goodin and Friedman collated 2,693 entries (Biegel, Farkas, Abell, Goodin & Friedman, 1989, p. xii). It is clear that social support struck a responsive chord in the sociological community. As Vaux expressed, “The idea underlying social support is both commonplace and immensely rich. Therein lie both the appeal and promise of the construct and the obstacle to its systematic study” (Vaux, 1988, p. 1). Vaux’s reference to an obstacle to the systematic study of social support refers to issues that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s.

These issues start with the basic problem of definition. The measurement and quantification of something as common as the support of friends and family members offers
considerable challenges. Much of the literature in the 1980s is focused on the number of
different ways social support was being both conceptually defined and operationally defined and measured. The first solid conceptual definition of social support was offered in 1976 by Cobb:
social support is “information leading the person to believe that he or she is cared for and loved,
is valued and esteemed, and belongs to a network of communication and mutual obligation”
(Vaux, 1988, p. 7). While this description provides a working definition of social support, Leavy
(1983) expresses his concern that while most of us can identify the concept, the definition alone
does not provide a solid theoretical framework.

In many definitions, including Cobb’s, reference is made to the emotional, informational
and instrumental aspects of social support (Newcomb, 1991, p. 29). Much later, Uchino (2004,
p. 17) added belonging as a fourth aspect; belonging is defined as providing one with someone
with whom to belong, someone with whom to just pass time. Of these four dimensions, a person
giving emotional and belonging support is seen as more nurturing and less controlling than is a
person who gives informational and tangible support (Uchino, 2004, p. 22).

In addition to the concept of belonging, another dimension appears sporadically
throughout the social support literature. One of Weiss’ contributions to the construct of social
support is the dimension of the opportunity to provide nurturance (1974). In essence, some
individuals are empowered by helping others. Just as some people grieve best by staying active,
planning, and keeping themselves busy, some people seem to receive social support by seeing
themselves as valuable providers of support to others. Their sense of self-esteem is enhanced by
being useful to others.

Cobb headed the school of thought that social support primarily functions as a stress
buffer. This is one of two worldviews still popular decades later. The other worldview includes
a direct effects model of social support (Vaux, 1988, p. 92). This model holds that social support is inherently beneficial and has direct beneficial physical effects. The difference between the models, then, originates in whether social support is helpful as a mediator of stress, or whether it is an inherent good of its own accord. These two models battle for paradigmatic supremacy within sociology. The main argument within the battle is that the many differences in definition and measurement make metastudies almost useless as these studies compare proverbial apples and oranges.

The clinical observations of Cassel and Cobb led to large studies within the field of epidemiology in the 1980s, thus establishing links between social support and health (Antonucci & Jackson, 1990, p. 173). One such early study (Nuckolls, Cassel, & Kaplan, 1972) examined the pregnancy complication rate of Army wives. Army wives with substantial psychosocial resources had a 58% lower rate of pregnancy complications than did women who did not have such solid foundations of support. Later, in the 1980s, came the realization that while studies such as those linking social support to cardiovascular disease, emergency room usage, postoperative anesthetic use, and labor and delivery complications clearly established that this link existed, the process and mechanism of these results were largely invisible. No one had yet identified how social support worked (Antonucci & Jackson, 1991, p. 173). Scholars such as Antonucci (1985) and Berkman (1985) called for fellow researchers to make insights into these processes and mechanisms. This call led Vaux (1988, p. 59) to put forth a transactional or ecological view of social support. It also led Sarason, Sarason, and Pierce (1990, p.1) to put forth an interactional model of social support. Both works expressed a need for further growth of social support theory in their fields.
Findings relevant to this study regarding social support.

With this overarching historical framework in mind, it is also important to look to some of the details of studies that are relevant to this analysis of the social support of Army spouses. This section is, in essence, a collection of findings that stood out as relevant. First this section discusses who provides support, then moves on to Social Network Theory. Building from there, the review of literature then explores findings from health care settings, findings from Psychology, and findings regarding gender.

Who provides support.

Oakley (1992, p. 28) problematizes social support as she discusses that not all close family members, spouses, and friends provide support. Sometimes those individuals are actually more stress-inducing than supportive. The sense of responsibility a person may have to support individuals (family members, spouses, friends and others) may outweigh the support being received, for a net negative loss of social support. So, if one cannot turn to close family members, spouses and friends for support, to whom should one turn?

The ideas of responsibility and reciprocity bring to mind the question for Army wives: is it better to look for support from those who are not so closely involved in the stressful situation? Should Army spouses be looking in places other than in their immediate unit for support? After all, those other Army spouses are also experiencing similar stressors. According to Sarason, when no active coping is possible, to commiserate and become distraught about the negative things a group is experiencing can actually cause the group’s members more stress (Sarason, Sarason, & Pierce, 1990, p. 252). It can also reinforce pessimism and negative feelings. It is completely possible that Army spouses (who get together to vent in what they anticipate being a socially supportive scenario) ultimately feel more worried and stressed after the meeting than
they were before it. In addition to becoming distressed, many spouses may be reluctant to ask for help from someone they know is facing increased levels of stress themselves. It would seem, based on this perspective, that social support given by strangers who have no hope of repayment might be an ideal form of social support.

Another interesting aspect of the aforementioned reciprocity includes the application of exchange theory (Antonucci & Jackson, 1990, p. 176). This theory essentially describes reciprocal relationships in economic terms: beneficial relationships are more supportive than costly relationships. Following this financial metaphor, Antonucci and Jackson coined the phrase “Support Bank” (Antonucci & Jackson, 1989, p. 178) to explain the idea of a long-term accounting system in which one deposits support to be withdrawn at a later date. To modernize this concept and apply it to the Army spouse population, many spouses may see today’s deposit at the “Support Bank” at Ft. Bliss as something they should be able to go to an ATM at Ft. Riley to withdraw. When there are no support ATMs around, or when there are fees associated with this withdrawal, individuals may feel cheated and therefore disenchanted with Army life.

Hobfoll and London’s (1986) study of the effect of social support within a military unit offers partial evidence for this idea that support can better come from outside sources than from those to whom one is close. This study investigated Israeli military wives as the target population. Hobfoll and London found social support was actually a stressor during deployment, as pressures mounted and stress took over wives’ lives, in a condition that was termed “stress contagion,” commonly referred to as a pressure-cooker effect. The women were more privy to rumor mills and realized the horrible straits others were in, but could do little to help them. The wives who were active in the support groups of deployed units were more likely to draw more extreme conclusions than were women who did not participate in social support scenarios,
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demonstrating a true risky shift in attitudes (Hobfall & Stephens, 1991, p. 466). In other words, what would normally be seen as supportive sometimes can have the opposite effect.

In an almost complete reversal of this finding (five years and a culture away) Rosen and Moghadam examined four types of social support for U.S. military wives and found social support to be a helpful rather than stressful presence. The four examined social support types were categorized as (a) support from other wives within their own unit; (b) other wives outside of their own unit; (c) relatives; and, (d) friends outside of the military (1990, p. 193). In Rosen and Moghadam’s study (1990), the most helpful of these supports in mediating the stress of separation was a supportive relationship with wives in the same unit (p. 200). A careful comparison of the two studies by Hobfall and Stephens, and, Rosen and Moghadam, could offer the Army valuable insights in terms of where it should focus its efforts in creating support networks, both formal and informal.

A typical source of support for many people is their spouse. By 1996, it had been established that a marriage partner is the first source from which support is sought after a crisis, and that no amount of support from other sources can replicate the effects of social support from a primary intimate or marital relationship (Cutrona, 1996, p. 2). Contrarily, a bad marital relationship can also be a source of great stress. Social support from spouses seems particularly important in times of uncertainty and crisis. For most Army spouses, the entire time spent associated with the Army can fit the description of “uncertainty and crisis.” This correlation has interesting implications for times of spousal deployment and other times of spousal unavailability due to military-related demands.

Another less expected source of support can be researchers. This is actually a confounding variable to some studies. In many instances, the act of interviewing to determine
levels of social support actually provides social support. Fortunately for this dissertation, as the Survey of Army Families surveys do not focus on social support, this Hawethorne-esque effect should not contaminate this study, but it is a cautionary note for future endeavors (Oakley, 1992, p. 19). To conclude this section of the literature review that focuses on who provides support, it is possible to think of who provides support as one’s social support network. The literature on social network theory itself is a separate entity. It is its own prevalent area of research, since a main focus of this theory is the interconnectedness of support providers, as is seen in the following section.

**Social network theory.**

Social network analysis tends toward quantitative measurement, and typically examines the interconnections between individuals. This literature traces itself back to Botts in the 1950s with her seminal text *Family and Social Network* (Oakley, 1992, p. 29). Aspects of social networks often quantified include the degree of separation amongst members, quantity, density (frequency of contact amongst members), accessibility (proximity and resources needed to contact), stability over time and reciprocity (Oakley, 1992, p. 30). By 2004, Uchino (2004, p. 12) adds to the list: type (spouse, relatives, friends); centrality (importance of the tie as seen through others in the network); multiplex (relationships that share multiple roles); and strength of tie (degree of freedom to continue or cease the relationship, intimacy, and pervasiveness across contexts). Army spouses’ social networks would likely be portrayed very differently from the general population according to many of these criteria. A study to see how geographical separation and frequent moves affect the social network would likely bring forth interesting data, but this study is not designed with this quantitative approach.
Findings from health care settings.

In 1987, Bruhn, Phillips, Levine and Mendes de Leon published an annotated bibliography of social support in the health field. Their topical organization of the studies brings to light two relevant issues. The first of these is that social support is taken and received differently in different life stages. As was identified in the last chapter, the Army spouse population is younger than the general spouse population. It is possible that life stages may interact with how spouses constitute what is supportive. The next issue is that of culture. Bruhn et al (1987, p. 303-413) identify 296 articles dealing primarily with cultural factors and social support. Insomuch as the Army spouse lifestyle constitutes its own culture, the implications from this literature could be astounding. For example, Maguire (1991, p. 1) found that culture could be a confounding variable when on his first assignment as a social worker with the Oglala Sioux Indian Nation.

An important element of this dissertation is the ability to apply the findings to the real world population of the Army spouse. Maguire’s 1991 article also forwarded this goal. Maguire (1991) wrote from an applied generalist’s perspective. He simplified theoretical and definitional concerns to what can be readily used by the practitioner. This perspective will be valuable when considering any recommended courses of action based on this study. Maguire summarizes Caplan’s (1974) three major forms of assistance from social support: providing empowerment, taking action to relieve overburdened individuals, and providing resources. Five resources acquired from social support are (a) sense of self; (b) encouragement and positive feedback; (c) protection against stress; (d) knowledge, skills, and resources; and, (e) socialization opportunities (Maguire, 1991, pp. xiv-xv).
Both House and Vaux continued to look at social support as a practical entity. House’s (1981) purposes of social support are summarized as: to grow positive interactions, to improve health, and to act as a stress buffer. Also looking through the lens of application was Vaux (1988) in his analysis of intervention issues and problems. Vaux cites numerous cases in which indigenous lay counselors, those who were part of the community, were seen as being more socially supportive than professionals (1988, p. 231). This information should be seen as an affirmation of the value of Army spouses helping each other.

Findings from psychology.

In the field of psychology, social support is often seen as a personality trait. To understand this concept, one must step back to recognize the often-mentioned dichotomy between perceived social support and received or enacted social support. Some people perceive that adequate social support is available to them should they need it. This belief was found consistently in up to three-year increments, even with substantial life changes during a longitudinal study completed by Sarason in 1986 (Brewin, 1995, p. 97). A different way of establishing social support levels is to see what support is really received or is enacted in crisis.

As the idea of perceived social support has been investigated, it seems some people maintain their perceptions of availability of social support in ways that indicate the belief in social support could be personality driven. An implication of this perspective is that people with different personalities may need different levels of social support at different times in their lives (Miller, 1995, p. 171). This inference is highlighted by a case study later in the same text. Dalgard, Anstorp, Benum and Sorensen (Brugha, 1995, p. 203) determined there are some people who have no experience in small groups, and that the social skills they lack can seriously impact the group’s cohesion and effectiveness at offering social support. This finding is relevant
to the current study as most Army spouses are younger than the average civilian spouse, and as such may have less practice in how to effectively manage themselves and their communications in group settings, merely based on their youth. In addition to perceived and received social support, Uchino refers to “invisible” support; support that is received but not perceived. According to Bolger, Zuckerman and Kessler (2000), some of the most effective social support comes in the form of supportive acts never even noticed by the one receiving them—e.g. a spouse taking care of the dishes so the receiver of support has more time to study for a Bar exam.

**Findings regarding gender.**

Another vital aspect to consider is that of gender. Studies on social support have determined that women and men rely on different sources for support. Women tend to cast the net out farther than do men, relying on many people (friends, relatives, neighbors) instead of one intimate partner (Cutrona, 1996, p. 21). With the benefit of having a larger group of people to call on comes the responsibility inherent in being supportive of them in their times of need (Cutrona, 1996, p. 23). It has also been widely supported that women and men experience and cope with stress differently, meaning that a catalyst that would require social support for one may not be recognized by the other as being truly worthy of concern (Cutrona, 1996, p. 34). When offering social support, women and men tend to do so differently as well, with women more often offering an empathic ear, and men more often offering assertions for what should be done to fix the problem (Cutrona, 1996, p. 35). In one last nod to gender differences, there seems to be a distinction between the support seeking mechanisms of women and men. Women seek support more often in stressful situations than do men (Cutrona, 1996, p. 36). Since the current study examined Army spouses, mostly women, whose active duty spouses are often absent, these findings regarding gender may prove to be extremely relevant. Another reason for
the relevance of gender to this study is that proportionately more males than females are in the position to make decisions about how support is offered in the wider Army community. If males are making assumptions about what is supportive to females, without first consulting the feminine frame of reference, there are likely to be misconnections.

These misconnections are exactly the kinds of communication phenomena studied by communication scholars. To solidify this claim that social support is largely an exercise in communication, Jacobson (1991) cites Albrecht and Adelman (1987) who advise that social support is really a symbolic activity, in which meaning is created in situ, and is unique to the participants and to the occasion. The context of this creative symbolic endeavor must be part and parcel of the scrutiny of any analysis. The next section provides an exploration of recent findings from the field of communication.

**Findings regarding social support from the field of communication.**

Since the millennium, there has been a consistent interest in social support from the field of communication, grounded in the historical background highlighted above. Even before that, Business Communication and Organizational Communication scholars were among the first to bring this construct to the communication discipline, in journals like *MIS Quarterly* (Weiss, 1983). As early as 1984, Albrecht and Adelman made a foray into the construct of social support in their article published in Human Communication Research (Albrecht & Adelman, 1984). This article advised researchers to consider this new avenue of investigation. From the late 1980s until present, the field has been ripe with studies utilizing social support with more than 75 studies in the past decade alone by communication scholars like those just mentioned as well as Mortenson, Burleson, Feng, Liu (2009), Edwards, Rose, Edwards, and Singer (2008). Major areas of emphasis include: the impact of emerging technologies on social support; the connection
of social support to the health field; a focus on culture; the impact of relational contexts on social support; and how characteristics of the person receiving support impact the perception of social support. Many of these articles share insights important to this study.

*The impact of emerging technologies on social support.*

Just as new technologies are impacting practically every branch of communication, a number of studies have been recently completed examining the role of technologies in the distribution of social support. The following four studies examine telephonically mediated social support and computer mediated social support. Rudy, Rosenfeld, Galassi and Schanberg (2001) wanted to determine whether social support delivered telephonically could be as efficacious as face-to-face support. Their program of mentorship through a cancer treatment program paired survivors with new patients and had them make weekly telephone calls to each other. It was found that these mentors who had been there and gone through the melanoma treatments (in other words, indigenous counselors) were very effective at providing both informational and emotional support (Rudy, et al., 2001, p. 300). As similar others who had only “weak ties” to the patients (Rudy, et al., 2001, p. 288), they were able to speak from their own experiences.

Recipients of social support appreciate support from similar others who have successfully managed similar stresses. Some additional reasons for the effectiveness of this program are that some patients prefer the privacy of one-on-one conversation, or dislike group communication altogether, so those patients would not have gotten so much out of face-to-face group based support. For those with mobility issues, geographical restraints, scheduling issues, transportation problems, and other issues of isolation, the telephone-conversation medium allowed support to be given. Interestingly, the mentors also benefited from the program by being a “helper” (Rudy, et al., 2001, p. 301). Many of these findings and explanations match the situation of the Army
Given today's technology, the next logical step from telephonic support is computer-mediated support. In three articles, Wright (2000a, 2000b, and 2002) examines how the internet affects the perception of support. These articles combine to present a case for the effectiveness of online transmission of social support. There are some distinct differences in the ways online communities are used to gather support, but it seems that in this case the medium is not the message. The message is one that can be accessed by a large number of individuals, asynchronously, cross-generationally, and anonymously, and sometimes without the interpersonal costs associated with face-to-face contacts. Negatives to this medium, however, include questions about credibility, loss of nonverbal communication clarity (especially haptic communication), lack of immediacy, and sometimes even flaming (negative and insulting email responses). Interestingly, it seems as though the more in-depth relationships become online, the more closely they resemble face-to-face relationships, where tone can be determined by communication partners and a sense of interactivity is felt (Wright, 2000a).

In the same article, Wright (2000a) distinguishes companionship from social support by comparing the dimensions in which they differ. Often, the motivation for seeking companionship and motivation differ, and they seem to influence well-being differently. Social support is often sought in times of crisis and instability, whereas companionship is sought when things are going well and individuals want to share their favorable experiences and receive positive rewards. Increased social support seems to help restore emotional equilibrium to get the recipient to a baseline level, whereas companionship seems able to boost ones' sense of well-
being beyond the status-quo. Wright’s (2000a) study found that older adults receive more companionship than social support from their online interactions. It is uncertain whether or not this finding would be replicated in other populations; however one possible corollary to the Army spouse is that online groups could provide more companionship to spouses, allowing groups such as Family Readiness Groups to focus on social support roles.

An intentional component of Wright’s (2002) research was his framing of his role as researcher to include a consulting element to the community so that the community could ultimately benefit from his research. This example of activist research provides an exemplar of this study’s intended goal. Wright (2002) also highlights that emotional support is particularly beneficial to those who, like cancer patients, are in a position where they feel they cannot change their situation but must adapt to it. This situation carries over very well to the Army spouse population, where short of dissolving marital ties, there is really no way to change the nature of the stressors. The Army-life-induced stressors must just be dealt with. Wright (2002) also extends the argument that computer-mediated communication can offer social support in line with both buffering and the direct effects model because of the ease of daily access and its availability in times of crisis. A medium for social support that offers that level of flexibility and omnipresence could prove to be very valuable to the target population of this study.

Solid suggestions are offered here for the administrators of online groups that will help ensure those virtual communities have a comfortable and supportive communication climate. A strong connection to the military Family Readiness Group is necessary. If those groups could be reframed to provide both crisis and sustaining support separately, they might find they are perceived as meeting the needs of the Army spouse more effectively. This idea is addressed more fully in the discussion chapter, but the essence of this insight is that those who need
companionship support or sustaining support may be feeling alienated by the more pressing needs for crisis support of other members of the group. If meetings could be divided into segments that would address specific needs, it might foster a better response from participants.

**The connection of social support to the health field.**

The next studies to be discussed focus more completely on medical social support. The examination of cancer patients continue as a common thread, but added to the discussion are mental patients, cardiovascular reactivity, hospice care workers, and patients living with HIV diagnosis. Robinson and Turner (2003) discuss the need to match the types of provided and desired social support. They have created a matrix that could be of great assistance in studying the optimal matching of provider to recipient. One intriguing element of this matrix ties back into computer-mediated communication: the availability of “hyperpersonal” communication online. Since relationships can be formed quickly online, and impression management is more easily accomplished online with fewer barriers to relationship construction, sometimes an online relationship can progress more rapidly to deeper levels than a similar face-to-face relationship. This technology may allow for some optimal matches for the Army spouse as well.

To this point in this study, social support has been examined from the positive side. This mirrors the literature until very recently. There is now a growing awareness that there is a negative side to social support, that there are in fact severe costs of social support that sometimes affect people’s mental wellness. Social negativity can have stronger impacts on some people (who are already predisposed to mood swings, depression, anxiety, etc.) than does positive social support (Bertera, 2005). This highlights the importance of avoiding negative communicators in life. In fact, Anthony and O’Brien (2002) did not find in their study the typically reported positive impacts from increased levels of social report as represented by cardiovascular reactivity
for research participants facing physiological and psychological stress. There are, however, a
number of mediating variables in their study which do place limitations on the generalizability of
their findings.

Egbert and Parrott’s (2003) study on hospice and hospital volunteers found that those two
categories of medical support personnel provide social support in much the same way, save that
hospice providers were more empathetic in the truest sense of the word, that they felt more with
the patient than did hospital volunteers. Personality type comparisons could be helpful in a
number of other populations, including that of Army spouse.

The role of social support to patients with HIV/AIDS is very convoluted. Three recent
articles shed light on some of the convolutions of the way support is requested, and of whom,
and for what reasons, as well as examine the same about support not being requested. Elwood
(2002) reports that suicide ideation rates are higher for HIV/AIDS patients with lower levels of
perceived social support, but HIV has also been reported to be a way to receive social support –
as in the case of one fourteen year old runaway who was knowingly having unprotected sex with
infected males so that she could contract the disease so as to receive social and financial support.
This is obviously the extreme and unusual case situation. Otherwise, HIV/AIDS positive
couples tend to see the disease as yet one more stressor in an already stress-filled life (Elwood,
2002). It seems that an overwhelmed Army spouse might see a deployment the same way – just
one more thing to deal with.

A large consideration of Army spouses is dealing with uncertainty. A study conducted
by Brashers, Neidig and Goldsmith (2004) examined the way people living with HIV or AIDS
manage uncertainty. Some of the strategies most frequently used for these individuals living
with chronic illness could very well be used by the Army spouse if she were aware of them. In
both situations, the stressor (military life-style or disease) is a long-term scenario, not a short-lived and momentary crisis. Strategies used to manage uncertainty include being provided with support that helps them find information, being provided with instrumental support and skill development, providing acceptance and validation, providing an outlet for venting, and encouraging the patient to pursue shifts in his or her perspective (Brashers, Neidig & Goldsmith, 2004, p. 305). The same study examined ways people living with HIV or AIDS manage the costs associated with social support. These could similarly be applied to the Army spouse population. The mechanisms for the management of support costs include (a) developing a self-advocatory role; (b) reframing interactions to be perceived as supportive; (c) withdrawal from situations that weren’t supportive; (d) being selective about who to turn to for support; and, (e) maintaining privacy boundaries (Brashers, Neidig & Goldsmith, 2004, p. 305).

Haas (2002) found that families can be a considerable source of social support, and that this support results in a higher quality of life for those with HIV/AIDS than for those couples who do not have familial support. Haas’ research supports the idea that perceived support may in fact be more relevant to those receiving support than is received support. He also reports that the timing of support is important. If an individual is seeking emotional support, and instrumental support is provided, that may not be seen as being as supportive as it would be at any other time. Haas reminds us of Lowenthal and Haven’s (1968) work which established that the support of a spouse or a particular, intimate relational partner is support that cannot be substituted for by any quantity of support from other sources. For an Army spouse to have that support, but to be separated from it by deployment or other work conditions, convolutes the way social support would be received and perceived.
Another corollary between patients living with HIV/AIDS and the Army spouse community revolves around the issue of stigma. HIV/AIDS patients often feel stigmatized by the community’s lack of understanding of their disease (Haas, 2002). Army spouses are often stigmatized too in the off-post civilian population, especially in times of political unrest when a war is perceived as unpopular. Finally, being able to reciprocate support is an indicator of higher perceived social support (Haas, 2002). Army spouses are often afforded the ability to help others in similar situations.

In a study that serves here as a transition between the medical field and the study of culture’s impact on social support, Song and Ingram (2002) examined HIV positive African Americans and found that greater satisfaction with the availability of social support was correlated with lower levels of mood disturbance. It is reported here that the most relevant types of social support for African Americans tend to be informal and familial support, but that many of the findings of studies involving HIV/AIDS and the African American community are very discrepant with each other.

**Focus on culture.**

The intersection of culture and social support is a relatively new subset of consideration in the literature (Feng & Burleson, 2005). In an early look at culture’s impact, Goodwin and Plaza (2000) examined culture as a construct that has been viewed too simplistically in preceding social support literature. Much of what had been done (to date) examined the continuum between a culture’s collectivism and individualism as the primary indicator of culture. Other concerns with previous studies include a lack of distinction between perceived and received social support, a lack of emphasis on the sources of support, and a lack of cross-cultural testing about the relationship between social support, values and life satisfaction (Goodwin & Plaza,
Goodwin and Plaza attempted to control for some of these limitations in their analysis of British and Spanish students. They found that high collectivism (in the Spanish sample) did predict higher social support from families and correlated with higher self-esteem and life satisfaction. Similarly, and somewhat less-expectedly, it did also correlate with higher self-esteem and life satisfaction in the more individualistic British sample. The one surprise that came from this study was that support from friends, not families, was the highest indicator of overall global perceptions of support in both samples. Past research would indicate that families should have a larger impact on perceived social support for collectivists. This initial look at culture is returned to in the discussion chapter as the culture of Army spouses is compared to the culture of the active duty Army.

Feng and Burleson (2005) draw attention to the fact that cross-cultural generalizability is limited by the lack of culture specific literature in this arena. Since the military culture is more heterogeneous than the civilian population, this insight may become very important. Feng and Burleson’s essay, in addition to calling for more culture studies, takes the study of culture and social support to the process of seeking support, an area that is relatively understudied in the mainstream of social support literature. This paper is a vital link in understanding where the study of culture and social support is at present. It is also returned to in the discussion chapter as the culture of Army spouses is compared to the culture of the active duty Army.

**Impact of relational contexts on social support.**

Social support has been examined in a number of different contexts: brother to brother, in volunteerism and in marriage, just to name a few. Avtgis, Martin and Rocca (2000) found that brothers who best understood each other had similar styles of relationship support and relationship depth, and lower levels of relationship conflict. Ashcraft and Kedrowicz (2002)
examined the social support needed by volunteers at non-profit organizations and made some suggestions that are very applicable to the often volunteer-intensive role of Army spouse. While paid employees tended to see volunteers as subordinates who valued autonomy, the volunteers tended to see themselves as needing ample support to be able to interact effectively on a part-time basis with other volunteers and employees. As Family Readiness Group leaders are all volunteers in a similar situation to that which Ashcraft and Kedrowicz studied, it is important to help them avoid the communicative alienation many volunteers feel. The conceptualization of social support utilized in this study, that “social support is a communication process in which participants aid each other with the struggles of (organizational) life” (Ashcraft & Kedrowicz, 2002, p. 91) is one which is broad enough to encompass much of the military lifestyle. A unique facet of social support brought forth by these authors is appraisal support, which includes performance centered feedback. We all like to know how we are doing at the things which are important to us, and it is likely that Army spouses do not get this type of feedback as often as they would like. When feedback is received, there is often the fear on the part of the volunteer that the organization is scared to run off its volunteers, so may be falsely positive (Ashcraft and Kedrowicz, 2002). In many situations, volunteers have little interaction time with others who fill the same role to be able to brainstorm and share what works and what does not work, and this may also be the case for Army spouses in positions of leadership.

The study by Xu and Burleson (2001) is only one of many to examine social support in marriage. This subset is only tangentially related to this dissertation in that the support being examined here is from sources external to the primary relationship. Where Xu and Burleson’s study intersects with this study is that individuals expect their spouses to be there for them in times of crisis, and by necessity, in the Army spouse subset, this is not always the case. This
unmet expectation can, in and of itself, be an additional stressor to the partner who is in crisis. Many interesting insights within this study come from gender differences in social support, which is an ideal segue to the next section concerning how different people deal with social support.

**Perception of social support.**

All of these contextual differences highlight that social support is different for different people. How social support is received is considerably altered by the characteristics of the person doing the receiving: man or woman, child or elder. Walen and Lachman (2000) found that friends and family members serve a stress buffering role more often for women than for men. Social strain, the negative and flip side of social support, is felt more acutely by women than by men. Social strain is not just the absence of social support; it is the psychological distress and reservations about the relationship itself that are caused by actions of social network members (Walen & Lachman, 2000, p. 7). Women may be more exposed to and affected by this strain as they tend to cast their social support nets more broadly, exposing themselves to more sources of potential strain. There is also a tendency, primarily on the part of women, to internalize the emotional strain being experienced by others in their network (Walen & Lachman, 2000).

A study conducted on children and adolescents by Dayan, Doyle and Markiewicz (2001) is relevant here in comparison to studies done by Robinson and Nussbaum (2004) and Segrin (2003) which examined social support in elderly populations. The combined impact of these three studies supports the claim that age is a variable of interest in the study of social support. The first of these studies, by Dayan, Doyle and Markiewicz (2001), examined children from different cultures, again making the case that culture is a factor which complicates the perception
of social support. The latter two articles, Robinson and Nussbaum (2004) and Segrin (2003), look at issues of elder health and religion, and social support and well-being, respectively. The idea of life stages addressed by these three studies implies that Army spouses, who tend to be younger than the average civilian spouse, may perceive and receive support differently than their civilian counterparts. The communities that they build may be different from other communities based on the context of the military lifestyle.

**Community building through communication.**

A brief synopsis of some of the context regarding the military community now precedes a discussion of community building as it is envisioned by researcher Putnam (Saguaro Seminar, 2001). The sense of belonging to a military community is so encompassing that there is a general acknowledgement that a military wife is part of that community, that team.

**The military community.**

Fully one fifth of spouses interviewed (Segal & Harris, 1993, p. 46) believe that their actions, and their use of services available to them, can negatively or positively affect their soldier’s career progression. In fact, Harrell went into her 2001 study expecting to uncover evidence that the notion of formal expectations for spouses was outdated and antiquated. She instead discovered that those expectations do still exist, and that in some cases, the expectations have gotten stronger (2001, p. 56).

To illustrate these expectations, as recently as the late 1970s, spousal involvement was a formal block on an officer’s “OER,” or Officer Evaluation Report. While that particular block no longer exists, it is widely known that if an officer is married, and there is no mention of the spouse’s involvement in the Family Readiness Group, that omission is a condemning silence (Harrell, p. 56, 2001). If a company or field grade officer (lieutenant, captain / major, lieutenant
colonel) does not have a functional Family Readiness Group (traditionally organized by the spouse), that officer can be virtually certain to have some hard questions asked before promotion. Keeping the target population of the military community in mind, it is important to examine the ideas of community building envisioned by Putnam (Saguaro Seminar, 2001).

**Community building.**

Starting in 1995, Putnam began looking at the idea of social capital, about which he wrote an initial article which was later expanded into the book *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Social capital has come to be defined in one of its simplest renditions as “social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Saguaro Seminar, 2001, p. 2). The research for this endeavor led to the Saguaro Seminar. The seminar was named after the saguaro cactus that grows in the Southwestern United States. Saguaro cacti are superb indicators of the wellness of the ecosystem. Their root systems extend by many times the height of the cacti, and the saguaro grows slowly, making this the perfect symbol for social capital (The Saguaro Seminar, 2005). This seminar and the resultant book and book tour led to the repeated question of how people could make a difference in increasing social capital. From these questions came the report of *Bettertogether*, which translated research into action and advice for increasing social capital.

Putnam’s book struck a chord with many in the world of research, social policy, and in the general population. The notion of social capital resonated strongly in many disciplines, from governmental organizations and others concerned with democracy, to companies and organizations attempting to better the lives of their workers, to questions from ethnic group leaders harkening back to Putnam’s work, *Are Latinos Really Bowling Alone?* (Hofer, 1999).
The Bettertogether report explored four main principles for building social capital: the social capital impact principle; the recycling principle; the bridging principle; and the C2C principle (Saguaro Seminar, 2001, pp. 8-9). The social capital impact principle refers to using the framework of social capital as an unconscious lens for viewing all decisions. When citizens begin to consider their actions through the lens of social capital as a standard, priorities will be reordered and an upswing in social capital should be seen. Secondly, the recycling principle assures us that in lieu of spending social capital, when we invest of ourselves, that social capital is returned to us in recycled form, generally with interest. Next, the bridging principle differentiates between two kinds of connections: bonding between those who are more similar than different; and bridging between people who are more different than similar. An emphasis ought to be placed on networks that achieve bridging, as research indicates it has an even greater value than bonding connections. Finally, the C2C principle refers to communications that happen consumer to consumer, citizen to citizen, community to community. The essence of this principle is that peers in horizontal communication networks are often more successful in expanding social capital than are experts preaching to laymen in vertical networks.

It comes as no surprise that those researching military communities also have found value in Putnam’s research (Saguaro Seminar, 2001). Researchers such as Martin, Mancini and Mancini, Bowen, and Orthner applied his suggestions and synthesized three main strategies to bring together military and civilian communities (Martin, Mancini, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2004, pp. 2-3). Martin, Mancini and Bowen have also cautioned that housing issues have profound impacts on the sense of community that a military family experiences. Another concern that stemmed from the tragedy of September 11, 2001 includes the terrorism based restrictions which tore apart many of the civilian-military outreach programs that were just
getting established at that time (Martin, Mancini, & Bowen, 2002, p. F5). In one example of that kind of outreach in the academy, Albano (2002) attempted to assist the civilian sector with the article entitled “What society can learn from the U.S. military’s system of family support.” The lessons promoted in this article are in agreement with Putnam’s social capital building.

**Secondary Data Analysis Literature**

As this study utilized secondary data analysis, a discussion of the issues associated with secondary data analysis is now relevant. In one of the seminal works on secondary data analysis, Hyman defines secondary analysis and comments that, “In recent years the idea of secondary analysis of survey data--simply stated, the extraction of knowledge on topics other than those which were the focus of the original surveys--has inspired a major movement in social science” (1972, p. 1). Hyman also invokes Sir Isaac Newton’s famous quotation, that, “If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants” (1972, p. 2) to describe the basic belief behind secondary data analysis.

To account for why this trend in giant climbing is the case, an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of this technique is warranted. Glass, McGaw and Smith (1981, p. 21) asserted that, “Some of our best methodologists have pursued secondary analysis in such grand style that its importance has eclipsed that of the primary analysis.” Burton described some of the advantages of secondary data analysis that promote that level of quality from researchers employing the method. With secondary data analysis, researchers are able to replicate and reanalyze data from different theoretical frameworks; researchers are able to focus on theory and analysis instead of practical issues of collection; and larger sample sizes are often available which allow research options of which most established researchers and students could not have otherwise dreamed (Burton, 2000, p. 349).
Burton further extolled the benefits of secondary data analysis as he continued that there are a large range of topics covered in existing databases that are designed to be multi-purpose in nature. Longitudinal studies are often more feasible in a more timely manner using secondary data analysis. Cross-national and comparative research (that otherwise would not be possible due to funding, time constraints, issues of access and linguistics) also becomes more possible with this technique (Burton, 2000, p. 349). Robson noted that recent data sets should have good documentation with full code books and recording methods that are easy to access (Robson, 2002 p. 360).

Other benefits of secondary data analysis include those put forth by Cook (1974, p. 160). Cook pointed out that secondary data analysis can increase the certainty of organizations in accepting the findings of researchers due to the verification of original findings. Secondary analysis also presents a potential cure for “disciplinary myopia” (Apple, Subkoviak & Lufler, 1974, p. 164). Studies employing this method can also achieve a kind of professional enhancement as they tend to be more highly visible (Apple, Subkoviak & Lufler, 1974, p. 173).

Pragmatically, secondary data analysis seems a logical choice. With current technology, it is now much easier to maintain and share data than at any other time in history. Burton (2000, p. 350) pointed to the rapidity with which a researcher can work in a cost-effective manner. Issues of access are often circumvented by secondary data analysis. Also, the researchers who undertook the primary analysis are often specialists in their field, with expertise in data collection above and beyond even that of the secondary researcher (2000, p. 350). Large databases of national and international studies are maintained by countless private organizations, public organizations, and governmental bodies (Dale, Arber & Procter, 1988, p. 1; Burton, 2000, p. 349). One example of this type of database is The UK Data Archive (UKDA). With more
than 5000 data sets, this is just one databank a researcher could go to for data acquisition, preservation, dissemination and promotion (UK Data Archive, 2004). Rossi, Wright and Anderson categorized these large database sources into sectors of the federal government, academic, private, mass media, and ad-hoc and in-house agencies (1983, pp. 10-14). The only real pragmatic issues of concern in secondary data analysis are when the databases are so huge as to be unwieldy, requiring more computer space than a researcher has access to, and when stronger statistical and computer skills are required for very sophisticated forms of analysis (Burton, 2000, p. 331).

As with any type of research, there are considerations and concerns to secondary data analysis other than the merely pragmatic. The biggest concern, as expressed by Robson (2002, p. 360) is that it is rare to find the research question that you want answered to be directly addressed in someone else’s database. Further, Jacob commented, that categorically, all published statistics should be deliberated over with wariness (1984, p. 51). Burton expounded upon the reason for suspicion, or at least caution, by explaining that statistics are, by their nature, organizational products which reflect the definitions, trends, assumptions, priorities and understandings of their creators (Burton, 2000, p. 350). One must be careful that the data are not mistakenly claimed to be representative of a general population if the sample was drawn from a special population (Rossi, Wright & Anderson, 1983, p. 157). As the population surveyed by the ARI is the target population for this study, this is not truly a concern for this study.

Other concerns in using secondary data analysis are raised by Burton (2000, p. 349-351). Different researchers’ definitions of concepts and research parameters can often be mismatched without the secondary researcher realizing it. Data taken from more highly industrialized nations tend to be of higher quality than the data from less advantaged countries, which can be especially
problematic in cross-cultural comparison studies. Social and political contexts can also skew data. While it is inevitably important to keep these issues in mind, it seems to this researcher that given the parameters of this study, awareness should be enough to combat these potential flaws.

In a final consideration which perhaps should be the first consideration, there are also ethical issues in the use of secondary data analysis. While it would seem that no one can possibly be inconvenienced, let alone harmed by the re-analysis of existing data, the reality is not so clear (Dale, Arber & Procter, 1988, p. 56). While researchers employing secondary data analysis do not need to concern themselves with the ethics of interviewing and the place of the research participant in surveys, and while anonymity is traditionally assured by the initial data preparation process, the use of secondary data analysis does still involve ethical issues. Secondary data researchers are one stage removed from the data collection, and as such may miss nuances that the primary researcher was immersed in, causing errors in judgment that the original researcher would never have fallen into. If the research participants felt a particular affinity to the primary data collector, they may have revealed things that they would not have revealed to some other random researcher.

Since ARI’s is a more formal instrument than those discussed above (which were ethnographic endeavors) these issues did not have a large impact on this study. The credibility of ARI undoubtedly contributed to its survey’s relatively high rate of return, something probably unobtainable for an independent researcher working with the same sample. It is even possible that respondents gave answers to ARI that they would not have given to independent researchers, hoping that an institutionalized entity would have the power to affect changes in military approaches. On the other hand, the possibility exists that respondents might also have edited their responses to ARI if they thought something they reported might lead to the loss of facilities
or program funds that would harm someone else. All of these considerations taken into account, there is at least no further intrusion into the lives of participants, issues of anonymity are much more readily assured, and a new perspective may help to balance out other analyses. As the researcher maintained awareness of the ethical ramifications throughout this study, it is postulated that these were protected against.

Grounded Theory Literature

The theoretical orientation of grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 and subsequently advanced by Glaser, Strauss and Corbin in numerous full books (Creswell, 1998) as well as chapters (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). By 1994, Strauss and Corbin list a small sampling of 19 studies in extremely varied fields which had utilized grounded theory methodology. It seems that grounded theory, as Strauss and Corbin describe it, “a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data,” has certainly been embraced (1994, p.275). The acceptance of grounded theory is especially well established in many more recent exploratory studies (Mazur, 2004).

In grounded theory, verification is part and parcel of analysis. Levasseur makes the case for stages of analysis, where themes are explored and compared against each other, looking for patterns of dominance and prevalence (2004). Creswell (1998) identifies construct orientation, thorough discussion, systematic procedure, coding diagrams and feeling objective while simultaneously engaging emotions (p. 34) as hallmarks of good grounded theory development. As researchers such as Glinert (2003) and Kassing (2002) have found, this makes thematic analysis a perfect match with grounded theory, theory that interacts with and mingles with the information gathered (Mander, 1999, p. 16). Following in those footsteps, after the thematic
analysis is complete, grounded theory will offer a framework in which to make sense of these findings.

To further explain how grounded theory is systematic, Creswell (1998) outlines the four major stages of the grounded theory format: open coding, axial coding, selective coding and developing a conditional matrix. This systematic nature helps guard the researcher against self-doubt, for, as further noted by Creswell, there are accompanying challenges faced by grounded theory researchers. They must be able to divorce themselves from preconceived theoretical ideas and constructs. When the entire study seems to be changing and evolving, having confidence in the system should bring reassurance to the researcher, who must then be able to determine when enough analysis is really enough, when the constructs are theoretically saturated. The developed theory, then, must contain all the vital components of grounded theory: “a central phenomenon, causal conditions, strategies, conditions and context, and consequences” (p. 58). To these concerns Böhm (2004) adds that the level of insecurity experienced by novice grounded theorists can be great, as there are very few hard and fast rules regarding when to transition between the aforementioned phases in coding. This is also spoken to by Winfield and Peng, (2005) who highlight this interplay of analysis and data. For all the reasons above, grounded theory was a strong match for this study.

**Brief Discussion of Methodology**

There were many options to consider in making the choice of methodology for this dissertation. The one chosen was thematic analysis using secondary data. It is important to understand what thematic analysis is by exploring the choice that was made. Many methods were filtered through, and the process of residues led to a determination based on fitting the method to the questions being asked, the data extant, and the preliminary nature of this area of
research within the communication discipline, as well as the epistemology behind this study. What was needed was a methodology that could be used to address open-ended text responses to specific questions. These open-ended questions were not responses gathered in conversation, but rather were answers to a questionnaire. A full discussion of the options considered but ultimately weighed as being wanting is included in Appendix A.

Based primarily on the form of data to be analyzed, this researcher reached a decision regarding methodology. This study employed qualitative content analysis in the form of thematic analysis. Content analysis most commonly refers to the quantitative forerunner of qualitative analysis of content. These studies are frequently found in mass media studies, as well as clinical settings, as evidenced in Gottschalk (1995). The method of content analysis was developed in the communication discipline and successfully exported to fields such as history, literature, law, economics, anthropology and natural science (Berelson, 1952, p. 9). As early as Berelson’s (1952) primer on content analysis came the recognition of the value of qualitative content analysis (p. 114). Today, many of the studies that are identified purely as “content analysis” studies examine the content of visual artifacts, mainly photographs and videotapes, as in Harper’s (2001) study of photographs taken in agricultural rural America. The use of the term “content analysis” does not seem to be popular at this juncture to mean qualitative analysis of textual material; this is why a linguistic derivation, thematic analysis, is the more appropriate choice.

Thematic analysis is often used in exploratory studies, and the themes generated can often form the foundation for later questionnaires and other focus group instruments, such as in Reidlinger’s (2004) analysis of group processes in organizations. The essence of thematic analysis is full immersion in the text – in this case the open-ended survey responses. Themes
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from the discourse of the respondents were taken from the survey responses, informed by the scholarly and personal knowledge of the investigator. These themes were determined, selected, and cultivated by gathering and collecting the prime and recurrent issues and concerns of respondents. Other scholars utilizing this method have explored the media’s portrayal of the Intifada in the New York Times (McCoy & Atwood, 1996), the instructional methods used in public speaking classes (Levasseur, 2004), speech impediments (Anderson & Felsenfeld, 2003), strategies used by employees communicating with their employers (Kassing, 2002) and privacy boundaries in nursing homes (Petronio & Kovach 1997), just to note a few.

Thematic analysis starts with close reading and generating lists of themes (Levasseur, 2004), informed by the study’s research questions. Following this, master lists of themes are established and the data reanalyzed. The article by Anderson and Felsenfeld (2003) explains in full detail the literal cut and paste job of physically moving notecards into and out of piles representing themes. This sorting process is an amorphous and evolving procedure, where categories are sorted and resorted, collapsed and expanded. By recognizing the themes represented in a text (in this study, the answers to open-ended survey questions), a researcher can determine areas of emphasis that the respondents come back to time and again by finding “re-occurrences and repetitions” (Reidlinger, 2004, p. 62). Kassing (2002) looked for refinements and developments in these themes until the existing categories were not really being improved on by further divisions or clarifications. Reidlinger (2004) contends that relationships between themes can emerge and be “recontextualized as the analysis continue[s]” (p. 64). This type of analysis allows a researcher to get to the supporting framework behind values and core beliefs. It stands to reason, then, that thematic analysis is most often phenomenological and interpretive
(Glinert, 2003, p. 516). This format allows flexibility while providing structure for a study of this size.

Denzin and Lincoln note that “Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences” (2005, p. 7). Noting this, it is important to recognize that other disciplines refer to what is being done in this thematic analysis as a close reading, and, in its general essence, that is what was accomplished. It is indeed possible that other disciplines may have yet other names for the steps taken here; they are not excluded for any nefarious reason or to slight any particular approach.

The clear structure provided by the specific lens of thematic analysis provided guidance and boundaries, as well as the rigor that was sought after in this analysis. It is for these reasons this dissertation employed thematic analysis as the methodology of choice. Chapter 3 deals with the specifics of applying this methodology to this study.
Chapter III: Methodology

Given that the goal of the study was to explore how Army spouses’ use communication both to construct community and to accept and constitute support via analysis of their responses to open-ended feedback at the end of a survey about their experiences of military life, qualitative textual analysis was a logical choice of method for the study. Within qualitative content analysis, thematic analysis offered the opportunity to generate the kind of data that would feed the grounded theory building at the heart of the study’s inquiry.

As discussed in Chapter II, thematic analysis is often used in exploratory studies, and the themes generated can often form the foundation for later questionnaires and other in-depth qualitative research methods (Reidlinger 2004). The essence of thematic analysis is full immersion in the text. In this study the text was the open-ended survey responses from the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science (ARI)’s Survey of Army Families V 2004/2005. The clear structure provided by the specific lens of thematic analysis provided guidance and boundaries, as well as the rigor that was sought in this analysis.

The sections of this chapter focus on the thematic analysis methodology, discuss the sample utilized in this study, and explore the implementation of said methodology. Appendix D proffers a random sample of the qualitative responses to which the researcher was granted access, which was used for the initial creation of the codebook and in coder training. Appendix E is the final form of the codebook developed by the primary researcher and refined by the primary researcher and the coding team.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis starts with close reading of the text and generating lists of themes (Levasseur, 2004), informed by the study’s research questions. Following this, master lists of
themes are established and the data reanalyzed. Anderson and Felsenfeld (2003) explain in full
detail the literal cut and paste job of physically moving notecards into and out of piles
representing themes. This sorting process is an amorphous and evolving procedure, where
categories are sorted and resorted, collapsed and expanded. By recognizing the themes
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analysis allows a researcher to get to the “underlying structures behind attitude and belief
systems.” It stands to reason, then, that thematic analysis is most often phenomenological and
interpretive (Glinert, 2003, p. 516).

Sample

This study has been conducted as a secondary data analysis of the Survey of Army
Families V 2004/2005. The data were gathered in a survey was distributed in August 2004 and
data collection closed on 18 January 2005. The survey was sent to a stratified random sample of
spouses stratified by rank and deployment status of the active duty soldier. A total of 24,793
usable responses were received. 8,988 were from officers’ spouses, and 15,805 were from
enlisted soldiers’ spouses. This translated to a response rate of 43%. Approximately 60% of the
completed questionnaires came back via regular mail; about 40% were completed online as web
surveys (Highlight, 2006). In 2004 there were 218,536 spouses of active duty soldiers in the
U.S. Army, of which 48,393 were married to officers and 170,143 were married to enlisted
soldiers. The survey results are reported by ARI at

The data responses that served as the sample for this study were culled from this pool of 24,793 responses by keyword search ARI ran on the responses to the “Additional Comments” page. Overall slightly more than half of the survey respondents (12,889) included remarks in the space allowed for additional comments and 14% of the written responses, or 7% of the whole sample, addressed topics relevant for analysis in this study. In all ARI shared 1,823 open-ended responses, recorded in Microsoft Access 2000 format. As transcribed and shared by ARI, those responses varied in length from less than a line to an entire page, typed, single-spaced. The responses that made up the dissertation sample were culled from all the written responses, using a series of words and word roots listed in Table 1. The asterisk by some terms indicates that this was the root used, in order to capture all permutations of the word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of qualitative responses per keyword</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>communica*</td>
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<tr>
<td>community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>friend*</td>
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<tr>
<td>informat*</td>
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<tr>
<td>know*</td>
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<tr>
<td>support*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implementation and Discussion of Consistency in Coding

The volume of data presented by the 1,823 open-ended responses that came from ARI necessitated enlisting two external coders to work with the primary researcher in order to expedite the process of coding and to bring fresh perspectives to the process of sorting the responses. For ease of maneuverability, the data were copied into Microsoft Word from Microsoft Access. Since the project relies on secondary data analysis, no special instrumentation was needed, aside from the use of a personal computer for word processing and electronic communication.

The primary researcher created a preliminary codebook after full immersion in the literature and after re-reading the data set. The codebook was tested on a random sample of responses (see Appendix D) to ensure that the codebook did not exclude any of the themes that were already emerging. The coders were brought together for a training session. In this first session, the trio discussed the population, the sample, the theoretical constructs involved, military jargon and the expectations of the primary researcher regarding open and frequent communication. The coders were sent home with Appendix D, a copy of the codebook, and a schedule of coding consistency conferences. The next training session started with clarifications of the distinctions between some of the more similar codes, such as the distinction between knowledge and information. Military acronyms were a large focus as well. The primary researcher and two coders discussed their codings of Appendix D line by line, working out any discrepancies and clarifying any misunderstandings and in the process a few subcategories were brought to the primary researcher’s attention for inclusion in the codebook. One example of this is the subcategory under “Support- who” of “church.” After this intensive meeting, the coders
were again sent home with keyword subsets to code. This time each received one of the 2 smallest keyword subsets, those keyword searched for communica* and community.

During the next coding consistency conference, each coder selected three pages at random from his or her subset and the group re-coded them to see if there were any inconsistencies or omissions. In the course of this meeting it was determined, ironically enough, that the theme of “Consistency” was not being applied consistently, so both coders re-scanned their efforts with a clearer idea of what should be included in this theme. By the next meeting, high coding consistency was clearly no longer merely a goal, but a reality. As each coder finished his or her keyword subsets, the subset was forwarded electronically to the primary researcher, who gave that coder with a new keyword subset to start coding. This pattern continued through all 6 keyword subsets.

One coder completed the 4 smaller keyword subsets in approximately the same time it took for the other coder to code the two largest subsets, so the division of labor was roughly equal. Once the initial coding was completed within the subset file, the coders then shuffled the comments into files that were sorted by theme. These, too, were sent electronically to the primary researcher, who then collated the files from both external coders to create manila file folders which contained each response that related to the theme of the file.

Each of the ten files was then further divided by the primary researcher and pored through multiple times to gain a sense of the story being told by the spouses. Comments and connections were noted in the margins of the pages, entries which were often repeated were clustered together, representative statements and entries which resonated were highlighted, and anomalies were noted. From the full data document, each comment that was marked for further use was electronically copied from the data to the dissertation in process to avoid any typing
errors. These connections were allowed to germinate, as is recommended in the grounded theory literature. Patterns of dominance and prevalence (Levasseur, 2004) evolved into a few solid ideas, primarily, the seeds of a theory of the interaction between military culture and Military Family Culture. This discussion is broached in the Summary and Discussion Chapter.

In the course of coding the responses, 10 main divisions of the data emerged. These themes were the level of support perceived (or lacking), the types of support perceived (and lacking), support providers, information, knowledge, Family Readiness (Support) Groups, consistency, attitude toward the military lifestyle, media and the internet, and issues with the military itself. The methodology of thematic analysis was perfectly suited to help answer the research question “How do Army spouses communicate and constitute social support?” given the data to which this researcher was granted access. A clear theoretical understanding of this method, and a vivid picture of the sample and the data, allowed the process to be implemented in a careful and thorough manner. The results of this study are presented in Chapter IV Results Relating to Social Support, and Chapter V Results Relating to the Army Spouse Lifestyle. They are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter VI, Summary and Discussion.
Chapter IV: Results Relating to Social Support

This dissertation endeavored to provide insight into the question, “How do Army spouses communicate and constitute social support?” This chapter reports half of the results of this study’s thematic analysis of the 1,823 responses to the open-ended response page of the ARI’s SAF V survey. In the course of coding the responses, ten main divisions of the data emerged. The first five of these ten themes will now be discussed as they emanate out from the heart of the research question. These five are presented first as they focus on themes that relate directly to the literature on social support. The second set of five themes is more closely connected to the military dependent lifestyle. The headings given to these first five themes are the “level of support perceived (or lacking),” the “types of support perceived (and lacking),” “support providers,” “information,” and “knowledge.”

In order to provide a true sense of the data, the excerpts from the spouses’ entries quoted in the text are transcribed here exactly as they were written in response to the survey. This means all the grammar, spelling, and typographical errors have been left as is, and the shorthand, and abbreviations are also unchanged. The results are authentic and powerful, since the precise vernacular used conveys the respondents’ genuine sentiments. While synthesis is a goal of this and Chapter V, this researcher deemed that the primary role of these two chapters was to allow readers to get to know the army spouse through the spouse’s own words. More synthesis occurs in Chapter VI, the Discussion chapter.

Level of Support Perceived

The strongest theme that arose from the data has to do with the Army spouse’s perceived level of support which they get (or do not get). Since this category encompasses many of specific themes connected to the way the spouses lives and interactions with the Army are
structured, it is naturally larger than any other, aside from “Issues with the military” category itself. The larger size of “Issues with the military” is primarily because it became a somewhat encompassing theme of specific content area complaints. Within the category of Level of Support Perceived, some respondents perceive that the level of support they receive is severely lacking, to the point of indicating that they feel support is non-existent. They will be discussed first. A second, much smaller contingent perceives that the level of support they receive is superb.

**Negative level of support perceived.**

Many more spouses feel that support is lacking in their lives than feel that they have enough. A foreshadowing to this section comes from the words of one spouse,

I have received little to no support from the Army as the spouse of an active duty enlisted soldier. I truly believe that the underlying belief of the Army is, ‘if the Army wished for a soldier to have a spouse, they would have issued him or her one.’ While this belief may have been an unwritten military law of the past, I truly feel like this policy still holds true today.

First, a brief physical description of the data follows, second are a few representative quotations, followed by the results noted by the primary researcher. The spouses represented by these entries give many specific instances, with evidence to back up complaints. Their entries are long, with over one hundred entries being more than 8 lines. Some go on for more than a single-spaced, typed page. Many utilize ALL CAPS to SHOUT their responses, many use expletives, exclamation points, and frowning emoticons to express negative tones. It is of note that the ARI warned the primary researcher of this trend before the data had even been collated. The pattern has been apparent in all five SAFs that more people who are unsatisfied take the time
to fill out the surveys, as those who are luke-warm or happy with things don’t feel the compelling, visceral need to vent. Some of these entries are very vitriolic; they are emphatic and many times reflect anger and frustration. These spouses are vehement that their story be heard.

Representative words and phrases here are “very difficult,” the military shows no support,” and a frustrated, “It needs to be fixed!” Of those in command, it is said that “They really talk out of both sides of their mouths,” and units are consistently, “not family-friendly.” A very common refrain references being left alone. The loneliness factor, the feeling of not being supported permeates every page of this file.

These Army spouses also clearly establish that there is a need for support. It is their own contention that this need is not being met. This is shown by one spouse very clearly.

Army wife support definitely needs to be better during stressful deployments for a long period of time. I had the privilege of being a POC for our unit and I see just how BADLY it’s needed…alot of wives ended up needing help during and after deployments for mental health, nerve problems, and a host of other things. When mom’s not doing good, who in the house is?

There are six main areas in which they perceive that support is lacking. These areas are: communication issues, problems concerning children, medical issues, financial issues, separation issues, and unjustness. In all, they express that, “To be an army wife is to be alone. People love to wave yellow ribbons and profess to support soldiers and their families, yet seldom actually do anything to put their words into action.” How that support can be communicated will now be examined.
Communication issues.

The most often repeated refrain in this set of responses involves the lack of communication. Many spouses identify this as a grave shortcoming on the part of the Army and the Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). These include statements such as “It is a horrible way to treat soldiers and family that after a whole year away, the Army did NOTHING to inform families so that they may greet their loved ones upon return.” Another indicates that a spouse did not even hear from and FRG until 2 weeks before redeployment, with the excuse that her phone number was misplaced. Some say that they have never been contacted at all. “Fort Sill does not know or care that I exist.” Some recognize that, “… this needs to change!” These wives attest that the amount of communication they are provided with is insufficient. Others identify that there were complicating variables, such as geographical separation with which to contend. “I remained in No. VA while my husband was deployed from Atlanta. The contact from any military group there was non-existent, even though I belonged to the group before he left. No phone calls, email, etc ever happened.” This is clearly a lack of communication.

The impact of insufficient communication is further explained by statements such as:

FRG was very cold people. I told them three times I was pregnant. Each time they were surprised. When the baby arrived they said again they didn’t know I was pregnant. So no telephone calls to see how I was, etc. Alone I sat with my four year old and new born. No help.

Another spouse, who is new to the military lifestyle writes, “I prepared myself for this lifestyle … I finally just called …to introduce myself. I would have liked the group to welcome me…Maybe that’s a little selfish and demanding…but it would have been nice.” Mirroring this sentiment, another wife reveals that although she was not contacted by the FSG during
deployment, she was “solicited by using the FSG database for an individual’s financial gain (invited to a Tupperware/candle sale event). I found this highly offensive. They obviously had my name and number, but only used it for their own benefit.” The use of contact information for a purpose that was not related to support is obviously a breach of trust.

Aside from the complete lack of useful communication, many spouses raise issues such as the quality of communication from particular sources: “The civilian employees on post are the absolute most RUDE people I have ever met!” A final, related concern ties in the lack of communication at home with the lack of communication from those involved with the deployed soldier:

There was a serious communication failure between the Company and the wives about the soldiers and their safety. As far as communications via satellite phones, video conferences, and computer emails they were never available to neither the wives or the soldiers during their time in Iraq. The Army nor the Company did nothing to ease the worried minds of loved ones left back at home.

The complaints about missing or incomplete communication will be revisited in the later section on Information as a type of support perceived. The next most frequently cited lack of support concerns problems with children, such as problems with childcare and schooling.

**Problems concerning children.**

The military lifestyle can be hard on children with frequent moves and separations from parents. In this section, Army spouses vent about the lack of support they feel while raising children. One mother says, “Back to back deployments which cause my husband to miss years of his children’s early lives will have me filling out his ETS paperwork. I …am an adult… My
children, however, are a different story.” The difficulty of being both mother and father while one’s spouse is absent and, likely, in danger is very real for these spouses.

Aside from the difficulties of separation, for many current Army spouses, some of whom work outside the home, and some of whom just need a break now and then from constant single-parent childrearing while spouses are deployed, childcare is a vital issue. “The unit commander and some others say once, ‘Let me know if I can help’ almost retorically, but the same don’t help when it’s hardest, putting 3 kids to sleep, bathing them, when plans seem to be all disrupted...”

A perceived unavailability of childcare can be very frustrating to spouses. One spouse writes that, “…they do not have adequate daycare here. I was told by the assistant director… that the Army feels that unless you are dual military or a single soldier that you don’t really need daycare because you don’t have to work.” In some situations, childcare is not a luxury, but a necessity, as it is for this next spouse.

I am 7 months pregnant. I have three school aged kids. My husband is redeploying to Iraq. I am overseas with no family or friends. How am I suppose to deliver a baby an take care of three kids by myself while I am in the hospital? The Army could care less about me or my kids.

When quality childcare is difficult or impossible to come by, it creates a huge problem for families. Another problem relates to schools.

The school system offered on military posts around the world is referred to as DODDS (DODDS stands for Department of Defense Dependent Schools). There are DODDS schools at most military locations, and the consistency between these many locations, as well as their ability to cater to the needs of military dependents are touted as their main strengths. According to some Army spouses, the Army should pay special attention to the product being delivered.
DODDS SCHOOLS NEED TO BE SET RIGHT ALSO. RIGHT NOW THEY ARE BELOW STANDARD! MY CHILDREN WERE EXTREMELY BEHIND IN CURRICULUM. TEACHERS NEED TO BE ROTATED MORE OFTEN. SEEMS THEY ARE THERE FOR THEMSELVES RATHER THAN THE CHILDREN. THE ARMY NEEDS TO START TAKING BETTER CARE OF THE FAMILIES!

says one Army spouse. Another spouse disagrees with how the DODDS schools handle deployments. “They discuss the war and most kids don’t want to talk about it but they get into trouble if they don’t participate. Thier needs should be thought of, most children don’t deal very well at all with the separation.” The interaction of DODDS schools and children who attend schools in the local community is highlighted by the next spouse. “My kids go to a school where there are almost no other military kids.” This spouse asked if her children could attend, “the support group for children of deployed parents and was told it was only for the children attending the school.” Education and support for their children is obviously a priority for these spouses.

Other than separation issues, childcare and school issues, medical issues affect parents left at home with children. Whether the child has a medical condition which needs attention, or just needs a routine appointment to see a doctor, many spouses feel that the current medical system is unsupportive.

We also have a son who has Asperger’s Disorder and I find there is little to no support for him…we have had problems with proper EFMP coding and medical staff knowledgeable in [the] disorder. At our current location there is a BIG problem with access to health care. I can’t even get an appointment for a sports physical before the sport seasson is half over, which means my children cannot participate in the desired sport.
Another mother with an issue that is related to children and medical care shares the following: “I was hospitalized with meningitis while my spouse was deployed and had a very difficult time finding someone to watch my then 2 year old making it that much more stressful.” All of these spouses attest that they perceive a lack of support regarding issues with children, whether that is due to deployment separation, childcare, education, or is medical care related. Whether the medical care is for children or self, many spouses contend that the current medical establishment is unsupportive, as will be considered next.

**Medical issues.**

The stories of medical problems told by Army spouses are some of the most emotional in this data set. These spouses express poignantly their frustration with a system that is described as not working the way it is intended to work. For the Army spouse, TriCare is synonymous with medical care, as they are the contracted medical provider of the Army. All referrals, appointments and prescriptions must go through the TriCare system if insurance coverage is desired. Spouses are very open in their criticism of this system. One of the calmest of spouses attests that the medical system is always very slow. More emphatic is the spouse who says, “Tricare is so frustrating that I grit my teeth at the thought of it. I am a reasonable, educated adult and Tricare and the Army are my two big grudges in life.” This spouse then continues for more than a single-spaced typed page with 7 well developed examples of how TriCare has failed their family during times of deployment. Her case is not atypical.

Two additional cases that highlight the frustration and anger with the medical system are included next.

When I went to deliver I had an emergency C-section and was told by the German doctor not to operate a vehicle or lift anything heavy for at least two weeks (that includes
younger children in and out of the bath etc.) I then called the rear detachment commander and told him my situation while I was still in the hospital. He asked me in which direction my stomach had been cut when I responded that it was horizontal he responded that then it was not an emergency and he would not send a message out for my husband to come help me. I went home and drove myself in pain and dealt with what my children and newborn needed. As a result of not being able to follow the doctors orders I developed a hernia and a cyst on my c-section and had to be taken into surgery. My spouse was sent home because I now had three children at home to care for he was only allowed less than two weeks and I was harassed by other spouses and fellow co-workers from the rear detachment. Even though I had medical letters from the doctors explaining my condition. I feel I was left in Germany to fend for myself and my family. The FRG was not helpful the community was not helpful.

It should come as no surprise given this woman’s experience that she does not perceive a high level of social support. Similarly, the following spouse’s anecdote further supports that there are some definite problems with medically related support. “I am a wife with a seizure disorder, who was told by the frg that they didn’t run a taxi service. I have been driving illegally on this post for 3 years since!!!” Her three exclamation points practically scream out her frustration and disappointment in the amount of support she has received. Spouses experiencing financial issues are just as vehement.

**Financial issues.**

Money is often fought over in marriage. Army families are no different. In fact, finances for these families can be an area of momentous concern; and many feel a lack of support regarding financial matters. It is well accepted in the military that for most military members,
were they to do the same job in the civilian sector, they would receive notably higher financial compensation. In fact, when talking about the annual military budget, the all Army newspaper, The Army Times, states, “The Pentagon’s goal is to set military pay at the 70th percentile, so that troops are paid more than about 70 percent of their civilian peers with similar education levels” (Army Times, 2010). In acknowledgement of this inequality are the two following spouse reflections:

    The saddest thing of all to me is that a Soldier could die for his country but not paid enough to feed or support his family. Or has to apply for Food stamps to feed his family. How do you think this affects the soldiers? What about his family? Why should they re-enlist?

and, the next spouse goes on to add that she knows “of families … that go to the food bank and shop at thrift, goodwill stores… Soldiers put their lives on the line for this country… We pay athletes millions but our soldiers near to nothing. It’s a shame!” It is hard to feel supported when the perception of such financial hardship permeates the reality of these spouses.

    So, while some view the long term financial picture as bleak, as above, others focus on short term financial hardships that created problems for themselves and those they know. The perception seems to be that support is not sufficiently present in some moments of crisis.

    …during deployments I have known families that have owed money back to the military for different reasons. Maybe because they were overpaid on moving expenses, etc. My problem is not that the military takes the money back, because it is owed them, but that they take it while the spouses are deployed and the family is having financial problems already.
The Army Emergency Relief (AER) fund is designed to step up in this type of situation. However, one spouse found in her moment of hardship that, “AER would only offer a voucher for the commissary. They wouldn’t help me pay bills which made them late and snowballed for several paychecks. I was not the only spouse who had casual pay come out during that period.” From these last two examples, it becomes evident that the timing of pay deductions is an issue that leaves spouses feeling unsupported.

Tales of other temporary financial hardships are expressed by yet more spouses. One tells that their family had to purchase supplies and equipment for their soldier before he deployed. It seems that this family was not adequately supported, which led to financial hardship. The next family expresses that they were almost in the same situation, and they are concerned for others not as fortunate as are they. “Upon our most recent PCS, travel pay was not reimbursed for over a month and a half… My spouse and I express great concern for those families who had to endure huge debt for such an extended time.” Similarly, this next spouse found the financial support programs offered by the Army to be lacking.

And he has one kid that lives with his ex-wife. He pays 501.00 a month for his other son in child support, and the Army has a program that is suppose to help families in financial problems. The Army turned us away. We bring home 1100 a month and we are trying to support a family of five. I don’t understand why we were turned away.

The root of many of these issues comes from a relatively low monthly take-home pay, but is often compounded by issues of BAQ/BAH/BAS which are acronyms that refer to the Basic Allowance for Quarters (and more recently Housing); with BAS referring to Basic Allowance for Subsistence which is related to food costs.
BAQ/BAH/BAS rates vary greatly based on the local area, and are often a topic of consternation and dissention. Housing markets and local economies are more fluid than are re-evaluations of these rates, often resulting in the rental/mortgage rates in any given area being markedly higher (or potentially, lower) than allowed for by BAQ/BAH/BAS. These changes can result in financial hardships and uncertainty for families, who can easily find themselves short on financial support. Essentially, many spouses feel that, “BAH and BAS are too low. We can only afford living in a bad neighborhood or we have to pay out of our own pockets.” Another example of this is very specific to one spouse’s situation, but tells a common story.

[O]ur family was PCS to Fort Lee Virginia, our BAH dropped. I went to housing; the list was 6+ months long. .. I asked for a list of rentals in the area; the lowest rental was 900 a month others 1000 and up. I know the BAH is based on average, so why is it only 631 for E6? I feel it needs to be looked into and updated.

In sum, in the words of one spouse, “It would be nice to know that the soldier made enough money and that the living allowance actually covered what all you needed.” Many of these spouses are proud of what their husbands do, and recognize the significance of their own sacrifices. That being said, the bottom line, according to one spouse, is: “However, proud will not pay the bills, put food on the table, or put him through school.” Finances are clearly often a concern for army spouses.

Separation issues.

While finances were mentioned by many spouses, only a few spouses really focused on the lack of support that comes from separating from their own support systems. This is frequently required by the nature of military moves. Typically, these comments did not focus on the fact that the move happened, but rather the poor timing of the move. This spouse describes
one of the greatest hardships she has endured as when she came, “to a new duty station and [had my] spouse deploy only 30 days later. Being new to this area, with no family or friends around, and being so far away from my family, was to say the least very hard.” This sentiment is echoed by another spouse.

We had to leave our support system. There was no housing available here and nothing to rent and I had to buy a house and move myself and family here while my spouse was deployed and get settled. I had no friends to help me and my child had to leave her friends as well and it was a hard adjustment.

These moves cause stress to the entire military family, and especially to spouses who often end up bearing the brunt of the work of relocation. This, to many spouses, seems very unfair. Situations that seem unjust are the root of the final area of concern expressed by spouses who feel that the overall level of support they receive is insufficient.

Unjustness.

There are a number of issues that Army spouses feel are unjust. When facing these issues, they do not feel supported. Army spouses have noticed that deployment time is not necessarily distributed evenly across all troops for a variety of mission-related reasons. When one soldier seems unduly burdened by a high operational tempo with multiple deployments in a short time, “It seems like some soldiers get deployed all the time and some spend 20 years and are lucky if they are deployed once.” This, understandably, does not sit well. Unfortunately, many spouses feel that they have no real recourse in matters where they perceive inequality, for, “Honestly, I feel like Army wives should be seen and not heard, according to the Army. If I did ever voice my opinion to anyone that was in direct contact with my husband it would affect him.” There is an often expressed fear that Army spouses can negatively impact their husbands’ careers
by being too outspoken, or bringing the concern to anyone in the soldier’s chain of command. Another spouse reiterates this point when she postulates that, “THERE ARE DIFFERENT LEADERS IN THE ARMY BAD AND GOOD BUT THEY ARE MOST NOT CONCERNED ABOUT THE FAMILY AND GIVE MY SPONSOR MORE PROBLEMS IF I GO UP AND TALK FACE TO FACE WITH THEM HOW COME?” This is clearly expressed as unjust.

Other areas of unjustness center around where someone is stationed and who they are. Some duty posts are more developed than others, and this can be a cause for feeling a lack of support.

The area that we are in here is very small and they are going to shut it down by 2007, so the services that we receive here are definitely NOT what we would receive had we been lucky enough to end up in Heidelberg. Therefore the people stationed here go to other areas and see what everyone else has and wonder why am I not getting the same treatment? For those of us that have been around longer we know sometimes you get it and sometimes you don’t but this is the impression that the younger spouses are getting and they have nothing else to compare THIS to. So they fall under the assumption that the Army as a whole stinks.

Sometimes there are inequalities based on rank, “I did not feel support from the Army community. It is a farce. Mostly a few majors and colonel’s wives getting together and patting each other on the shoulder and receiving awards for doing almost nothing.” Other concerns focus on inequality based on MOS, or Military Occupation Specialty. Some spouses perceive that certain MOSes get more support than do other MOSes. This contention is advanced by one spouse who asserts that she received ten-fold the support when her spouse was in the infantry than she feels now that he with a military police unit. The final response highlighted here
discusses inequality based on gender of the spouse. The male civilian Army spouse is a relatively recent entity. Due to their small statistical presence, these spouses are effectively invisible to Commands, FRGS and most researchers. The unjustness of this situation is raised by this one entry, which is the only entry written by a male spouse addressing issues of male spouses.

**MY ONLY CONCERN REALLY IS NOT FOR THE SPOUSES OF SOLDIERS BUT FOR THE HUSBANDS ESPECIALLY. AS A HUSBAND, I ALWAYS HEAR ABOUT THE WIVES…AND THAT’S FINE, BUT NEVER HEAR ANYTHING ABOUT THE HUSBANDS. MAYBE A LITTLE MORE SUPPORT AND INFORMATION REGARDING US AS HUSBANDS WOULD HELP A GREAT DEAL.**

The spouses that have been heard from in this section have made statements regarding the level of support they perceive. As this chapter continues, their responses will be further discussed. Two last responses, taken from those who perceive the level of support they receive to be negative, close this section. The first gives a perspective that is not at all unique in the data. “The military is a good life for anyone willing to give it a chance…[except] when ‘individuals’ become so wrapped up in themselves and forget that we are an ‘Army of One’ dedicated to protecting the overall well-being of many.” Finally, there is a plea for the responses to the SAF-V to be taken seriously, “I really hope that you take these responses to heart, because at this point, no one is really listening and cares what is happening. I sincerely hope you do.” This spouse sums up the concerns of many in this section.

**Positive level of support perceived.**

Many Army spouses indicate that they receive tremendous support. First, a brief physical description of the data follows, second are a few representative quotations, followed by the
results noted by the primary researcher. As contrasted with the spouses of the previous section, the spouses represented by these entries do occasionally give specific details, but more often offer generalizations without stated data to back up their claims. The vast majority of these accolades are one or two lines of glowing pride and contentment; only five entries reach eight through ten lines. This contrasts sharply with the longer entries of the previous section.

In the entries encompassed by this theme, we see words such as “fortunate” and “blessed” and phrases like, “I made it through,” “buddies are a God-send,” “Always been there when I needed help,” “put forth great effort,” and, “We knew we could count on one another.” These words and phrases represent an optimism that has withstood trial, and has come out the stronger for it.

Army spouses clearly establish that there is a need for support:

While I am a strong, independent woman, the first OIF deployment was emotionally brutal….It’s not the lawn care, transportation, or change in finances that overburden a person. It is the emotional toll, the fear of the unknown, the pain of loving someone in combat that makes deployment unbearable for those at home.

While identifying herself as “strong,” this spouse makes the case that there are limits to what any one person can do. Some spouses even state that they understand that there is a balancing act involved during difficult times. One spouse speaks of how important it was that her husband was allowed to return from a deployment when her father died. She indicated that she knows that, “the Army tries to care for families and provide services for us as much as the mission allows.” These spouses are aware that there are times when mission must come first, but feel that even in those times they are supported, as in a family. They also recognize that the support afforded to families is crucial to the retention of the soldier in the Armed Services.
The Army is a tough place even for people who are strong and well educated. We stay for the challenge, for serving our country and because we know God wants us here. If we ever felt it was bad for our family we would leave. Families must be taken care of or soldiers won't be able to do their jobs.

The imagery of family is often invoked. “During Desert Storm, we were in Germany, so the spouses turned to each other for support. We were like a family.” These references to family seem to come up more when the spouse is geographically removed from her own family of origin. Often spouses mention a moment of becoming part of the Army Family. It seems that these spouses accept what is a common understanding of community as family. “Although we are away from family, the ‘Army family’ of families here on Schofield is very supportive and has made the deployment easier.” Just as the term family is invoked, so too is community.

The construct of community is also often mentioned, as in, “This army community really felt like a community.” There is a sense of commonness of experience and similarity of perspectives. “Overall, I believe my children and I did very well while my spouse was deployed and I know this was due in large part to my community here on post.” Credit is given to self and others for strength that is both seen as internally and externally supported. There is a one-ness of experience indicated, a banding together to face a common foe. “I feel the community environment of living on post greatly helped in the family support.” Proximity to support is often discussed, whether it be from family or friends, or on-post programs. These spouses express that others were there for them when they needed support the most. “I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer during the deployment and I received a tremendous amount of support from this community’s leaders and spouses of leaders.” From this sense of community comes the idea of safety in numbers.
Physiological security is also valued by these spouses. They recognize that with the Army, “There are great benefits and it is a stable and steady income.” There is support that comes from the psychological awareness of job security. In addition to a consistent salary, these spouses recognize the financial boon associated with the Army’s benefit package, such as health insurance, and other resources. In uncertain economic times, every bit of financial security that they can cling to is a great psychological resource.

In sum, much of a spouse’s identity can come through the support she perceives and gives. “Support the Army, the spouses, and I try to make sure these families are taken care of. I feel that it is my job being an Army wife! I’m a Army wife.” These spouses appreciate the opportunities they’ve been given and the kindred spirits they’ve met along the path, “I have met a lot of nice military families and will always be friends for life.” They add exclamation points to attempt to convey a tone of pride, and emphasize their commitment to each other and the mission. “We are an Army family and proud of it!” Many spouses feel very good about this, as is summed up, “The military offers tons of support.” And, finally, “I think the Army is doing great things for soldiers and their families! I have always felt that …they were trying to take care of us… I understand his job and support him totally in peacetime and wartime.”

Types of Support Perceived/Lacking

The literature indicates that there are five key types of social support. The data were examined to illuminate these types. The types, discussed in more detail in the literature review, are: instrumental, emotional, information, belonging and nurturing. A discussion of each type follows; each is further subdivided into negative and positive support experiences. Within each category, first, a brief definition of each type of support is given, followed by any physical description of the data that is warranted and some representative quotations from each subset.
**Instrumental.**

Instrumental social support is that support which provides tangible assistance to a person. This support often takes the form of physiological or monetary support. It is in some way embodied and can be observed. As expected, since these are so tangible and immediate, there are more negative instances of instrumental support reported than of positive instances. As such, and in the interest of consistency, the negative will be presented first.

**Negative.**

Far surpassing the entries that were coded as positive instrumental social support were the entries that were identified as being negative in valence. These entries are more prolific, more vehement, and definitely longer than the positive entries to follow. Details given in these examples paint a vivid picture of what it means to feel lacking in instrumental social support. This spouse communicates her dissatisfaction with the instrumental support she received while her husband’s unit was deployed for more than a year. “… there was no help given to anyone. We had to help other wives mow lawns, watch their children, shovel sidewalks clear of several feet of snow and help raise money in order to send the troops food/supplies.” The fact that they did these things for each other seems to mean that social support was provided to each other, but that they had to do it all for each other, and did not feel that the institution of the Army supported them instrumentally. There are seven areas in which these spouses felt a lack of support. The most extreme is medical, which is highlighted first. It seems that when medical issues go wrong, this is a very intense and polarizing problem.

**Medical.**

Some voices seem to calmly report that their medical needs were not met. “I am a handicap spouse and was not supported.” Others report going through fairly routine surgeries on
their own, such as knee and back operations. Others start to get more emotional. One spouse reports that after a c-section, the rear detachment commander “would not send a message out for my husband to come help me I went home and drove myself in pain and dealt with what my children and newborn needed.” Still others are clearly frustrated and use rhetorical devices such as repetition to pound home their points,

I have been by myself having to have our child. Military don't seem to care. Found out daughter has a medical problem. Military don't seem to care. I have had to spend thousands of dollars to come stateside so at least some family members could help me physically and emotionally with her medical. Me having surgery, left with no one, but me to try and care for a 6 month old with one arm, due to shoulder surgery. Was my husband able to come and support and help, no. Why, cause the military don't really care about the families.

While the examples above highlight spousal medical issues, the majority of complaints about a lack of instrumental social support populate the intersection of medical, psychological, child and education. Just as in life, there are seldom neat and tidy compartments. It seems clear that many of these entries were penned to solicit empathy.

The thing that made the deployment of my husband so difficult is that we have a child with special needs. He has developmental delays. Dealing with him and his needs on my own was very difficult. He required alot of trips to specialist and they even said that they felt sorry for me and did not know how I handled it on my own. During this time I was diagnosed with depression and put on medication. I am in the EFMP as well as my son. I have a tumor on my brain. Having this while he was gone was very distressing on my spouse. He was very worried about my seizures returning and how it would affect my
ability to care for our son. Our son regressed tremendously when my spouse left after his R&R visit. He is still, 9 months later not up to the level he was at before his daddy came home on R&R. This is very distressing for us. Our child is the most important thing ~ his development and emotional state. This does not seem to be a concern or care of the Army.

Another mother writes a parallel plea,

I would like to address the stress on the military families lives with deployments of soldiers with children of special needs. I feel there is not enough support for soldiers with special need children. In example, out of a three year tour my spouse will be gone at total of 18 months. We are away from family and resources adequate for my five year old who get to 'extreme' misbehaviors when my spouse is gone for very long terms. After about the six month of deployment my child get violent even with medication. Unit does not help much, installation does not have resources. Please help provide resources on installation to help children who are having extreme difficulty with the recent year long deployments. Maybe make it seven months like other Arm Forces.

Some spouses report more concisely that they are dissatisfied with the support they feel while caring for disabled children. Occasionally, a specific condition such as Autism or Aspergers is mentioned. The last entry in this section, on a lack of medical instrumental social support, represents the strength of the Army Spouse as clearly as any in this data set.

I had 2 children hospitalized in 2 different cities. One in ICU with menengitis and my newborn unable to eat food in another hospital. The army failed to help me with this situation. We couldn't even count on the Red Cross to deliver the messages to my husband (he never received one of them) that his children were in hospital. The leaders
did the minimum for the families. The resources were not available that were needed. I pray to God that no one ever has to suffer the way we did when he left. I had to fight the healthcare system to get my kids tested in the ways needed. The first thing I was told was 'My kid(s) aren't presenting normal and I was just trying to get my husband home'. Well, guess who was right? I WAS!!! I was about to be discharged from the ER when the Dr. decided he would check the spinal tap test results 'just to Cover his ass'. It was positive and within 24hrs my son was being taken to a pediatric ICU hospital when they couldn't help him anymore at the army hospital!!! I had to fight with the Dr. in regards to my newborn (who I gave birth to alone) as well since he said I was just 'not doing it right'. Well, by the time someone listened he had to be hospitalized as well and had to see a specialist 3 hours away. Let me tell you, that specialist was furious that the army waited so long to listen and had his condition worsen! All of this with my husband in Iraq! My point? Help the families rather than just assume everyone just is trying to pull something to get their Soldier home!!! I could have lost my 2 kids due to this and I tell you what... I rather have my husband in Iraq for 2 years and have my kids be ok than have him home with them sick. I support my Husband, whether he is home with us or serving our country. I am very proud of him and ALL of our troops and stand behind them all. I still help our troops over there however I can even though mine is home. After how I was treated though, I hope my Husband will end his army time at the end of this obligation because the army is not doing there part. If you take our Soldiers from us, then help us, don't make things even harder.
Even with everything that this spouse was enduring, she still took evident pride in supporting her husband and the troops he served with. This tone is present consistently throughout the data.

*Children.*

Aside from medical issues, there are other instances where spouses do not feel that their children’s instrumental needs are being met. The level of frequency of these complaints indicates that this may be an area where support is lacking. “[T]here should also be more things for children to do on post. for example, swimming pools, parks, playgrounds, sports centers, boys and girls clubs.” Some comments are specific to a certain age group, such as those under five or six years old. Others offer justifications, such as needing more programs to keep kids busy, or otherwise keep them out of trouble.

Caretaking is also obviously an issue that needs to be examined. The refrain that it is assistance with daily care that is needed is repeated often in the data. The concerns especially seem to focus around families that are expecting an addition to the family, or are dealing with a newborn child.

When a spouse has to take on the responsibility of the deployed [service member] with no prior notice and prep., it is hard to find time for assistance. I'd have to make an apt, arrange child care, drive there, get some sort of assistance. In the meantime the day is used and nobody has helped with meals, cleaning, nurturing, etc. With 3 small children (1 newborn) I had trouble finding minutes out of the day to just breathe easy. Minutes counted. I believe i learned to cope and do alright, given little help.

Words matter. The following spouse refers to herself as a ‘single mom’, even though she is a married military spouse. This speaks loudly to her self-perception, and her perception of the
support she was not receiving, at the time of this entry when she gave birth to their first child during her husband’s deployment. “It would be helpful if there was some support to help ‘single moms’ with newborns. As well as some info on what to do if you don’t have any family around the area.” Military spouses who are moms, or are soon-to-be moms, obviously have need of instrumental support surrounding children’s issues. As well as the actual support requirement, the attitude expressed toward these ladies is of great concern.

I am 7 months pregnant. I have three school aged kids. My husband is redploying to Iraq. I am overseas with no family or friends. How am I suppose to deliver a baby a take care of three kids by myself while I am in the hospital? The Army could care less about me or my kids. My husband's commander said Mission First, meaning that I could go to hell!

This response was clearly not the supportive message the spouse was anticipating.

*Legal.*

Another arena in which spouses feel a lack of instrumental social support is the legal system. One spouse reports that in the survey, she was dissatisfied with the rudeness of the employees at legal services. While this may have been an isolated and relatively subjective incident, much of daily life is made better or worse by the collection of these ‘little things.’ Other cases are more substantial.

Neighbor's pit bull attacked my son while my husband was deployed. Fort Huachuca MP's refused to cite the neighbor because the dog didn't bite my son. My son was backed up against our front door and kept kicking the dog until stopped attacking and went away. After the incident, the neighbors made two false reports about me and my small dog to
the MPs and even admitted to an MP a report was false but they were still allowed to stay on post.

Even more serious is the report from the following spouse:

When my husband was deployed to Iraq last year a old foster family who works for a court in Kentucky took my son and no one in the army or in the community would help and I am still going through this and the lawyer fees have been tremendous and cant afford our every day living and still no help from no one and I don’t understand why no one would help. My husband supported his country and no one is supporting us though this dilemma.

Clearly, these spouses indicate that they do not feel their requests for instrumental support in the legal arena have been met.

Security.

Some spouses do not feel that their instrumental need for physiological safety is being met. As primal on Maslow’s hierarchy as this need is, this is of foremost concern.

Force Security Protection is a joke too. We had a fence that was torn down by somebody, only God knows who, I called it in and it took 2 months for someone to come and fix it, God only knows who walked on our post during those 2 months. We also had a car with no plates sitting in our parking lot we called the MPÆs for months to come tow it away and they finally did 4 and half months later. IACS is a waste of time and money, they scanned my ID card and came up as a 50 yr old white female and I am a 34 yr old Mexican/American, then I hear someone say that if you make a photo copy of the back of your ID card and just leave it in your plastic sleeve it will scan anyways, people know that the guards rarely looks at the pic on the card.
The physical safety of other spouses has been compromised.

[I] kept info about spouse deployment secret but after 3 months of him gone I became victim to people that pray on situation people. It became a problem I had life threatened in front of my children and I had 3 people try to beat me down in my front yard…

Another spouse indicates that it is not only the real security issue that is at stake in these situations, it is the perception and appearance of apathy that really is problematic.

The installation command tries to be supportive and offer good activities and resources but when a real problem i.e. POST SECURITY and SECURE FEELING OF FAMILIES comes up they are not very agressive in truely helping the family as they are checking the box that the issues were addressed and trying to dismiss the issue. POST SECURITY is an issue and should not be taken lightly of put off as 'the biggest reason for crimies is unsecured property and valuables in plain site'. The biggest reason for crime on base is that the 1 or 2 reasonable parties are not prosocuted and continue to live on post as dependants!!!! The fact that people are afraid and stay up at night is enough to take the issue seriously and not disregard indiviual events.

Facilities.

The level of instrumental social support received by some spouses is reported as negative when it comes to some issues of facilities that are not available at all, or are not sufficient. “I am a wife with a seizure disorder, who was told by the frg that they didn't run a taxi service. I have been driving illegally on this post for 3 years since!!!” Some issues are quite basic, about issues like commissaries that are not sufficiently stocked on pay days. There is an expectation of a certain level of quality of life, and some spouses find that expectation violated at some locations. “There is no housing, commissary, PX, youth services, family support, basically nothing most
posts have except a fitness center… a pool that is open for 3 months, outdoor rec, and craft store…” Some complaints are specific, about a certain base and a request for a specific facility, like a skating rink, park, or more religious services of a certain denomination. An often repeated refrain is more general, but the frequency with which it appears is telling. It is simply, “Please help family members during these deployments with better facilities and better equipment.” This call for improvement involves both facilities, and as the next section shows, financial issues as well.

**Financial/housing.**

Financial issues are important to just about everyone, and the army spouse is no exception. Having the financial wherewithal to feel secure is a vital component of feeling instrumentally supported.

I feel that the military active duty soldiers are not paid enough. I know of families and seen them on my local news station that go to the food bank and shop at thrift, goodwill stores. I think that is terrible. Soldiers put their lives on the line for this country and a small fifty or less raise is nothing. We pay athletes millions but our soldiers near to nothing. It's a shame!

A perception of financial inequality often becomes an issue of retention of the service member. One spouse mentions that the majority of officers of equivalent rank in their unit, “…have resigned their commissions, many of these are very good people that the Army really needs. Housing for officers is not equivalent to our civilian counterparts. We have to pay for new uniforms/uniform changes out of pocket.” This seems unfair to many.

These money concerns are often exacerbated when service members are deployed. It isn’t always a matter of salary that raises issues in the army family, but a matter of uncovered,
un-reimbursed expenditures related to the deployment and unexpected or poorly timed withholdings. Some families have had to pay for storage for the soldier’s belongings while the soldier was deployed. Issues such as these can ruin an individual’s credit rating – creating even more stress for the army spouse.

Without much communication with my deployed soldier, I did not know about how much casual pay was being subtracted from his pay. When finance finally took out casual pay, it was one lump sum. During Christmas and the last paycheck before the holiday. AER would only offer a voucher for the commissary. They wouldn't help me pay bills which made them late and snowballed for several paychecks. I was not the only spouse who had casual pay come out during that period.

Another example is cited here,

And during that [deployment] time, there was a very serious financial problem and no one from his unit wanted to help. I was told to go to a food bank when I not only needed food but assistance for other bills because my husband's pay was not correct. This was completely unacceptable to me. Then when my spouse was sent TDY for 3 mos. they NEVER paid for his time there. While he was there his reg. paycheck had to cover us at home AND him there at his TDY duty station. Not until A FULL YEAR later did DFAS compensate him for the time he was there and this created an EXTREMELY serious hardship on our family. Another big factor, is pay. My family and many others I know in the military struggle just to make ends meet. There is never money to set aside for savings when you're living from pay check to pay check and the financial training classes do not making a difference if the money is not there to budget.
Having a deployed service member can definitely wreak havoc on a young family’s finances, especially if that family was not completely financially secure prior to the deployment. Older spouses see this issue, and it causes them stress on the younger spouse’s behalf. “I worry about soldiers that lose their WIC and free, reduced meds when their spouse deploys. Some young families are barely making it.” These older spouses have definite opinions about ways to try to make things better. “… As FRG leader … I strongly feel funds should be allowed for the unit FRG. With two deployments within the past two and half years, available time makes it difficult to fund raise for the unit, soldiers, families.” As seen by the fact that older spouses are concerned about younger spouses, this is apparently a long-standing issue.

A closely related financial issue is housing, as a family’s economic condition directly impacts its housing arrangement. In some circumstances, that means minor issues, like living on post and finding that, “We need people to spray for spiders and insects in the house.” Some issues revolve around even more major quality issues. “Though we live on post, and are grateful for our quarters, they are much too small, are full of asbestos and lead paint, and we cannot get things like drain pipes and vents cleaned unless there is a crisis.” While no one hopes for a crisis, a crisis is sometimes the needed catalyst for change.

When there is a crisis, such as a natural disaster, it is vital that the basic need for shelter is met for these families.

There was little contact from my husband’s unit even though at one point we had hurricane Isabel come through and there was supposed to be 100% accountability. No one called, yet they claimed that they had talked to each and every family member. This was not a true statement. We lost several sections of fence, a piece of the roof and had
some leaks in the roof and needed help that I had to get from strangers. I was very
dissatisfied with the support I received.

Another spouse in a similar situation ended up patching her roof herself when she found
that no one was going to offer her assistance. These comments illuminate the preponderance of
negative attitudes toward the level of instrumental social support being received by army
spouses.

*Positive.*

While there were fewer entries detailing positive levels of instrumental support, those
who did were quite emphatic. One Army spouse emphasizes her perspective regarding
instrumental support with all capitals. “AS A WHOLE THE ARMY FAMILY/COMMUNITY
UNDERSTANDS WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM AND CAN TAKE CARE OF EACH
OTHER FOR THE MOST PART.” She has clearly expressed her point here that there is a
family feeling within the Army, and that the Army takes care of its own. Elucidating upon the
theme, another spouse details,

I am very proud to be an Army spouse of an active duty officer. I am grateful for the
benefits that the government provides military families. I am grateful to all of the
volunteers on posts conus/oconus. AFTB is a great program. ACS and Red Cross are
super organizations. Commissaries, AAFES, Medical Hospitals are a comfort to our
military families...we know what to expect and we are grateful to be able to use these
services.

Similarly, “I think the ARMY has great resources and programs available to make things go well
for ARMY families. I also believe that family support is encouraged and promoted throughout
Financial/housing.

The first of these subcategories is related to money and housing. In most marriages, financial issues are an important consideration. Quite a few spouses expressed their satisfaction regarding their spouse’s financial stability. Some indicate that starting off life together with a stable income offers and medical benefits sets them up for a lifetime of financial security. Some point to one of the tangible benefits of deployments, the separation bonus. “The extra military pay, and benefits is great. It gives us a chance to pay off our bills, and build our saving.” One spouse chronicles that they did their part as they, “Helped a soldier prior to moving with housing information and let soldier stay overnight with meals with his family while searching for the right house/community.” This type of support to one another is mentioned a few times in this section. The words of one spouse sum up this section, indicating that financial considerations are strengths of the military lifestyle. “Most of the ‘good’ was often related to . . . the financial security I felt we had with the Army pay and benefits.” For some, money is a considerable motivator.

Medical.

One of the major benefits provided to army families is free medical care for the active duty member and for all dependents (spouse and children). The medical system is vast and the knowledge that medical care can virtually always be accessed is seen as a major perk to the military lifestyle. Instrumentally, this provision for health care is vital, as expressed by a spouse who recognizes the assistance given their family as they have a newborn special needs child, who spent the eight weeks after her birth in the hospital. “My husband's unit is well aware of our
baby's needs and have been very supportive and understanding. They allow him time off if she
has a lengthy hospital stay and check on us frequently.” It is not just important for children, but
for spouses as well. Some spouses report receiving support from the chain of command both
stateside and overseas when the spouses experience ongoing medical issues. Many patients
living with chronic and life-threatening illnesses and conditions praised what they view as
“tremendous support” from the Army community, such as the woman who “… was diagnosed
with Breast Cancer during the deployment and I received a tremendous amount of support form
this community's leaders and spouses of leaders.” Medical support is vital to many spouses.

Childcare.

For many spouses who are mothers, the availability of care for their children is a primary
concern. Especially, as Army spouses are sometimes required to do “double-duty” parenting
when one of the parents is deployed, having a reliable option for an alternate caregiver is a
requirement. Some provision must be made, whether the choice is a family member, friend, or
institution. One spouse sums this up with her statement.

Overall, I believe my children and I did very well while my spouse was deployed and I
know this was due in large part ot my community here on post. The other spouses and I
became very close and took care of each other. I very rarely ahd childcare issues because
there always seemed to be someone available who could watch them. I was very lucky. I
am fine about the next coming deployment because I have the same friends. These battle
buddies are a God-send and are one of the biggest selling points for me about the Army.

Educational.

Another issue of great concern to spouses who are mothers is their children’s education.
DODDS educate children who live on post, and staff from these on post schools often offer
assistance to families with school age children who live off post, as they did for this spouse who reports that an advocate from post helped her, “with school related issues. Mr Fred Chevez sat in with me one an IEP meeting for my son, that was invaluable. They treet me with respect now and know I seek help if needed.” Education is also relevant to spouses who are in college or who decide to return to school, or for those who are married to a service member who decides to continue their education. The military system of education is often mentioned in responses as a positive element of the army lifestyle.

The extra services that the military has provided for soldiers and families are greatly appreciated and always beneficial. When my spouse was deployed, the college I was attending at the military installation gave me 25% off my tuition. The army has also provided grants for military spouses, helped them find employment and has given soldiers re-enlistment bonuses. These priviledges has made life easier on military families. I really hope that over time more opportunites like these are available to the families of the men and women that support our country!

Benefits in general.

In general, many spouses perceive the support value of the benefits of being a military dependent. Many of these benefits fall into this category of instrumental support. Thinking of the positives associated with the military lifestyle helps to counterbalance some of the stressors of the lifestyle.

The Army does what it can to support spouses and to ease deployments. Long deployments and excessive missions are beyond the control of most local commanders. The difficulties of Army life are eased somewhat by the benefits. Life overseas and travel
opportunities are some of the great perks. It would be a shame to deprive families of these opportunities.

Seeing these PCS moves as a positive is more reasonable given the military support system to assist in this time of transition, the military sponsor. This is a person who (ideally) wants to help welcome a soldier and his family to a new post. It is … “the greatest welcome one has to a new PCS move. Our sponsor supported us greatly by helping us with transportation, getting us familiar with area, living arrangements, and much more.” This is a benefit that those in the civilian sector might underrate in importance. One spouse further compares her life within the Army community to life in the civilian sector; she is “thankful for weekends off usually & all holidays….you cannot get that in the civilian world any more. absolutely happy with health care for the family & happy with all the military benefits.” Another reiterates that during deployments, military benefits do make a difference in quality of life, as bases increase programs to help those families who remain behind. This satisfaction with the quality of life afforded by the military lifestyle is echoed by another spouse, “I was very fortunate while my husband was deployed. We have a nice home, off-post, with many other military families. Great neighbors, wonderful child care provider, friends at work on-post, and great support from mine and my husband's families.”

In conclusion, some spouses feel that the Army does a positive job of providing them with instrumental social support. “I think there are many good things about the Army (commissary, CDCs, support services, retirement benefits, people who understand what you are experiencing).” Even those who don’t utilize the benefits regularly are aware of the option. “I have never lived on base with spouse but I am aware of services available & impressed with availability.”
Emotional.

The next type of social support, emotional social support, examines the elements of support that deal with feelings. This section, by its nature, is quite subjective. How a spouse feels emotional support will vary individual to individual. What emotional support an individual needs or wants is also highly variable. The striking preponderance of comments regarding emotional social support is valenced negatively. Comments which referred to emotional support are less common than those which refer to instrumental support. Also, the comments are shorter on average than in the preceding section. Those comments which indicate positive emotional support are the shortest of all, seldom exceeding two lines. The examples of negative emotional social support are slightly longer, but rarely exceed five lines. These spouses do not emphasize individual words by italicizing them, or by capitalizing a word for emphasis. There are no exclamation points or emoticons, unlike in other selections of comments.

Negative.

When spouses report negative levels of emotional social support, the accounts are clear cries for help. Many of these spouses relate amazing stories that would try the metal of anyone, even if their spouses were not deployed in a time of war. Some of these spouses are so obviously overwhelmed and/or melancholy that it is hard not to feel for them. The following entries echo the theme, “All I ask is for a little more psychological support and community outreach from the Army.”

In many cases, negative social support is perceived regarding issues of separation and deployment. Even before the separation begins, the negative emotional support can start. The time leading up to deployment, with long hours and high stress levels, can come as a source of incredible negativity.
Then when the SMs did finally get to come home, they were completely exhausted and not much interested in family interaction. All of that, added to the usual stresses associated with an impending deployment, made things a LOT harder than they had to be. I realize that the pre-deployment preparations are necessary, but I feel that the Army could have been a bit more compassionate and actually given the SMs a bit of time off before they deployed. As it was, they were all so stressed out prior to deployment that it was almost a bit of a relief when they finally did deploy! (Sad, but true!!!).

Cutting to the core of a lack of emotional support, a long-time spouse reports that in her 26 years of being an army spouse, she has never felt so alone as she did while her husband was deployed for 13 months. Some have often gone to the FRG for “many times for emotional support and received nothing.” Then, if things go badly during the deployment, it only gets worse. Many spouses reported extended family deaths while the military member was deployed. Many of them were unable to travel to their family during these times due to finances or other lack of support. There never is a good time for a death in the family, but coupled with deployment, it can be devastating.

One of the most frequently mentioned stressors in this category had to do with the children the spouses are often left caring for in a solo parenting role. Schools are seen as a major factor in spouses’ reported negative emotional support. Mothers discuss schools that enforce discussion of the deployed parent when the children do not feel like discussing their absent loved one.

It isn’t only at school that children are a concern for spouses. The medical community is also indicted as being emotionally unsupportive, with medical centers being described as
“incredibly disheartening and stressful.” It is clear that the issues surrounding children can be emotional hot buttons.

Our son regressed tremendously when my spouse left after his R&R visit. He is still, 9 months later not up to the level he was at before his daddy came home on R&R. This is very disstressing for us. Our child is the most important thing ~ his development and emotional state.” Another spouse states, “Our experience has devastated our marriage and my son is preoccupied with the possibility of Daddy leaving again.

Just like the wife who attested to feeling lonely, another repeats, “I felt very isolated, and to not have the support of the military or the Rear detachment or FRG was beyond anything I could ever imagine.” Ironically, one spouse tried to combat it, by diving in to the work of the FRG, only to have it thrown back at her.

I was so lonely and bored from lack of communication from my husband that I basically lived in the office doing paperwork and making sure that family members received their information, but when they returned my efforts that I put in were lost because it was said that the people back here in the rear wasn't doing anything and I was part of the rear and the family readiness group.

It seems that, in general, there is a lack of respect experienced by spouses, a lack of care and concern that is almost palpable. “The Army doesn't have enough resources for spouses to turn should they need emotional stability.” There are sometimes extenuating circumstances that would be difficult for anyone to deal with. One spouse had shoulder surgery herself as well as having to deal with a young child’s medical care. She ended up moving home, so at least some family members could help me physically and emotionally with her medical. Me having surgery, left with no one, but me to try and care for a 6 month old
with one arm, due to shoulder surgery. Was my husband able to come and support and help, no. Why, cause the military don't really care about the families.

Another spouse who was required to move her family to a new home during a service member’s deployment seems the most upset that she, “received no sympathy from community army leaders for help on how we would accomplish this.”

Even if there were just normal medical issues dealt with during a deployment, a lack of respect, care and concern was reported.

Luckily, I only visited the hospital for regular checkups, but the employees were often rude or non-caring. Very unlike what you see at a normal doctor's office. I know it has been hard with less staff because of deployments, but Army families expect the utmost care in these situations no matter what the circumstances. I felt safe knowing I had these medical benefits, but on the other hand I hated going to the doctor's office or even picking up an RX. The respect issue came into play a lot on post. I just felt I was not looked upon as a normal person with a career. As an army spouse, I was somehow lesser of a person. I often felt this from civilian employees or active duty employees in various facilities. Even as a civilian employee myself I came upon other employees who had unfair views regarding Army families.

Statements attest that it is hard to have service members preparing to leave, and it is certainly emotionally challenging to have them gone, according to other accounts. It also is reported that re-deployment can also be a time of difficult and negative emotions. Some spouses report that their units do not have support systems to help their members de-stress, so the stress is instead added to the households. To second this opinion, a spouse whose husband has seen two deployments in a short time reports that he, “is infantry and often sees not so pleasant
occurances. When he redeployed last time he received very little emotional counseling because they moved him from one company to another.” The emotional and psychological issues that affect the soldier primarily also affect his family members in a secondary, but very real way.

Some spouses feel that the negative emotional support comes about directly because of key leaders’ attitudes, whether during deployment or time in garrison. The next sampling of responses supports this claim.

I asked my husband to accompany me to a very serious Doctor's appointment I had. I had a procedure done regarding some pre-cancerous cells the Doctor found in me this past August. He was only gone from work for 1 1/2 hours. Some comments were made to him that we both found to be very inconsiderate in regards to me and how serious this Doctor's appointment was. I have never asked my husband to take me to a Doctor's appointment before. I wouldn't have asked him to take me to this one, but I needed him there for moral and emotional support. It broke my heart to hear what his higher-ups had to say about him taking that time away from work for my Doctor's appointment.

A summation of this section could be found in the words of the next spouse, who repeats an often referred to maxim of Army spouse life. “Leadership… do not show respect or concern for… familie... one officer told my husband 'if we had wanted you to have a family we would have issued you one'. This thinking is very outdated and a poor motivational tactic.” While it may be outdated, it is repeated many times in this sample.

When service members are deployed, those soldiers left behind are referred to as Rear Detachment, or the Rear D. One of their many responsibilities is to care for those who are left behind, soldier and dependent alike. The spouses need to know that they are being taken care of by a leader who cares about them. A question arises often through the responses about how
these individuals respond to the needs of families. “Although I understand that all the good
soldiers need to deploy with their units, someone with compassion, knowledge and a willingness
to help, MUST be left for the unit's families.” Another spouse reveals that, “The FRG and Rear
D failed our unit and my family. We suffered two tragedies while my husband was away, but no
one cared or offered real help (FRG only offering to cook meals).”

For many, an attitude of caring could go a long way to creating lifestyle satisfaction. Of
the Army leadership, it is stated that they just need to be more caring. As another spouse puts it,

With regard to how spouses are treated, I must tell you that I am tired of feeling as if I am
irrelevant in the eyes of the military. I am tired of hearing: 'it is your husbands orders, not
yours,' or it is 'his move, not yours' or 'his personal belongings, not yours.' Really? I
distinctly remember making all the arrangements, packing the house, and shipping the
household goods while my husband was deployed. I remember unpacking once we
relocated. As a professional who makes as much as if not more than my husband, I
helped pay for those personal belongings. It is 'our' move, orders, personal belongings --
not 'his'.

A supporting claim comes from a spouse who is in the unique position to have seen both sides.

I served on Active Duty in the Army, before having my first child. And now that I am a
spouse of a soldier, I am not satisfied with the way that the units handle the families of
soldiers. They seem to think that the spouses of the soldiers have no knowledge of the
way things work. They speak down to spouses. They have no concern with how much
time the soldier spends with his/her family or the problems that may arise for any given
reason. This is definately something that someone in a leadership position should take
seriously and rethink what actions they take.
It is not always military leadership that these spouses feel has let them down. The blame quite often goes to civilian employees associated with the post. This complaint of civilian rudeness is prolific throughout the data. “I am extremely disappointed in the services provided by civilian employees…federal employees show blatant disinterest in the needs and concerns of military family members… employees have shown disgust and annoyance at the thought of helping family members.” The same spouse later recommends that “federal employees should participate in in-service trainings focusing on customer service, empathy, and professionalism.” Another spouse remarks, “and we have had the ‘pleasure’ of dealing with rude civilian employees who act like we are disrupting their day when we need help.” The perception gains more specificity of location and job description, but the complaint is the same for bases almost everywhere. “…civilian employees on Ft Bragg tend to be (on the average)rude! They will not acknowledge you, make you wait while they fiddle w/pc's and talk to their buddies, etc. You are often treated with contempt,” and “A lot of civilians working in the Army community are the same. For example, employees working in the housing office are very rude and are not helpful or knowledgeable about their job,” round out the selection.

The role of emotional social support should not be minimized, just because it is harder to quantify than support such as instrumental or information. When individuals do not feel emotional support, the results can be quite serious and profound. This section closes by examining the results when spouses are not sufficiently supported emotionally. The results can be financial hardship, directly stated to be the result of a lack of emotional support. “I had a problem with loneliness and emotional spending because of lack of emotional support and friendships.” Or, the results can be even more intense and emergent,
I was having a tough time coping and asked for help and couldn't get any until it was too late, a few pills and a week long hospital stay. I had no idea where to really get help and no communications with the FRG for support.

The good news is that the army spouse community can meet the challenge to stand for each other, as this, all capitalized entry announces:

I JUST WANT TO CLEAR OUT THAT WHEN MY HUSBAND WAS DEPLOYED I WENT THROUGH ALOT (EMOTIONALLY) AND I DID LOOK OUT FOR HELP, THE ONLY ONES THAT HELPED ME WAS MY POC AT THE TIME AND THE FRG LEADER AT THE TIME, AND THE CHAPLAIN. IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD OF DONE.

Positive.

How a spouse feels emotionally, especially during a deployment, can have a large impact on that spouse’s life and the lives of those around them. In this section are highlighted those spouses who share information about the emotional support they received. There are many iterations of a thought that goes very similarly to this: “The other spouses and I became very close and took care of each other.” In one variation or another, this is one of the most often repeated lines in the data. The statement often goes something like this: “I was able to befriend 4 other military spouses. We all were able to support each other with our schooling and emotionally when needed.” When it comes to emotional support, close friendships with other spouses are one of the most often repeated sources of support.

Another type of source from which emotional support is gleaned is institutional. Children’s schools are supportive, as attested to by multiple statements that the on post schools provided counselors for students. Churches support the emotions and faith lives of spouses.
This spouse indicates that they aspire to be a strong family so that others can see them as an example, “We work hard at being the best that we can be, so that we will be good examples for younger Army families. We are a very tight-knit community, especially in our local churches.”

The Family Readiness Groups and rear detachment soldiers are also extolled for their support, “For the most part, the spouses and rear detachment soldiers are wonderful supportive people. Our community and schools go out of their way to be supportive during deployments as well.”

In fact, these military sources of support are often mentioned as being the most effective, since they truly understand what is going on. “I felt the most connected and got the most info from support groups. Outsiders and family would be sympathetic but that was fleeting, the military community was the only one who really understood.” This sense of community is something that requires attention. When it works, it seems to work well, but as seen in the section above, not everyone thinks it works.

**Information.**

The category of Social Support, Information, centers around the flow of information. People who feel “in the know” report that they feel supported; those who feel like they are somehow “in the dark” report lower levels of social support. Information is power, and allows for the making of good decisions. In the uncertain life of an army spouse, information is vital. Whether it is information that affects the service member or the family directly, the accurate flow of timely and relevant data is critical to psychological well-being. This is highlighted by the vast number of entries regarding the issue of information flow. As one wife puts it, “The uncertainty is one of the worst aspects, as well as the long hours and frequent deployments. You don't know when or for how long your spouse will be away.”
COMMUNICATING SUPPORT

The data in this section are prolific. Many more spouses report that they perceive a negative level of informational social support than do those who report receiving positive informational social support. The entries here are primarily frustrated in tone. These spouses know that the flow of information is being hampered by many factors, but seem powerless to do anything about it. Even the reports of positive levels of informational support seem almost to be phrased in a defensive way, as if it was anticipated that someone would say they did not do a good job at keeping others informed. Deployment status, geographical location, and the level of experience in the system all appear to be keys to the level of informational support perceived.

Negative.

One spouse reports that her family was not contacted at all during 19 months of deployment. She continues on to say that no one even notified her to let her know when her husband was arriving home. There is a clear distinction in these entries between positive and negative informational support. There is no middle ground. Either the support provided was wonderful, or it was critically lacking. In the majority of cases, it is clear that information flow was lacking. In the end, a lack of informational support is a major issue for Army spouses.

Entries here range from the fairly calm and rational report that, “The last duty station had no organization and poor information resources,” to the strikingly more heated and emotional, “On his last deployment, NOBODY had the decency to call me to let me know if he was even alive. When I called unit, always a promise of a return call, but it never came. WHERE was the support?” Then, there is the almost palpable desperation of a spouse who cries out, “This deployment I have tried to active the email system for this new FRG but no emails have come yet. I’m out in the dark. They have left me alone.”
Sometimes, the information flow relates to very important life events on the battlefield or home-front. These are the scenarios where it seems information is the most needed, but it also seems to be the situations in which the information is most lacking. There were multiple entries relating to the birth of children and the death of extended family members that were not conveyed in a timely fashion. Information coming from overseas is also reported to have been inadequate.

When my husband was deployed for OIF1 - he was injured during the heavy part of combat. The injury wasn't severe, however, the Red Cross message that came to me showed that he was in critical condition. After a few days of not getting further updates on his condition - a Major in his unit had talked to his spouse (our FRG leader at the time) and she told him of the news of my husband. And that was when the Major used his Satellite phone to have my husband call me directly to let me know that he's okay. It is very important that information gets relayed back to the states accurately to avoid these types of emotional heartache.

There are multiple explanations given, such as location and type of assignment. Some of the worst situations seem to come about when soldiers are assigned to Army Depots, or are attached to units other than their home station. One spouse says, “There is no support about what's going on except for our own husbands calling, writing or emailing us. I miss the Army Community support of regular installations.” A spouse in a similar situation writes,

It was very lonely when he was gone, because all of the other spouses from his unit were 3 hours away. I did not get a lot of support from the folks at Ft. Sam because his unit was not from here. No one could help me with financial issues or other problems. No one told me where to go to get info about his unit, I never had a predeployment briefing, etc.
When I learned what unit he was assigned to, I went online to find out where the rear was located. I managed to track down the number of the rear det/FRG on my own so that I could get info about my husband.

Many spouses do live at a geographically removed location, which is a scenario that seems to complicate the flow of information. Multiple spouses in this situation report never hearing from anyone in any of the support groups. This bodes poorly for the spouse who predicts, “For our first deployment, I wanted to stay near the information source. For this next deployment, I will be moving home to live with family because the information provided during the deployment was not worth living Ocnous...” Another spouse reports that she was never called, and her FRG leader specifically stated that it was because her phone number was a long-distance call.

One of the most often cited complaints was a lack of information about re-deployment when their active duty spouse was coming home. The sheer preponderance of responses indicating that this was a problem speaks clearly to the issue. One spouse indicates that her main source of information was, “the FRG but it was really unreliable and not a very good source of information, I also would have liked to been notified when my husband was coming home.” It makes logical and emotional sense that spouses would want to know when their husbands were coming home. In the civilian sector, these expectations are often honed to a point where a 15 minute deviation is unexpected – in the armed forces, the difference can be months. One would expect that the good news of soldiers safely returning home would be heralded,

However, I've received absolutely no information from the Army or FRG regarding deployment dates or returns. It is VERY disheartening when you open up the Army Times (on the same day) and see parents and friends of other service members greeting
their loved ones at the airport but I can't be told, even within a few hours, when to meet my husband.

Another spouse emphasizes the importance of this breach of information,

It is a horrible way to treat soldiers and family that after a whole year away, the Army did NOTHING to inform families so that they may greet their loved ones upon return.

Furthermore, there was a ceremony for them that no one notified families about either. It may not have mattered much to the US Army but it sure meant a whole lot to us.

There are times when missing one important piece of information can make all the difference. Many spouses are clearly upset that the one thing they wanted was the one thing they could not get. Lack of medical information is an often cited complaint. “No one can tell me who my primary care docotr is, and no one knows where I can find this information.”

In a different circumstance, when the active duty spouse is still, presumably, with the spouse, “Before we moved, I specifically requested an overseas orientation. I was expecting classes on language, culture, and history. I got a briefing on terrorism! And then at the new location, no such orientations existed.” Another spouse is concerned about disenfranchisement, as in the past it has been hard for her to find out how to get her ballot in a timely fashion. “The powers that be would get the message out to the troops, but I would have to depend on my husband for info. And he would always forget!” The message, that disseminating information through the active duty service member is not effective, is a refrain that is often repeated in the data.

Many spouses are disgruntled about the lack of information coming from the rear-detachment.
Regarding my husband's deployment, we were told before his troop deployed that our rear detachment would be the best place to get information and help if needed. During the months he was gone, I attempted to utilize our Rear D unit only three times, two of which was simply a request for information on where to go for Army resources. Those two times I was not given any help or information and spent three days looking for the proper agency within the Army to direct my questions to.

This spouse expresses that one of the major concerns with this is the accuracy of the information that is given out, “You have rear D commanders and regular commanders who try to answer questions but just give lip service filled such non-informative answers that it makes the rumors even greater.” Then, there is the spouse who reports that the rear detachment, “did not make any attempt to contact us or keep us informed. It was only through my own efforts that we were able to arrange a video conference and find out about the status of the unit.”

Information resources can be hard to come by. As one spouse puts it, “There should be more support and information for wives, we shouldn't have to go hunt for it. Example information for jobs, support on deployments, more entertainment things for soldiers and their wives.” Another spouse (who has just had her first child while her husband was deployed) reports that, “It would be helpful if there was some support to help 'single moms' with newborns. As well as some info on what to do if you don't have any family around the area.” In general, the complaint sounds something like, “The members of the FRG were incapable of maintaining contact with my family about community events or information about resources for help, mediation or just someone to talk to.” A situation like this makes spouses reluctant to participate in FRG groups, which as we saw above, confounds the problem exponentially.
The last one did not include me. I never received phone calls as to what was going on. At Christmas, they sent stockings and cards and had all the wives participate but me. I only found out because my husband asked why I did not sign the Christmas card. I said what are you talking about. Ever since that I have not wanted anything to do with FRG.

It is not only the availability of information but the accuracy that is a concern for spouses. Incorrect information is almost as much as a problem, when spouses find that they get different answers to the same question from different people. Another spouse was told to get one specific power of attorney, and was later told that it was the wrong one. The same spouse experienced hurricane Isabel. She reports that, “there was supposed to be 100% accountability. No one called, yet they claimed that they had talked to each and every family member. This was not a true statement.”

When spouses do not feel as if their informational social support needs are being met, it all comes down to a lack of information being communicated in a timely, consistent, and accurate manner. As one spouse neatly sums up, “There needs to be more consistency at the unit level for support of families in important areas like information on service member status while deployed, information on post services, etc.”

**Positive.**

There are also some clear differences in experiences when it comes to informational social support. As support for this claim, compare the following quotation to the previous section.

The services offered when my husband was gone in Illeshiem, Germany were awesome! We had a local number to call 24 hrs, 7 days, and a LIVE person would tell you how the
unit was doing, when they last had contact with them. They would also say or confirm things we saw on the news.

Those who feel that their needs for information were being met consistently refer to the support groups they belong to as being the main source of that information. Very rarely are other sources of information even mentioned in passing. Comments such as, “I felt the most connected and got the most info from support groups,” are typical in expressing this sentiment. Another spouse comments that, “Also, the FRG for my husbands unit @ Fort Drum does a tremendous job at keeping me up to date & informed while I'm working and not able to attend or help.” Other spouses reiterate that, “We had terrific unit and leader support, information, and a feeling of being cared for at our previous duty station.” Another wife offers that, “I have learned many things from friends I have met but learned alot of info from other wives in other companies.” So, there are multiple channels through which information is being conveyed between Army spouses. It is not only the formal communication networks, but also the informal networks.

Many more experienced spouses seem to be speaking from a position of leadership, as if they are on the inside of these support groups. It sounds as if they are the ones providing the informational support, or at least have seen support groups that are effective at the mission of information dissemination. There does seem to be recognition among spouses that relaying information is a major component of their vocation. “[T]he support we provided in the FRG was what most family members (spouses as well as parents, siblings, etc.) relied on the most. Our website, newsletter, and constant communications were instrumental in keeping family members informed and 'sane'.“ While it may seem a somewhat self-agrandizing to claim credit for the sanity of other spouses, when the reader recalls the frustration inherent in the comments of the
previous section (those spouses who experience negative informational social support), this claim may be seen to be true.

One spouse expresses her concern for those who do not engage in these groups, “I also worry about those individuals that don't attend FRC meetings, but complain about being cut off or not knowing. The Army tries to support families. We just need equal assistance.” This comment may also help us understand one reason why some spouses experience a negative level of informational social support. If they have been cut off (voluntarily or involuntarily) from what is perceived as a primary resource for information, they may not be getting the support they need or desire.

**Belonging.**

The category of Social Support, Belonging, addresses the basic human need to fit in to something larger than oneself. The military community is often referred to as a family. This metaphor clearly indicates a desire for this sense of belonging. Many spouses are looking for this rather intangible quality in their experience of the military lifestyle. Some find it, others do not. Those who do, represent a positive level of social support as it pertains to this category; those who do not feel this sense of welcome have their words recorded as experiencing negative belonging social support. This is one of few categories where the responses seem balanced between the positive and the negative. As expressed by one spouse who recently arrived at a new installation, “Until [now], we always felt an intricate part of the community… this location did not bring those 'warm & friendly' fuzzies …The military is a good life for anyone willing to give it a chance.”
**Negative.**

This spouse noticed the void of Belonging social support, and reports on its impact on her emotional well-being. “I was very lucky that I was living on a very close knit installation...but now that I am living away from an instalation I live in fear of my husband being deployed.”

Being part of the group, being invited, is important. The most common refrain in this category echoes variations on the theme of not being invited, nor feeling welcome. Another consistent theme in this data is that spouses do not yet know anyone. Sometimes the feeling of not belonging is attributed to rank, “The officer's spouses in the FRG were mostly very snobbish and always stood together, leaving the enlisted wives out.” The sense of isolation is particularly acute when a family has just relocated. If deployment follows soon after that relocation, this can cause a serious challenge to the spouse’s sense of belonging.

Others who are impacted to a greater extent, it would seem, than the average army spouse, are those spouses who are displaced from their native countries.

As a foreign nationality spouse, regardless of husband's rank, you are never as fully integrated into your company structure (FRG or just spouses groups) as American born wives. I have asked many foreign national wives in over 13 yrs. of marriage, I cannot name a single one, who counted an American wife as a friend. I think segregation into nationalities (Korean, Hispanic, etc.) can be a serious problem during deployment!

This recognition by the participants of the role of nationality in the sense of belonging experienced by army spouses indicates that although this concern does not affect the majority of spouses, those who it does affect are impacted a great deal.

Personal choice also seems to play a large role in determining the sense of belonging that a spouse experiences. “Unfortunately, if a wife refuses to take on a calendar of social
engagements - she tends to be ostracised by those in the local community.” Another spouse reports further that it is a conscious choice on her part not to interact with Army community as she never felt connected to them. The consequence of not interacting is a sense of not feeling connected, or not belonging. Whether by choice or not, it is clear that a sense of belonging is vital because when it is missing, the absence is sadly profound. “To be an army wife is to be alone. People love to wave yellow ribbons and profess to support soldiers and their families, yet seldom actually do anything to put their words into action.”

Positive.

A positive sense of belonging is expressed by many spouses. It seems that many experience a sense of belonging to the FRGs or coffee groups, clusters of friends, churches, work, and other organizations in the community. Many see this belonging as a source of strength and indicate that they have grown personally because of these groups. “The FRG helped many wifes get to know each other & even become great friends. I enjoy the Army for the most part. I have learned a lot from each experience we have been through.” In simple terms, this comes down to, “My friends supported me and I supported them.”

Reading the responses, one gets the sense that the support of friends is an integral part of happiness in the life of an army spouse, but that the term friendship may have different meanings and connotations to the army spouse than it does in the civilian world.

The other spouses and I became very close and took care of each other…I was very lucky. I am fine about the next coming deployment because I have the same friends. These battle buddies are a God-send and are one of the biggest selling points for me about the Army.
One spouse seems to be on the verge of recognizing that there is a difference, as she questions the attitudes and motivations of those around her.

I didn’t know the coffee group long before he deployed w/ the Coffee group’s unit. Since it is an army function, sometimes I thought they were friendly out of an obligation to be friendly. I guess I mean that if my husband wasn’t deployed w/ their husbands, we never would have talked at all. So, again, unless you have friends in the place, it’s hard.

This researcher believes that this comment starts to uncover a truism of the army spouse – that friendships are formed differently in this community than in the civilian sector.

These friendships are integral to the army spouse experience. “During Desert Storm, we were in Germany, so the spouses turned to each other for support. We were like a family.” This is reported often in the data. The sense of family, this cohesiveness, however, can also have its bad side. A positive sense of belonging in one situation can turn from positive to a negative quickly, as inconsistencies are noticed. “WHEN WE NEEDED THE SUPPORT THE MOST, WE KNEW WE COULD COUNT ON ONE ANOTHER. I DON’T SEE THAT SINCE OF COMMUNITY AND TOGETHERNESS HERE AT FORT KNOX.” When a spouse has seen how well things can go when there was support, if they later experience a lack of support, the void is all the more apparent.

**Nurturing.**

The last category of type of social support, Nurturing, was added to the construct of social support when it was determined that some people gain support through the act of supporting others. These altruists are happiest when they are helping others, and they receive the benefits of social support when others allow them to care for them. The army spouse community offers ample opportunity for this type of giving of self. It is interesting to note that in this sample
there were no examples of negative nurturing social support. Not a single spouse reported having their nurturing advances rebuffed, or of not being allowed to help others as they saw fit. This is the only support type for which this holds true. The first spouse highlighted in this section says,

I was heavily into volunteering and had a great chapel family and support. The Army chapel programs and the Cadence Ministry that comes along side the chapels have made the times my husband, have made the times my husband has been away, a powerful and wonderfully fulfilling time of growth and blessings. I think the Army for allowing this to happen.

Her spirit of volunteerism clearly paid off for her, as well as those she helped. Other spouses who focused on the needs of others seem to have been similarly rewarded. One mother reports that she dealt with things, “the very best that I could for my child and the FRG group was wonderful to help support all our families. I volunteered to be a leader in our FRG and focused on helping people worse off than myself.”

Some spouses even indicated that this was a vocation for them, that it was their responsibility. “Support the Army, the spouses, and I try to make sure these families are taken care of. I feel that it is my job being an Army wife! I’m a Army wife.” The job requirements are laid out as, “the other spouses came to me for info and support.” There is a feeling here that the spouses are all in this together. One spouse simply states that she hopes she has helped others.

An interesting insight is provided by spouses who express the idea of reciprocity. “We took care of each other and supported our soldiers in various ways.” This is echoed by the many spouses who indicate that the support was a two way street among friends. “WHEN WE NEEDED THE SUPPORT THE MOST, WE KNEW WE COULD COUNT ON ONE
COMMUNICATING SUPPORT

ANOTHER.” Yet one more spouse says, “The other spouses and I became very close and took care of each other.” There is a feeling here of equilibrium, of symmetry and even synergy. This is best expressed by the spouse who states, “We work hard at being the best that we can be, so that we will be good examples for younger Army families.” Her mindset of bettering herself in the intentional effort to be a role-model for others shows that this spouse embodies the idea of receiving social support through the nurturance of others.

Support Providers

The next theme to be unpacked is that of the support providers themselves. Who is it that is providing social support to army spouses? Who do army spouses turn to when they need support? The preponderance of participants reveals that they turn to other army spouses. Many also turn to family. Many turn to friends – both military friends and civilian friends. Others turn to the military itself as an organization, yet others turn to their places of employment or their churches.

Other spouses.

As discussed above, army spouses turn to established groups such as the FRG or Rear Detachment for support. This is done with varying degrees of success. But outside of the formal networks, they also turn informally to their peers. This section discusses those peer relationships.

Closeness and mutual caretaking of each other are the anthems most often repeated in this subcategory. There are entries about providing childcare for other spouses, meals and assistance post surgery or at the death of a family member. One spouse relates, “I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer during the deployment and I received a tremendous amount of support from this community's leaders and spouses of leaders.” Other spouses are referred to as “wonderful
supportive people.” One spouse shares, “I was able to befriend 4 other military spouses. We all were able to support each other with our schooling and emotionally when needed.” These other spouses are often referred to as family.

Sometimes the spouses are spouses whose husbands are also deployed, sometimes not. “I have learned many things from friends I have met but learned a lot of info from other wives in other companies,” is reported just as is receiving support by, “Being around other spouses who had deployed husbands.” For some spouses, it is the non-deployed husbands of friends who help provide support, or friends of the deployed spouse. Many help each other out. In essence, as one spouse eloquently sums up, “It's the love and sense of responsibility of my soldier, the support of other military families and members of 'on post' installations that make a deployment bearable.”

**Family.**

Other military spouses seek support from their families of origin, or to the families they have created in their roles as military spouses. It seems that, especially in times of medical need or other crisis, military spouses look for support from these primary sources. During deployments, many spouses also move themselves and their families to live with either their parents or the in-laws. One spouse phrases this as, “If it were not for close friends, family and strong values many more families would fall apart when faced with the burdens the military life brings.” Another says that, “I love my home and friends and can visit family.” The refrain of support from family is constant in the data. “I have a job, friends and family to rally around. I'm very content with that.” Sometimes it is yelled in capitals, “I GOT ALL MY SUPPORT FROM MY FAMILY DURING MY HUSBAND DEPLOYMENT.” Sometimes it is more subtle. “My parents live in the same town where we're currently stationed. Their support… has helped
tremendously during my husband's absences.” One new mother even writes of her birthing experience while her husband was deployed and her mom was there as a birthing coach instead.

When families are not so lucky as to be stationed near extended family and a deployment occurs, many spouses change their physical location to be closer to this source of support. “After my husband deployed . . . I needed nothing more than to be near friends and family.” Outstanding obligations make this decision right for other spouses, some of whom move back home so that they can work, finish school, or be with family and friends. Medical situations are often the catalyst for these moves, “I was very sick during my pregnancy which was considered high risk. I was on bed rest the majority of the pregnancy. I went home so that I could receive help from my parents.” Another expectant mother in a troubled pregnancy also reported that, “Fortunately my husband was granted special permission from his unit to drive with me up to Colorado where I lived in my parents' home for 8 months.” For others who have recently come to a new duty station, it is easier to go back to family. “…my husband deployed three weeks after we PCS'd I went home to be with my family rather than stay in a new location alone without a job or friends.”

Gratitude and recognition that not everyone has it this good are common themes in the responses. One spouse reports that, “I was fine because of my strong faith and upbringing as an Army brat, but I felt very bad for some of my friends who did not have supportive families for backgrounds and experience with the military.” This sentiment is echoed by the spouse who reports that, ‘I took my children back home, where I could get help from my family. I am very fortunate because I am very close to my family, a benefit that some young moms don't have. ..being near family helped immensely.”
For some, this support came from their own families; for others, it came from their active duty spouse’s parents. One spouse reports that she had super support from both her parents and the in-laws. Another even says that, “I live with my in-laws right now since my spouse is PCSing to S. Korea.” These are not the only ones who report that during deployments, the in-laws become a major source of support.

I had to get through on my knee and lower back operations by myself during my spouse's deployment to Iraq. It was really tough to overcome by myself, so I moved to my parent in-law's house to stay with them together because I don't have any my family in United States.

And, finally, for some families who are dual military, their extended families make it possible to complete the mission. “…my parents had to take care of our household while we were both deployed.” Family is clearly a vital source of social support for many army spouses.

**Friends.**

While many spouses responded that they received their social support from family, even more responded that they received support from their friends. The category of friends, in fact, was large enough to deserve further analysis. While some spouses speak of friends in general terms, others specify whether the friends they turned to were civilian friends or were other military spouses.

**General friends.**

Many respondents did not specify whether their friends were primarily associated with the military or not. These responses focus, rather, on the friend relationship itself. It is interesting to note that very often, when the word “friends” was used, it was used in combination with other sources of support. One spouse advises that to have a successful “Army life,” it is
imperative that one, “develop good solid friendships by being a friend.” This theme of the friendship of reciprocity is echoed throughout the data. “My friends supported me and I supported them.” Many responses indicated that, as the cliché goes, to have a friend, be a friend.

Some friendships are described as budding relationships, where, upon moving to a new duty station, these spouses, “Became neighbors then good friends.” Many others refer to going to “close friends” for support. Many admit, “I was very lucky. I am fine about the next coming deployment because I have the same friends. These battle buddies are a God-send and are one of the biggest selling points for me about the Army.” Some mention reaching back to friends from previous assignments, while others looked to friends at their current base.

An entire assignment can be viewed positively or negatively based on friendships. “The PEOPLE at the particular place make the place good or bad … It depends on if you make a friend at that particular place.” An entire career can be colored by friendships, “Most of the 'good' was often related to friends I made during my husband's deployment.” For many, these relationships are not transient “friends of the road.” These are robust and deep, true friendships that have been tested. They are friends for life.

*Civilian friends.*

Other respondents specified that they sought out friends that were not associated with the military. For some this was a matter of convenience, being that these were long-standing relationships which had a history of being supportive; others specifically looked to civilian friends because of their status as civilian. For some this is as simple as the emphatically capitalized statement that they “Had friends in the CIVILIAN community.” Others go into much deeper levels of detail. “Overall, I prefer to use civilian support than military…” I prefer to pick
my own friends. I am a friendly person, and don't like to be 'not one of the group' because my husband out ranks their husband.”

Many offer insights as to why they intentionally chose to seek friends among civilians. One spouse is concerned that her personal issues could become known to others in her husband’s unit. Similarly, another states that “…we have chosen to live 30+ miles away from our duty station and develop associations with non-military and non-dependent groups… when my spouse leaves work, he wants to be FAR away from his work environment…”

Seemingly with less intentionality, there are almost offhand comments like, “I also had many friends from the city who were very supportive of me.” Many others seem to turn to the civilian sector for friendship when on-post relationships are not meeting their expectations. “In 26 years I have never felt so alone as I did during those 13 months of my husbands deployment. Thanks to my civilian friends I made it through!” Another highlights that, “Any support I do feel here is from my off post neighbors and the efforts I’ve made to meet others and get involved in my local community.” Although there are clearly reasons for seeking out civilian friends, there are certainly a myriad of reasons why some spouses chose to look to friends within the military as well.

**Military friends.**

Yet other respondents reached out to military friends. Whether this is because of convenience and proximity is a matter for another study. In reading these passages, however, it seems that there is something else going on within the data. Army spouses reach out to other army spouses in a sense of camaraderie and looking for someone else who will understand their circumstances because of common shared experiences. Many of these respondents specify that they deliberately searched out friends within the military community, such as this spouse,
I had a good support group of friends during my husband's deployment (April 2003-April 2004). I felt I dealt well during difficult times and had friends to back me up. It was good to be near the post and friends there because other friends just did not understand the Army life and the feelings that came with a deployment. Living in the Army community during a deployment gives you access to information faster and also to friends who understand what you're going through.

There is a definite theme that friendships with other military spouses are better able to meet the requirements of army spouse life, that those friends are the only other people who could truly empathize. “Outsiders and family would be sympathetic but that was fleeting, the military community was the only one who really understood.” There are many who indicate that it is only others who are in your own situation that can truly give full support. This is repeated in short phrases like, “I stayed on post to be near friends who could relate” and in more verbose phrasing alike.

While I am a strong, independent woman, the first OIF deployment was emotionally brutal. I could not have functioned as well as I did without the close network of my friends who were all in the same situation. It's not the lawn care, transportation, or change in finances that overburden a person. It is the emotional toll, the fear of the unknown, the pain of loving someone in combat that make deployment unbearable for those at home.

It seems that spouses who live on post and off post both are able to gain support from military friends. “I THINK THAT IT SAID A LOT ABOUT THE COMMUNITY OF FORT POLK THAT WHEN WE NEEDED THE SUPPORT THE MOST, WE KNEW WE COULD COUNT ON ONE ANOTHER” says one on post respondent, while another spouse who lives off post says, “I was very fortunate while my husband was deployed. We have a nice home, off-post,
with many other military families.” Some identify that one of their sources of strength was, “friends going thru the same thing and support.” One spouse sums up her experience making new military friends thusly: “Also, women from the unit that I hardly knew were more than willing to help me out, since our families do not live in the area. I was very pleased with all the support I received.”

The military.

While some spouses claimed military friends as a source of support, others turned to “the military” itself. These spouses seemed to be reaching out to more formalized networks for assistance. They were concerned more with the efficacy of systems and the ability of programs to fill their needs than with friendships and informal communication networks. This was a very well represented theme. It appears that Army spouses do expect well functioning systems of support. Still, they also expect a human touch. Most spouses appreciate the smoothness of systems that function well, but still have room to take into account individual needs and concerns. Many spouses personify the army, or the unit or the post, making the experience more personal. For some, it is clear that they have a positive attitude towards the challenges they face and the support they receive from the military. Yet others are clearly frustrated with what they perceive are systemic inadequacies.

When systems function well, spouses make comments like, “I received a lot of support from the waiting spouse support group.” Another spouse notes her appreciation of the material support she receives as a dependent, “There are great benifits and it is a stable and steady income.” When systems run smoothly, spouses know to whom to turn,

WHEN MY HUSBAND WAS DEPLOYED I WENT THROUGH ALOT (EMOTIONALLY) AND I DID LOOK OUT FOR HELP, THE ONLY ONES THAT
COMMUNICATING SUPPORT

HELPED ME WAS MY POC AT THE TIME AND THE FRG LEADER AT THE TIME, AND THE CHAPLAIN. IF IT WASN'T FOR THEM I REALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT I WOULD OF DONE.

Just knowing that the resources are there can be a source of support. Even those who have never lived on base can feel support by knowing that the services are available. The plethora of options available to spouses is not lost on them, “The military support channels are numerous and some prove to be quite helpful during times of deployment. Morale, welfare and recreation facilities are also abundant and serve the military family well.” This type of knowledge will be discussed in more detail as it is its own subcategory, but for now, this quotation will serve to highlight the importance of knowledge.

Proving the adage that the exception proves the rule, many spouses express their appreciation that their special circumstances were taken into account. This is especially true in cases of medical need. One spouse of a deploying soldier writes, “…he was supposed to go but I have a tumor that has to be removed, and his commanders have been wonderful and have allowed him to stay behind until January to have this taken care of.” The appreciation is the same when it is a child that is sick.

During my spouse's deployment our son was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. My spouse's unit did a great job supporting me and getting my spouse home to his son during the first several treatments. My spouse asked to return to Iraq and did so to his unit. During this whole time his unit did everything it could to make this easier on my family.

This also becomes clear when spouses are dealing with grief, as indicated by this spouse whose father had just died. “I also GREATLY appreciated the fact that the Army allowed my husband
to take leave from deployment… I know that the Army tries to care for families and provide services for us as much as the mission allows.”

Other systems are more specific to individual cases, such as educational meetings for children and AFTB classes for spouses.

The AFTB classes offered were helpful. They explain the military in common terms. I also enjoy other post services such as JAG (for POA's) and the Chaplains. Chaplains do a lot of work outside the Chapel, like offer retreats, classes, fun outings for families and soldiers. They are an important part of the military community.

It is interesting to see the army personified as a living entity that can take action of its own accord. To these spouses, it is almost as if “the Army” has a mind of its own. This is highlighted nicely by two spouses who state, “I appreciate all that the Army is doing for the families. It goes to show that they do care,” and,

I think the Army is doing great things for soldiers and their families! I have always felt that my views mattered to the Army and leadership and that they were trying to take care of us, especially when my husband has deployed. I understand his job and support him totally in peacetime and wartime.

If not the army as a whole, then, at least the installation and the unit are often seen as entities. “Ft. Drum does a lot to support families.” More than one spouse expresses the understanding, however, that it is the spouses themselves who make up the community, and as such, have to work to make it their own. “With current OPTEMPO we need to educate and empower all of our family members to become proactive in the military lifestyle. We need to stress that this isn't a job, but a way of life.”
Along with a recognition that what they do is indeed difficult, some spouses seem to have a positive outlook. “The pride the kids and I felt … made the deployment a lot easier… sure everyone wants more money and less time away from home but the fact is that they didn't join the army to get rich.” Another spouse recognizes that,

The Army does what it can to support spouses and to ease deployments. Long deployments and excessive missions are beyond the control of most local commanders. The difficulties of Army life are eased somewhat by the benefits. Life overseas and travel opportunities are some of the great perks. It would be a shame to deprive families of these opportunities.

The sense of community and support in these statements is almost tangible, with vivid and concrete descriptors. “We had terrific unit and leader support, information, and a feeling of being cared for at our previous duty station. Nearly our entire military community was deployed.” Summing up this optimistic note, one spouse writes, “I have noticed a recent trend in the Army in which the importance of 'the family' is slowly being recognized, acknowledged and valued… I know first hand that this is what is on the minds of the spouses.”

Contrarily, there were a few occasions in which other spouses expressed a sense of disappointment that the military is not providing what they need. “It has been my experience that the military shows no support what so ever for the family of the soldier.” These statements are always absolutes, such as, “I didn’t get any help from the Army,” with no gray shades. These two statements were the only examples culled out of the data to express a negative reaction towards support from the military itself. Otherwise, statements were much more emphatic that, “Overall, I am satisfied with Army support and concern for family” and “I can say that I'm satisfied with the Army way of life.”
Church.

A grounding in faith has been shown by many sociologists (Meeker, 2009) to be an integral part of life for many people. While the question of faith itself is outside of the realm of this study, there is little doubt based on these findings that having a faith community often provides a great deal of strength, support and nurturing for military spouses. A remarkable number of responses referenced churches, religion and faith. Most were simple statements such as, “Churches on post are great,” rarely going into much detail. Another interesting facet is that, like the sample of statements in the Work category, there is not a single incident of negative social support represented in the Church sample.

Representative samples here include, “I was supported by my church family more so than the Army community,” and, “We are a very tight-knit community, especially in our local churches.” A few spouses single out military chaplains, “THE ONLY ONES THAT HELPED ME WAS MY POC AT THE TIME AND THE FRG LEADER AT THE TIME, AND THE CHAPLAIN,” and, “I also enjoy other post services such as … the Chaplains. Chaplains do a lot of work outside the Chapel, like offer retreats, classes, fun outings for families and soldiers. They are an important part of the military community.” Others specify that it does not matter whether the faith community is a community church or on the installation, what is important is that the connection is made.

It is very important that army wives be introduced to chapel services and/or community churches in the area as part of a welcome to a new post. We need to be plugged in to a church 'family' as soon as possible before our spouse deploys. There should be a spiritual/religious volunteer (another army wife, not a chaplian) to help us with that information. I know many people from chapels on post would love to volunteer with that.
Finally, there seems to be recognition throughout this sample that a faith in God was vital to the well-being of the spouse and the active duty service member both. “My spouse had a lot of bad memories and would not talk. He basically had a short fuse. We worked through it and faithfully attended church. With God's graces, we made it and are doing so very well.”

**Work.**

To receive social support, some spouses look to their career or job. The relationships within a workplace are a source of strength, as is the satisfaction of doing a job well. There are sufficient responses to warrant discussion, especially based on the literature’s assertion that this is often a source of support, but as sources go, this is one of the least frequently represented. There are no reported instances of negative social support from the workplace.

Statements that are encompassed by this category are often very simple and straightforward. “I had a good job and good friends and a good support system.” The quotations are often as brief as, “Loved my house/friends/job,” or, “My life is busy w/my job & friends,” or “My job also support me greatly.” Work was often mentioned in combination with other support – very seldom was it singled out. “I have a job, friends and family to rally around. I'm very content with that.” Support at work comes from military sources and civilians alike. Some have, “friends at work on-post,” for others, “My only support was from civilians at my job.” Workplace support was not as oft noted as many other sources of support.

**Information**

As was established in the results section *Types of Support: Informational*, the accurate dissemination of information in a timely, easy to access manner, is vital to the well being of the Army spouse. This accurate dissemination must occur regardless of spousal deployment status, geographical location of the spouse, and must be consistent across experiences. By the
Communication: Support

The preponderance of entries that dealt with this issue, this is an area of concern to many spouses. The discussion of this area within the Types of Support section serves to highlight the importance of this theme, and need not be repeated here.

Knowledge

As operationalized, knowledge is slightly different from the category of Information. Knowledge focuses on insight into how systems work in the military. Access to Information comes through a Knowledge, an understanding of where to go, who to talk to, what systems to mobilize. There is general information about military systems that is often gained through time and experience, but there is also a great deal of knowledge that is context specific to given locations or positions. As noted in the coding process, there is some overlap in the operationalization of the difference between Information and Knowledge, but there are clearly two distinct core themes to unpack. There are over three times as many comments which indicate a negative relationship to knowledge than which indicate a positive attitude towards knowledge. This is the largest quantitative disparity noted in the data.

Negative about knowledge.

After a hypothetical colon, the subtitle for this section could read (in the succinct words of an army spouse), “i don’t know what's going on.” Not all spouses feel confident in their abilities to ask the right questions of the right people. This can be overwhelming. “I feel totally out of the loop and clueless.” The negative responses about knowledge typically express a frustration that they don’t know who to talk to or how to find out information. Many are unfamiliar with the ways of the Army, and are often unable to locate resources they think might be available. Others are confident that services should be or are offered, but don’t know how to go about finding them. One spouse comes out and says that, “I also have not used resources
available due to lack of knowledge of the resources.” This is a real concern, as it is not efficacious for the army to offer resources that are not taken advantage of for lack of knowledge. Many of the responses in this sub-category offer suggestions and remedies; these are gathered together with the suggestions from other categories and will be appended to the main body of this work.

There is a repeated theme that spouses amorphously know there are many benefits and programs but that many people don’t know any specifics about them, or only find out about them after the fact. There is simply not a smooth transfer of knowledge occurring, according to entries like this, emphasized in all capital letters.

EVERY STATION THAT WE BEEN STATION AT WE HAD TO LEARN OURSELVES.NOT ONE TIME HAVE WE ARRIVED ANYWHERE WERE WE WERE SHOWN AROUND NOR DID WE GET WELCOME TO THE STATION. I'VE BEEN A MILITARY WIFE FOR 5 YEARS AND I STILL SEE NO CHANGES.

It would seem that a lot of this issue comes down to basics of marketing. “I think the Army is trying to make life easier for the 'family' but they are doing a poor job at getting the information out.” It was this very survey that emphasized this for one spouse. “I think my biggest complaint is that I don't know what half of the services were that were asked about on this survey which means I don't know how to use them.” Some spouses themselves identify that it is a lack of education about the availability of programs that prevents their participation. These are often worded as follows. “I still think that the military eeds to do a better job of educating young officers and NCOs early about the community resources that are available to the families.” It is clear that the current system of transmitting knowledge is insufficient.
This is especially the case for spouses who are new to the army. “Being new to the Army I had no way knowledge of how to get information except through my husband who is also fairly new to the Army. It was frustrating and disappointing.” Even being new to a duty post makes the utilization of post specific knowledge problematic. “His first tour our family was not even in the state a month before my husband left to join his unit in Iraqi so I did not know hardly any information about services offered.” It takes awhile to garner knowledge about systems, as this spouse emphasizes with multiple exclamation points. “I have been living on post for 6 months and I still feel confused about everything the Army has to offer families and soldiers. I would love to know more!!!”

Word of mouth simply does not suffice. These spouses assert that the service member is inefficient at relaying information about programs. “I am unaware about programs because my husband does not inform me about their availability. He either doesn't know or he forgets to tell me about it.” This was far from the only spouse to address this issue. “My concerns are that my husband is not communicating with me on who I need to speak with to get some sort of support while I am away from my family.” If publicity for programs is relegated to informal communication networks, it is not sufficient. “… I have never gotten any information about any Army services that are available. Anything I've ever heard about them is from people I've met. I have no ideas as to where they are located and what they help with.”

One older spouse offers a rationale for the active duty member who intentionally does not transmit knowledge to his spouse,

During all those years of being an Army spouse, I have experienced quite often that - especially very young soldiers - are not aware of the programs, help, and assistance that is available for them and their families.Besides that, a lot of soldiers do not want their
spouses to participate in the Family Readiness Groups. They are concerned that their spouse might get too much information, and also become independent, which in my opinion is the most important thing any Army spouse has to be! In a lot of cases 'new' spouses do not want to participate in the unit FRGs because they do not know what the Readiness Groups are about, and how important the involvement in these groups is. What it all boils down to, is to get the information out to the spouses regarding programs, assistance etc. so they know what all is offered.

Spouses who are employed outside of the home report special considerations in their attempt to gain knowledge. “The Army needs to seriously work on communication, Soldier and family expectations and those Army wives who actually work.” Sometimes the situation is further complicated by geographical separation. “I don't know anyone in his unit b/ c he was deployed from Korea and I know nothing about their programs and even if I did they would only be available to me from across the world.” Just living off post can make deployments more difficult.

I live off post and I feel like I do not know what's going on when there are on post activities or events held. I think there should be some kind of outreach program for those families that live off post. Right now I am not involved in any programs or activities but I would like to be. I just don't know what kind of programs there are to join.

Being from a different cultural background can also be a huge liability. When even this survey is informative to this spouse, it is easy to understand the frustration that seems to imbue her entry.

I have no idea about anything I rely on information from my spouse which is not much because when he comes home he is too tired to teach me about army and services on post.
and how to adjust to this way of life. I never received any welcome packet letting me know about any services on base or off base etc. I would just like to know if there is any service that helps foreigners adjust to army life … for some of us who got married here have no clue what to do, what is right or wrong, so it’s been very confusing and very hard for me to adjust i am still lost as it is as i had no idea what i was doing and had no one to ask for help and my spouse had no clue what i had to do. Thank you for making this survey available to us, i learned a lot about the army from doing this survey, i had no idea there was so much help and so many services that aim to help spouses etc. Thank you very much, this survey was very enjoyable and very informative for me.

The role of the FRG seems to be contested by responses in this section. This will be examined in much closer detail in the next section which looks specifically at FRGs as social support. Just to provide a glimpse of FRGS in relation to the transmission of knowledge,

I was the FRG Leader for our BN… before I came to the unit, no one really was interested in doing it the 'army' way. (the way it is encouraged with AFTB and FRG Plan) They just wanted to be very laid back and just send out an e-mail once in a while…most really did not want too much involvement but only wanted information they would get from their spouses verified from time to time. They were busy and did not think much of FRG….many were very young and didn't even really know what it is or how it could or should be used… The spouses were actually very well informed by their soldiers due to e-mail and cell phones.

So, in summation of this section, it comes down to, “If a person knows how the Army works, one can find what they need, but many do not know where to start and units are not always helpful.” This needs to be addressed.
Positive about knowledge.

Some spouses express that they are knowledgeable about where to go for help and who to talk to. Their responses fall into this subcategory. While they may often not have the answers, they assert that they know which questions to ask, and know where to go to find out who can help them. As one spouse sums up this feeling, “Although, I don't seek out many services, I know where to go should I need to.”

There seem to be two phases in the process of offering social support: The systems need to be in place and working, and potential recipients need to know about them. Spouses represented in this category feel that this happens within the army community.

The army provides many services and tries to make them known. Sometimes people don't use them but that is not the army's fault. People in the army do have special needs and do deserve some help but many need to help themselves and others around them. We are thankful for all that the army does provide and as we are OCONUS we are using more of the army services.

One new spouse shares that, “It was a difficult transition but now that I am on post, the info and help is readily available.”

Some of the information and help comes in the form of organizations that provide education about the army lifestyle. One such program is the set of Army Family Team Building classes. “The AFTB classes offered were helpful. They explain the military in common terms.” Another spouse attests that, “The Army has come a long way in educating and empowering the military families with programs like AFTB, AFAP, and FRGs.” Others repeat the praise as, “I am grateful for the benefits that the government provides military families. I am grateful to all of
the volunteers on posts conus/oconus. AFTB is a great program. ACS and Red Cross are super organizations.”

While systems and classes go a long way in providing knowledge support, people are always at the heart of the system.

FRGs need to be run by experienced spouses - those that have 'been there, done that'. As well, Rear detachment commanders need to be officers and NCOs capable of dealing with family members appropriately as well as have the ability to resource and network to find answers when they are not known.

Those with the experience and personality to make a difference are necessary to the transmission of knowledge to others. The second chapter of results begins by examining the group most responsible for this transmission of knowledge, the Family Readiness Group.
Chapter V: Results Relating to the Army Spouse Lifestyle

The second of two chapters of results, this chapter handles the second set of five themes which evolved in this study. These themes are “Family Readiness (Support) Groups,” “consistency,” “attitude toward the military lifestyle,” “media and the internet,” and “issues with the military itself.” Just as in the previous chapter, the spouses’ entries included are transcribed exactly as they were written with typographical errors, shorthand, abbreviations, and misspellings intact.

Family Readiness (Support) Groups

Much has already been said about Family Readiness Groups. They were a primary focus of the remarks in the categories Types of Support: Information, and Knowledge. Entries already discussed in those sections will not be highlighted here, as the case has already been made that the FRGs are perceived as being sources of information and knowledge when they work, but that they often do not work. Based on quantity of responses, negative social support experiences are considerably more common in dealing with FRGs than are positive experiences.

Negative about FRGs.

Many spouses relate that their experiences with the FRG are negative. “Regarding FRG's - It seems like a great idea gone terribly wrong.” The prevalence of negative responses indicates that there is a systematic issue that deserves attention. In fact, many of the spouses call for reform of some kind to come to the FRG. The tone of these comments is usually terse and uses extreme phrases such as, “programs are in shambles,” “Our FRG stunk,” and, “people frequently left crying.” Emotions are vehemently expressed in these entries, such as, “FRG is run by morons,” and “it’s a bunch of bull. It is a backstabbing, caniving group of women that sit and talk about everyone else in the unit.” The most commonly expressed complaint is echoed by
many; it is that the spouse has received no contact or support at all. Overall, the main issues addressed include: the tone of the meetings and contacts, the content of events, and the frequency and timing of events. There are also pragmatic concerns that these responses bring to light.

Many spouses had negative experiences with the tone implied by their FRGs. “Unfortunately, this FRG was about bickering,” seems to sum up the main gist of these entries. Others indicate that the leaders at their FRG meetings were always “letting meetings get out of hand (noisy kids, people talking among each other).” Others describe their experience with, “an unorganized FRG group and leaders who were petty and immature.” Some spouses prefer not to participate because of “so much gossiping and rumors and back stabbing.” Others point out that it felt as if the FRG only contacted them if the FRG needed something, “The only reason FRG ever contacted me was for money or to volunteer for a fund raiser.”

Similarly, many spouses had negative experiences with what was done during FRG events. Some spouses characterize the conversations that go on at FRGs in the following way: “[My specific] FRG is only a way to get gossip from spouse's. They never give you any useful information, and everything you say will be used to get your husband in trouble, this has been my experience.” Others saw it as being even more detrimental to attend meetings, as, there were too many disturbing rumors that I felt better distancing myself from the FRG. For instance, the FRG leader called and told me that said missiles were hitting near my husband in Kuwait. After extreme concern, I watched TV and did not hear any such thing. Come to find out it was not true. When I talked to my husband, he said that he didn't know what she was talking about, in so many words. I did not need the added stresses of the rumors.
Others were also, “Disappointed by false and incorrect information given out by FRG.” Overall, to the spouses represented in this section, “Between apathy, and screaming kids running amuck, the meetings seemed like a waste of time.”

Still others offered complaints about the frequency and timing of FRG functions. The time lapse before initial contact is often seen as being too long. For example, “it took 14 months before anyone realized that I existed.” One spouse points out that “I never know about the meetings until the last min,” which she perceived as inconsiderate. It does seem true that it is impossible to please everyone, as some indicate that there “are too many meetings and too many people trying too hard,” while many others indicate that they received infrequent contact. One leader explains that, “The pressure to make sure all FRG members were happy was overwhelming and impossible to meet.” In what was a very common complaint that seems to be an extreme example of bad timing, many spouses were not alerted when their active duty spouses were returning from deployment. The need for social support does not end when the service member comes home. However, some FRGs drastically limit their functions when the service member is not deployed, as expressed by numerous spouses in phrases like, “FRG stopped completely upon redeployment.”

There are other pragmatic concerns and issues addressed by these spouses. Some of these are mundane, such as, “I am unable to attend FRG meetings due to the location and hours of my job.” Another problem mentioned a few times through the data is, a lot of soldiers do not want their spouses to participate in the Family Readiness Groups. They are concerned that their spouse might get too much information, and also become independent, which in my opinion is the most important thing any Army spouse has to be! In a lot of cases 'new' spouses do not want to participate in the unit FRGs because they
do not know what the the Readiness Groups are about, and how important the involvement in these groups is. Another spouse indicates that, “I would also like to see the FRG stay out of personal problems unless asked to intervene,” which indicates that there is a practical problem sometimes between being available and being intrusive. It does seem that in practice it is nearly impossible to please everyone, as the following responses show. “I do not feel the frg has anything to offer me. It's barely more than a social club” Another concurs that meetings are “a waste of time” since they only discussing bake sales and parties, not deployments. And, in stark contrast to the two previous entries,

the FRG's are not any fun. When they were FSG's there was more comaraderie, people became friends. Now, they just give information and nobody even knows anyone else. They used to offer support. Now they are a joke! And not a funny one. They do not have to be all about Army business.

One spouse sums up this section very well as she states that,

The whole goal of the Army is to 'self-empower' families to care for themselves...FRG's are not meeting those needs. Actually more and more spouses/families want nothing to do with FRG's because they have become nothing but a political group, only in existance because the Commander MUST have one, not because he/she truly cares about the spouses/families. FRG's as a whole… are dysfunctional. There MUST be a better way!

**Lack of FRG.**

A great many entries indicate that the unit to which their spouses are assigned, “DOES NOT have a family support group.” Whether the unit does not truly have an FRG, or whether it is ineffective at publicizing its functions is essentially irrelevant. These entries are all one to two
lines and usually, there is little context given. If there is no FRG, clearly no social support comes from it. In fact, the absence of an FRG often incites frustration by its absence.

Certain specialty fields are singled out as in, “In general most hospitals do not have FRG groups so we don't get that support anyway.” Based on multiple entries, it is also apparent that the JAG corps and the Army Acquisitions Corps often do not have FRGs. Although these are all individual cases, there are enough individuals with this complaint to see a systemic need. It is not only specialty fields who experience a lack of an FRG. Some spouses, “…are told it is only for deployment.” These assertions are certainly not indicative of social support.

Choose to avoid FRG.

It is this frustration with the lack of FRGs or the negative that has come from FRGs that makes many spouses choose to avoid FRGs altogether. Some have had negative experiences with FRGs in the past; others have heard negative things from other spouses. This is clearly expressed by the spouse that says, “Too many wives have bitter feelings toward the army and the FRG because of past experiences. This makes it hard to reach out and be of some help.” The disappointment in FRGs is almost palpable in some responses. The main themes in this section are primarily a recap of everything negative from the last section “FRG should not be about what rank your spouse is, it should be about Army family unity; how we can help one another,” but there is an additional element of justification of why spouses choose to avoid FRGs.

The list of reasons provided for why spouses do not attend FRGs is quite varied. Some live too far away for it to be convenient; some work when meetings are traditionally held. Another spouse says, “I don't attempt FRG meetings because some people use it to judge others instead of offering support. Seeing it too many times.” Another gets right to the point and says she doesn’t participate, “Because my FRG members are not supportive. They only gossip and
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steal funds from the FRG monies saved from fundraising, etc. I'm very dissatisfied and completely turned off from ever being a part of another FRG group.” Some are just tired of it, “I no longer care if I participate in unit activities or get to know people.” One knows herself well enough to say that she is too shy. One other spouse says that she does not attend because, “My husband doesn't like to take us to FRG's.”

Contrarily, some do not attend FRGs for more positive reasons, such as the spouse who says that she has, “simply not needed them. My family is well-adjusted due to our faith in God and each other, not because a career choice my husband or I have made.” Another echoes, “Availability of family support systems is highly appreciated; however, I have not had the need to use them due to strong support from my local church, family, and civilian opportunities.” The same is summed up as, “Because I have a strong personal support system, I don't feel the need to seek support from military organizations.”

Some spouses see avoiding FRGs as a way to distinguish themselves from the Army. One spouse indicates “I go if I have time. I certainly don't live for activities and mtgs. I have a very active life without the extras. I like living in the community. My husband lives the Army, not me.” Even more emphatically,

I simply do not feel the need to involve the Army in my life as a civilian. My husband is in the Army, I enjoy that he is in the Army and serving his country, but I am not active duty and I do not want the Army involved in my affairs. I would never seek out military services (including FRGs) for this reason.

The next respondent is still more emphatic, “While my spouse was deployed to Afghanistan for 7 mo. I did not participate in FRG or any other unit function because I was boycotting the unit.”
Positive about FRGs.

When they work as they are intended to, FRGs are a great source of support for the military spouse. They are good sources of social connection and dissemination of knowledge and information. Many spouses are very positive about their experiences with FRGs. These responses are relatively short, typified by expressions of gratitude and satisfaction. One such entry extols, “Thank goodness for the FRG!”

Many responses here seem almost idyllic, with frequent use of the adjectives wonderful, AWESOME, and, great. Groups are claimed with pride and the use of inclusive pronouns such as “Our FRG” is rampant. A surprising number of respondents directly come out and invoke the term “support,” calling the FRG, “…a very important supportive community,” for example. Many spouses identify that the idea of Army life and FRG go hand-in-hand, as evidenced by responses such as, “The pride the kids and I felt for him and his unit made the deployment a lot easier along with the FRG and the army community.”

Spouses express their gratitude in statements such as, “I credit a very strong FRG leader with providing support during this past deployment.” They largely seem to recognize that the members of these groups are spouses like themselves, doing their best. “I think overall people in FRG leadership positions, Rear Detachment CDRs and other folks try their best to help & support families.” Another spouse states, “the FSG did the best they could with what they had.” This is clearly not a ringing endorsement, but a realistic perspective that one can only do what one can do.

Some spouses who were members or leaders of the FRG take pride in a job well done. “I volunteered to be a leader in our FRG and focused on helping people worse off than myself.” This spouse is by far not the only one to mention the rewards of being able to help and nourish
others. Another proactive spouse says, “I also took over my husband's FRG and decided to change things myself instead of waiting for this unit to make things happen.” These women seem to embody the comment made by one of their colleagues, “The FRGs … should be there to help you help yourself… [some] spouses feel that they 'deserve' to be basically babysat … the FRG is there for friendship and to help spouses become educated on how to care for themselves.”

Perspective, then and expectations play a vital role in satisfaction with FRGs and with the Army lifestyle in general. FRGs can play a positive role in that perception. “As a whole I enjoy the Army way of life. It is hard but with a good marriage and a strong FRG I have made it through 2 deployments and will continue to make it through more.” Even among the positive comments, there was a tacit recognition that there are distinctions from group to group and post to post about the effectiveness of FRGs. This area of complaint bleeds through the entire theme.

Consistency

Certainty is not a given for army spouses. There are some things that are consistent in the life of an army spouse. The challenges of supporting a soldier are consistent, and the job security is a constant that is essentially unparalleled. After these, however, many elements of life can be uncertain. When what one finds to be true at one time does not hold true under other circumstances, this can be very disconcerting. Due to this, some spouses comment that a lack of consistency is clearly seen as a negative, while others say that the consistency of social support is of benefit.

Consistency is negative.

One of the themes that is evident as a great source of frustration for many spouses is the lack of consistency across time, assignments, locations, and leadership. This theme is one of the
largest of these sections; the ambiguity of the quality of life is a serious detriment to satisfaction in general. As one wife puts it, “Another thing that bothers me is that nothing is ever set in stone. One day it’s one thing and the next it’s another…It is toying with our emotions and I don’t appreciate it.” Another wife establishes that it is specifically inconsistency in family support that is missing from her life. “There needs to be more consistency at the unit level for support of families in important areas like information on service member status while deployed, information on post services, etc.” An endemic lack of consistency can lead to even larger problems, such as problems trusting. “The people have changed or the program itself has changed and you begin not to trust.” The feeling of frustration is almost palpable from these entries. If any one set of comments had to be singled out as the source of the most negative effect among army spouses, it would be this set.

**Time.**

The entries in this section embody the frustrations of spouses who have been around the military for long enough to notice changes over time that they indicate are inconsistent. The first of these entries is from an Army wife of 27 years, who says that, “In the old Army, spouses were important, in the new Army (last several years) wives are not as important it seems.” Another entry echoes, “THE MILITARY HAS CHANGED A FULL 100% AND THAT IS NO JOKE.” Others identify that everything, “changes at such a rapid rate.” Yet one more spouse asserts that, “I love the military life, it’s all I’ve known but I have become saddly disappointed with the 'NEW' ways it has taken.”

The other side of negative consistency can be that the changes that are happening are for the good. “Having been actively involved in FRGs from the beginning of my marriage, 15 years ago, I am very pleased with how things have improved - but there will always be room for more
improvements.” Similarly calling for yet more improvement while recognizing that changes have occurred, another spouse claims that “The Army has taken great strides in recent years to improve the quality of life for its families. I can see a difference. Thank you for recognizing that this is a constant work in progress.” This positive outlook about change is again supported by the former active duty spouse who says that, “I was in desert storm and never saw the spirit that people have for the soldiers today.” So, consistency can be a good or bad thing, depending on whether the change is perceived as beneficial or detrimental across time. There are also assignments where social support is described as being inconsistent.

**Assignment.**

Resentment seems to be a common theme among the following responses. As soldiers often change geographical locations, the actual job they perform changes as well. Sometimes these changes are very difficult to their family members for reasons that are specific to that new job. These are very situational, but there are a large number of these assignments across the Army.

One group of spouses indicates that there is inconsistency across different duty assignments. One spouse explains that,

I have been very active in FRGs and coffee groups at previous duty stations and I must say that since he has joined the Acquisitions Corps I feel very detached from the whole Army way of life. I know that there are many jobs in the Army where soldiers spend their days working alongside civilians and the families kind of get forgotten. That would be fine if these same soldiers were not deployable and able to be pulled from their jobs to go fill taskings. It would just be nice to know that the Army had some kind of 'safety net' in
place so that other family members don't feel forgotten when they are placed my situation.

A different spouse from the Judge Advocate General Corps indicates that, “The JAG corps is also very different… and to my knowledge do not offer family support services, because JAG persons are not attached to units always or are sometimes the sole person in the office.” Yet another difficult assignment with a high stress level is the job of the recruiter. “I would even say that recruiting was more difficult for us than the recent deployment to Iraq. there is no support for families and soldiers.” So, when the active duty spouse changes jobs, the consistency level of their dependents can drastically change.

Some spouses are married to active duty spouses who work in a “Joint” assignment, where all the armed services are intentionally intermixed. “I'm not sure how the air force works but I find little support and felt more connected with spouses groups in the army community.” There is inconsistency when spouses are assigned to joint positions, as the following spouse points out, “spouse was in a line unit for last deployment with a very active support network in place. Current assignment is at Joint Command level so no unit level support for families exists.” Another spouse who does not identify where her husband is currently assigned reaffirms, “No comparison with commaraderie within a line unit.”

Lastly, there are many spouses who mention that the activity level of support mechanisms changes drastically when the active duty members return from a deployment. The level of support changes depending on deployment status. “While my husband was deployed the FRG was very active. Since then no one knows anything. I have not been notified of any meetings or trainings, etc.” Support is needed as an army spouse at times other than deployment, and so to
have a drastic reduction of support just based on deployment status is inconsistent. Another inconsistency is that seen from geographical location to location.

**Location.**

With a frequency that is notable, many spouses indicate that they have noticed disparity in the support provided at different posts. This “never knowing” what is coming in the way of support is seen as a sizeable stressor. Those who know it can be better are frustrated at what they see as inadequate support. To open up this discussion, one spouse spells it out to the researcher.

The area that we are in here is very small and they are going to shut it down by 2007, so the services that we I here are efiantly NOT what we would I had we been lucky enough to end up in Heidelberg. Therefore the people stationed here go to other areas and see what everyone else has and wonder why am I not getting the same treatment? For those of us that have been around longer we know sometimes you get it and sometimes you don’t but this is the impression that the younger spouses are getting and they have nothing else to compare THIS too. So they fall under the assumption that the Army as a whole stinks.

The basic inconsistency is succinctly summed up as, “Each installation is different…” There is a recognition that an aspect of this difference comes from the size of the installation, as this spouse writes, “We are on a very small post right now and I don’t know if I would feel as comfortable on one of the larger installations.” Some of the inconsistency is explained away in financial terms. There is a “[b]ig difference in the 2 posts and the amount of money given to the posts.” Whatever the reason, spouses almost universally report that, “I would like to see more consistency of services offered throughout the various posts.”
One of the distinctions clearly drawn is the difference between stateside and overseas assignments. There are many reasons for this, from issues of language and culture to base size and the connection to the local community. Regardless of rationale, many report that, “I find that the FRG in the States is more like a clique, where in Europe it’s more like family.” Another spouses directly contradicts this claim and states that, “From my experiences the posts, and units CONUS are more supportive and caring to the Army family in comparison to the posts OCONUS.” Clearly, perception and individual circumstances play a large role in the reception of support.

It does seem to matter whether the family lives on post or off post, and whether or not they are geographically united with their active duty spouse. Many spouses report that there are differences in the support to families who live off post compared to families who live on post. Many spouses start off a military life from their home of origin rather than moving to a new place knowing that their spouse will soon deploy. Others take the opportunity to move back to the familiar mid-tour. In these situations, there is a resounding chorus which reveals that these “geographical bachelorettes” do not perceive a high level of social support. States one spouse, “I do not feel that I was a part of the ‘ARMY FAMILY’ until I actually moved to where my husband is stationed.”

Others find location-specific discontinuity of support. Those who are stationed in more remote areas, like army depots indicate that, “My main complaint is that if you are going to send Army Families to depots like this then you should provide all the Army support that the other installations get.” This motion is seconded by another spouse who states, “Our last two duty stations have been Army Depots and it has greatly affected our quality of Army life. There is no housing, commissary, PX, youth services, family support, basically nothing most posts have…”
As this spouse ties this subsection all together, the overwhelming sense is one of resignation and frustration. “I have given up on the installation. It is a disappointment compared to the military cohesiveness I’ve experienced in the past.”

**Leadership/people.**

While the mantra of, “location, location, location,” is clearly important, there is also a clear presence of the belief that people make a huge difference to the perceived consistency of experience. The location is important, but support depends on more than just place; “The PEOPLE at the particular place make the place good or bad.” The support felt may increase or decrease, but there is a common recognition that when the leadership changes, the overall support climate may also change in sizeable ways. To put it bluntly, “Our current command is wonderful. But the one a few years ago really sucked.” Just because it is recognized does not particularly make it easier to deal with this instability, as experienced by this spouse. “…the Army leaders are different at every installation. The FRG in our last company was really bad, the one we're at right now is good. It depends very strongly on the leaders.”

Leadership at different levels may impact the support climate of a given place. It is possible that the mix of support received from higher and lower levels may cancel each other out, or work together, to make a situation even better. This spouse sees the more pessimistic side of the equation at her current posting.

I think, on company/battalion levels, there is genuine concern for family stability and security (they know how important this is for soldier efficiency) but at all higher levels, the focus is on SAYING what is necessary to keep families 'happy' and quiet. I do not believe that there is a sincere interest in making life better for dependents beyond the brigade level. Career and finance always win out over soldier and family support.
To balance out that pragmatic response as this section draws to a close, spouses remind us that one person can make a capital letter kind of difference. “DEAR GEN. CODEY PLEASE COME BACK TO FT CAMPBELL WE MISS YOU AND LOVED IT BETTER WHEN YOU WAS HERE WE KNEW YOU CARED ABOUT US FAMILIES.”

**Consistency is positive.**

Of all the comments coded regarding consistency, only one is actually an affirming comment. This lone response indicates that across time and location, her support has been constant, “my husbands chain of command has been very supportive in the states and overseas with the ongoing medical problems I have been having.” The rest of the comments in this section indicate that many unconstructive aspects of military life are consistent across time and situation. So, although the consistency rating is high, the event which is consistently reported is actually off-putting.

Those consistently critical comments (still coded as positively consistent since they express continuity across time and situation) revolve primarily around all of the negative issues addressed regarding FRGs, as well as the consistent issues with the finance department, and with communication in general. There is no need to restate all the negatives associated with FRGs, as those concerns had their own section. A solid summation is expressed by the spouse who states, “Not once did I get a call from ANYONE in his unit for anything. And, this happened for all 3 of his deployments.” Regarding pay issues, a spouse wants to know…

Why it takes up to 6-8 months to get pay issues rectified, when the soldier has done everything they've been asked and must repeat steps consistently because paperwork is lost. This is not a one time problem, this happens at every single duty station we've been at and from talking with other spouses, we are not alone. This is an Army wide problem,
that, other than deployments and field time, is the number one issue that causes stress within families.... pay issues that are not the families fault but the Army's.

Support can be measured as tangibly missing both before and after the service member’s deployment, under varied situations. The central theme of this section can be summarized by a spouse who said, “Each base is very different, but it always seems to end the same. Poor medical support, extremely poor housing or housing support, very poor rear deployment support, poorly run FRG groups, very rank-oriented wives, etc.”

**Attitude Toward the Military Lifestyle**

As in all aspects of life, attitude is very important to satisfaction. Army spouses often took the opportunity of filling out the Survey of Army Families to express their attitudes toward the military lifestyle. Four main attitudes seemed the most prevalent and relevant to this study. Spouses expressed a desire to support each other and their active duty service member. Others expressed a strong degree of frustration with the military lifestyle. Many were very emphatic about being disillusioned by what they perceived as hypocrisy. Another considerable sample highlights the sacrifices made by themselves, their spouses, and their families in general.

**Desire to support.**

A group of comparatively optimistic responses expresses a strong desire to continue in the military lifestyle, (at 100% or 110%, even, according to some spouses) as well as to support each other and their active duty military members. These spouses extol the benefits of the lifestyle, while often simultaneously recognizing the difficulties associated with it. The most often feeling invoked is pride. Another recurring comment refers to how much their husbands love their jobs. These spouses speak of duty and commitment.
This sentiment is often expressed as indicative of a sense of identity. “I try to make sure these families are taken care of. I feel that it is my job being a Army wife! I'm a Army wife.” A similarly minded spouse states that she has, “great… pride in my husband but, also in myself for being able to handle basic life situations. I miss my husband dearly while he is away… but he and I both know that I can handle the homefront.” This self affirmation is very common in this sample. Another common feature of these entries is the almost mantra-like assertion, often with capitals and exclamation points, that this is the right place for them to be.

There are incredible pressures put on both soldiers and family members because of the war on terror. Even so with deployments and heavy training schedule, I wouldn't want to live any other life. I'm proud of my husband and how he serves this nation. I'm a proud army wife. My children know that because of what their dad does, others can live their lives as they see fit. Army families stick together!

This is clearly a matter of identity. “First, I am a proud military spouse! And proud of my husband's service to his country, but also my service to my country by supporting him and the Army!”

There also is an expressed pride in the families of these spouses. One highlights the importance of family with the following statement, “Strong military families makes a strong military.” As the spouse who is primarily responsible for the upbringing of the children when the active duty member is away, the spouses’ responses seem to affirm their identities as strong mothers as well as wives. This mother admits that the family members all miss each other during a deployment, but that all of the family members, “take it all in stride. And it actually upsets the kids the most when people talk about how upset they must be with dad gone. They know and accept that it is part of his job...and ours.” Spouses speak of how being married to the
military has helped them grow, not just in pride, but also in respect. “Being a military spouse for 10 years… I have a greater respect for our country and the men and women who defend it and also the families behind those men and women who defend our great country.”

There is an acknowledgement of a commitment to the larger whole when one is a military spouse. It is up to the individual not only to keep their own home secure, but also to help other families stay strong. “As a spouse of a military person we work as one unit & if I'm doing well and my husband is doing well. It's very important to help service members keep their family together.” Sometimes the support is not perceived as reciprocal, as this spouse identifies, “I choose to support him, regardless of the support the Army provides us.” Even when times are admittedly hard, spouses understand what their support means to their active duty spouse. “Although long deployments are difficult, they are not impossible and I fully support my soldier and his mission.”

Some spouses are unabashedly enthusiastic in their support – even all in capitals. Their responses sing out with optimism. “…I SUPPORT MY SOLDIER AND I LOVE MY WAY OF LIVING, I LOVE THE EXPERIENCE, I LOVE MOVING AND I LOVE ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES THE ARMY PROVIDES FOR MY FAMILY.” The following spouse has seen support throughout her husband’s career,

I think the Army is doing great things for soldiers and their families! I have always felt that my views mattered to the Army and leadership and that they were trying to take care of us, especially when my husband has deployed. I understand his job and support him totally in peacetime and wartime.

Others even take on the vernacular of the army to show their support. “The term Hooah! is a regular part of my vocab…I am a dedicated Army wife…”
Frustrated.

In stark opposition to section before this, the subtitle of this section might well be, in the words of one spouse, “Enough already!” Another signs off her comments as, “Fed-up Military Spouse.” A goodly number of spouses express that they have essentially given up. They are frustrated beyond belief, and are simply no longer willing to continue. The frustration has clearly built up over time, and their comments exude angst. Many list out individual complaints, such as the demand that leadership, “stop saying they get 4 day weekends then ask them to work. We haven't had a full weekend for 3 months. Empty promises are killing morale!” A common refrain has to do with the incredible operational tempo and multiple consecutive deployments.

As a military spouse I cannot tell you how many meals, birthdays, and anniversaries we have not been able to share. It was difficult counting up all of the time my spouse has been gone to complete this survey because I told myself years ago to stop counting because that just made the separations worst (keeping a tally).

All these led up to statements like, “I am tired...So very tired...I try to do my best for my family, for my Spouse, for my Church family...”

The end result is that spouses report that, “I am so entirely dissatisfied with Army life…No one wants to help, no one is willing to listen, and it is beyond frustrating to be in a place where so many people are unwilling to even help out.” This is a problem not only for the spouse and her active duty service member, but also indicates an upcoming problem with retention. When spouses want their service member to separate from the service, there are invariably going to be stressful consequences. That is where this spouse is. “The army has just created one big headache after another, and I can't wait for this nightmare to end.” While she “can’t wait” the next spouse says, “So I'm making plans to leave and hopefully convince my
husband to do the same.” She is at the planning stage. The next spouse is farther down the path. “If I had the power to take my husband out of the Army right now, I would.” Another echoes, “I now desire to leave all that is military related behind me as the sense of betrayal both personally and ethically, is too much.”

The next spouse is anxiously awaiting retirement and says, “The Army has worn on us both. The day he's out will be a big celebration…we are not complainers. We make lemonade out of lemons, but our time is nearly up.” Even more concerning is the switch to the plural pronoun “we” in the next two quotations. “We can't wait to get out of the Army.” As if the concern about retention wasn’t enough, the next spouse says that “we discourage others in joining the ARMY.” This is a recruiter’s nightmare. The next entry is no better. Not only will the army be facing retention challenges and current recruitment challenges, but, “I certainly will not encourage my sons to serve in this capacity.” This is a long term and endemic problem that may be generational if left as is.

Dis illusioned by hypocrisy.

Many spouses express the perception that only “lipservice” is given to the ideal of support for the army family. These spouses sense a disconnection between the official party line and what is practiced. This cuts close to the quick because, “We have found that Army leadership asks us (soldiers and families)to uphold and respect the Army Core Values but does not practice them.” The real bottom line comes down to the statement which is made time and time again that, “I have always heard that the army cares about families. I am yet to see that.” They have identified that, “I have also noticed that even though military leaders and the military itself constantly says that it cares about it's families their actions many times speak much louder than their words.” The sample includes example after example of what is seen as hypocrisy, but
what is of particular interest is the interesting turns of phrase used in this section. It seems as if these are practiced lines that have been rehearsed and oft repeated.

Five short remarks bear out the practiced nature of this rhetoric. Of the army leadership, it is noted that, “They really talk out of both sides of their mouths saying that they are family friendly, but yet invoke policies and such that are definitely unfriendly.” There is also, “Too much talk about being family friendly, but nothing to back it up.” Bitterness is exuded as this spouse exclaims, “The Army talks about how family is first but its a lie.” Unified in meaning, this spouse relates to us that, “The … slogan of family first is nothing short of an ongoing joke in this household.” Further, it is mentioned that, “…the army ‘talks the talk’ about supporting families and giving soldiers time with family, but they are not ‘walking the walk’.”

While there were plenty of short and pithy remarks, there were spouses who saw this as an opportunity to express themselves in a more verbose manner. The phrase “Family Time” clearly is loaded language to this population. The points that they make about the army “putting its time where its mouth is” are poignant.

The hours are helatious-sometimes going to work before kids are up and then getting home after kids are asleep. So here is a soldier who now is getting it from the work side in that there are not enough hours in the day, and then from the homefront--why are you not home at a more reasonable hour. You just came back from a years deployment.

Where is our family time.???

The selection which was selected to round out this subsection beautifully captures the ambivalence expressed by spouse after spouse. They seem to want to believe the good, but have seen the not-so-good too many times.
My only rub with the Army is how it preaches (at all levels) that it cares so deeply about family time. In the same breath, the leaders above my spouse always come up with mandatory 'fun' (yeah right!) things to do that suck up ALL of my spouse's free time. If they're really that damn concerned about our quality of life and expect us to accept long deployments (which wouldn't be a problem if I actually got to see my husband when he's here!), then stop requiring things of my spouse that require his undivided attention until 7 in the evening. We have a new baby and I'm sure my husband would love to spend time with her. Instead, he leaves the house @ 5:30AM and doesn't get home until after 6:30PM on a GOOD day. What kind of family time does that allow?????? Can any of you honestly justify that? Where's the incentive for him NOT to get a 9-5 job and live a normal life like most of the world. Don't get me wrong, we love the fact that we're defending the country and we're both very proud. If my husband chooses to make this a 20 year career, I fully support him. I'm just sick of being told that everyone cares about family time while at the same time scheduling 8 million events in the evening that take it away. It's total hypocrisy and I miss my husband even when he's home!

**Sacrifices made.**

The theme of sacrifice was even more prevalent than most other themes. To set the tone for this section are the words of one spouse, “The military way of life is extremely demanding on all family members, and at times extremely stressful. Both the service member and the family members make great sacrifices every day.” It seemed very important to these spouses that someone note that they have been through many challenges. In most cases, the sacrifices made by the spouse and the family were often put into a context that was almost self-effacing, and downplayed the hardship compared to their spouses’ happiness or the welfare of the people that
their spouses were helping. Many areas of sacrifice have been touched on in previous sections, as many of the sacrifices mentioned are instrumental in nature. Other sacrifices were mentioned regarding their own education and the impact on their own careers. The time children have missed with their active duty parent and the other sacrifices made by their children are by far the most commonly repeated concerns. Another notable element of these comments is the desire to create and show perspective. This is an element that was not immediately evident in other subsections.

As was heartily discussed under instrumental support, many spouses indicate that, money is not sufficient reason to serve. It is also pointed out that, “The pay is not up to par considering my husbands experience and level of education (BA in math and MBA)…” While comparisons are odious, they can also indicate priorities. “…We can pay NBA players and MLB players all this money, but the people that keep those people safe enough so they can play their games, dont even get a quarter of what they make in a year.” Pay and housing go hand in hand. The sense of humor of this spouse still shows through, even though she is discussing her sacrifice: “I may gripe about the moves and/or the housing (who thinks that one bathroom is adequate for a family of 5?) but they won't make me pressure my husband to end his Army career.”

Abundant responses dealt with educational and career implications to spouses. Most of these responses are succinct, such as “I was not satisfied with my educational opportunities and career opportunities,” and, “My career suffers to enhance my spouse's career.” A multitude of responses dealt with hindrances to their professional lives, as did the following spouse, “I … did give up job promotions repeatedly because it was 'time to move' AGAIN. Even military commanders want long-term 'local' people to fill their civil service positions because they know the 'military spouse' will be leaving. How hypocritical!” In addition to the inevitable loss of
salary associated with leaving one job to search for another, the next spouse raises the issue of the emotional costs of this process.

Personally, I find it very difficult to handle the emotional upheaval of looking for work at new duty stations. When a spouse tries to have a professional career, other than military or as a GS worker, it is next to impossible to do. I don't think there is an easy answer. It is just a sacrifice that must be made.

The same emotional tone comes from a spouse who reiterates how hard it is to sacrifice all that she has worked for a tone location, only to start over again. “… it takes time to find a job ( if there are any), less pay, by the time you have established yourself it's time to do it all over.”

For some, the sacrifice has been damaging to the sense of self. “I knew that I would be sacrificing a lot to marry into the Army, but I didn't realize that meant losing my identity as an intelligent, hard-working, independent woman.”

Many spouses who have parental responsibilities discuss the sacrifices they have made in their parenting roles, as well as the sacrifices they see being made by their children. The comparison to being a single parent was the most rampant sacrifice mentioned. “I guess being a military spouse means being alone and raising your kids on your own. I have 4 under 5 and it sure seems that way.” This perspective is seconded by too many spouses for this to be anything but endemic. This mom points out that as a military spouse, it “… feels like single parenting. It is very stressful and forces one to put her own goals on the backburner for the military. It is no wonder that military families have the highest rate of divorce and domestic violence.”

A corollary to the army spouse as single parent is that those army spouses have to act as both mother and father. In capital letters, this mother brings up that being in the Army, “is a WAY of life. It isn't always easy…we cope the best we can. .. We do the best we can as moms to be both
mom and dad but it's a tough job.” Again, it isn’t always easy, but, “Freedom isn't free, that I understand & my children do too.” Army spouses seem to be more emphatic about the sacrifices made by their families than to their own sacrifices.

In this section, explanations were offered as to how spouses deal with the psychological ramifications of making sacrifice. One spouse reports that, “I acknowledge that my husband was in the military when I married him and that he does not only belong to me and the children.” This is a spouse who justifies her sacrifice as sharing her husband. An understanding of the military axiom “mission first” is paramount to the next spouse. “We all, in my family, understand that the Army's needs and mission come first and for the legitimate cause we are ALL willing to make the sacrifice.” Some are motivated by a future orientation, considering the benefits associated with persevering through a difficult time to make it through to retirement. “I do not want him or his family to have made all of these sacrifices over these past 12 years in vain. We have already earned that retirement.” Other spouses minimize the idea that what they sacrifice is notable by offering, “Sacrifice is a necessity no matter what one does for a living.” The cost that these spouses pay pale in comparison to the benefits others will receive due to their sacrifice. “It was a difficult time for us… I also know that the people that he went to help live constantly in inhumane conditions. I can take a bad few years if it means a better life time for them.” In essence, these spouses do request some recognition of their sacrifice, but the majority of spouses seem willing to continue to sacrifice, as this spouse summarizes in her comment, “The Army need to accept and realize many spouses lose vast opportunities of advancing in life. They sacrificed time, goals, and family to support the soldier, as well as the children.”
Media and the Internet

A surprisingly few spouses make mention of the use of various media and the internet to gain information and to communicate with loved ones who are distant. Upon a close reading of these entries, it becomes clear that these spouses view the media and the internet as resources, tools, and even sometimes as enemies. It is important to preview these two sections with the explanation that spouses clearly identify these channels as exactly that – mere medium through which communication of support either happens or does not.

Media.

The entries which mention media are consistently negative. The spouses represented here unanimously speak of the media as invasive and problematic. This spouse highlights the major concerns expressed by most spouses when she writes,

As I said before, I agree with freedom of speech but I honestly think that the media takes advantage of that and reports a little too much and endanger soldier's lives. Also I do not allow my children to watch any type of report on what is going on in Iraq. I don't watch it either because it upsets me.

Many spouses felt that,

The Army leadership needs to be aware that media misinformation and biased reporting can cause emotional distress, especially to newer/younger family members. The integration of the media into the lower level units during Opn Iraqi Freedom seemed to help limit that problem a great deal and raised the credibility of the reporters somewhat.

Other spouses expressed that misinformation about the duration of deployments caused stress for them. About the “… length of deployments. Anything over 6 months is a morale buster. Period! The media reporting otherwise is pure propaganda.”
Many concerns, as indicated above, dealt with the perceived negative effects of the media on children.

The media was horrible and their coverage of the war was biased and did not show the same things that my husband and the guys saw in their unit. The saw things going well, and the Iraqis happy with US presence there. The media portrayed otherwise, and this troubled the children. Reporting that soldiers died was also extremely stressful for me and the children. Why can't they wait to say who died until they have names? That would spare us from wondering if it is our guy.

Another says, “Our children where stressed and the best advise I could give was be positive and don't watch the news with your kids, limit exposure.” The concern over media effects on children is evidenced by the many spouses who mention that they did not allow their children to see media coverage about the war. While these statements do not indicate how Army spouses constitute social support, the statements do indicate some of the reasons spouses need social support.

Internet.

The internet is used by many people in many ways to reach out for support. The Army spouse is no exception. From information gathering, to online groups, to emails, the spouses who are connected to the internet wanted to address some of the good, and some of the bad about it. One spouse explains that, she got no information other than what came through the internet and newspapers, while another points out that there is room for improvement as, “It would also be good if your websites were more user-friendly, and you offered more information on the web.” Some online groups also still have room for improvement, as evidenced by the following, “The FRG may be better coordinated and they keep us informed through the internet.”
Technology does present challenges to army families, and there are clearly some areas which still need to be improved upon. “Also it took us about 3 months to get our phone and internet hooked up here in Germany which was a major problem.” Another technology concern is related by a different spouse, “Also my husband says they have to pay for internet use while deployed to check email. That is uncalled for. They should not have to pay for nothing while deployed.” As emails are such an important means of communication (“E-mails were very important and they could write their dad.”), issues affecting technology clearly impact spouses considerably.

**Issues with Aspects of the Military Itself**

Fully one third of the responses considered fell into this large and encompassing category. Many spouses take issue with the way things are done in and by the military. These issues help to color the communication of spouses – these issues are a filter through which the military as a whole is seen in either a positive or, most often, negative light. It will be important to carefully sort through these issues with an eye toward rectifying problems and considering the recommendations made by these spouses. There is a wealth of knowledge to be gleaned from seeing what spouses identify as the day to day issues with the lifestyle they are experiencing.

These are issues that army spouses see as impacting them and their families. There are issues with specific leaders, and with leadership in general. The operational tempo is unprecedented in frequency and duration of deployments. Race, rank, and level of education still are documented as being divisive. Medical and mental health issues are overwhelmingly prevalent in these responses. Problems with the availability of childcare abound in these responses. Some spouses report issues with gaining citizenship, or discuss the difficulties in being a spouse for whom English is not their first language. The rate and equality of promotions
clearly concerns spouses, as do other issues that are cited as affecting their active duty spouse’s career longevity. Others are concerned with what happens in assignments that are Joint assignments or Attachments – those that are inter-service with other branches of the military, or with other Units within the Army. Many, many just want to express their gung-ho enthusiasm and “hoo-ah” attitude; while others specifically take the time to express gratitude to the Army, and to the survey-takers for giving them many opportunities, specifically the opportunity to have their voices heard. In that these responses do not, however, directly impact the construction or communication of social support by these spouses, they are outside of the purview of this dissertation.

Ten themes, ten areas of concern to the Army spouse, emerged from the close reading of the responses to the SAF V. As is obvious from these chapters, the responses of Army spouses are rich in content and deep in meaning. The implications of these themes to the field of communication, the construct of social support, and to the population of Army spouses will be considered in Chapter VI, Summary and Discussion.
Chapter VI: Summary and Discussion

As a support to the reader, the final chapter of this dissertation consists of a brief overview of the study, which includes a restatement of the research question, a review of the methodology, a brief summary of the results, and then a discussion of the results. The discussion of the results includes five general findings, the limitations of the current study, and implications for this researcher’s future research agenda.

Research Question

The driving force behind this dissertation was to answer the primary research question: How do Army spouses communicate and constitute social support? The thematic analysis of the data set was formed around questions such as the following. How do Army spouses generate a sense of well-being? What are the biggest hurdles to well-being faced by spouses? Which interpersonal relationships are important to that sense of well being? How do spouses draw on different sources of information and communication systems? Where do they turn to get information? How do they combine traditional and more advanced technological forms of communication to communicate with their support networks and spouses? What is the impact of demographic factors such as age, gender, race, rank of service member and time in service of the service member?

Review of Methodology

Thematic analysis was the best tool for this project since the focus of this study, the construction of social support in the army spouse population, is in its preliminary stages. The core of thematic analysis is full engagement in the text. The text for this dissertation was the open-ended survey responses from the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Science (ARI)’s Survey of Army Families V 2004/2005. The structure imposed by
the systemic lens of thematic analysis provided guidance, boundaries, and rigor in this analysis. Poring over the text in multiple iterations, the primary researcher developed a preliminary codebook. With the assistance of two external coders, the data set of 1,823 open-ended responses was divided by category into ten primary themes, which will be revisited in the next sections.

**Summary of the Results**

This summary is intended merely as a refresher, not as a comprehensive review of the prior chapter. In extremely truncated terms, the examination of the data set revealed the presence of ten themes, which radiate out from the heart of the research question: the level of support perceived (or lacking), the types of support perceived (and lacking), support providers, information, knowledge, Family Readiness (Support) Groups, consistency, attitude toward the military lifestyle, media and the internet, and issues with the military itself. These themes are provided here and briefly discussed in the next two paragraphs as a recall enhancement from the last two chapters.

While there was a large number of comments indicating that the level of support Army spouses receive is superb, there were many more who indicated that the level of support they receive is severely lacking. Spouses have both positive and negative things to report about three of the five types of social support (instrumental, emotional, and informational). The negative and positive comments in the belonging category are balanced. There are no examples of negative nurturing social support reported. For social support, army spouses turn to other army spouses, family, friends (both military friends and civilian friends), the military itself as an organization, their places of employment, and their churches. The accurate dissemination of information in a timely, easy to access manner, regardless of spousal deployment status and the
geographical location of the spouse, is reported as vital to the well being of the Army spouse. Knowledge of how to get to information in the military system is overall seen in terms of negative social support by a ratio of more than 3:1.

Family Readiness (Support) Groups are both loved and hated. There is very little middle ground. They are seen as good when they are effective, but considerable concern deals with the frequency with which they are not effective, and those situations where they are missing. Consistency is the next theme addressed. It is clear that while consistency in job security and social support are positive elements of the lifestyle of the army spouse, inconsistencies across time, assignment, location, and leadership outweigh the positives. There are many attitudes toward the military lifestyle expressed, including the desire to support each other, frustration with the military lifestyle, disillusionment with military hypocrisy, and a focus on sacrifices made. The spouses do make mention of the use of media and of the internet. The coverage of military matters by the media is seen as a challenge to be overcome. Comments about the use of the internet are few, but the few that exist seem to focus on the frustrations associated with technology not serving as it is expected to work. Issues with the military itself comprise a large section of the data, but only tangentially apply to this dissertation. These issues are a filter through which the military as a whole is seen in either a positive or, most often, negative light. While it is interesting to note, for example, that the army spouses often say “thank you” to the researchers for soliciting and listening to the spouse’s input, these issues with the military itself do not directly impact this dissertation. This dissertation has applied the construct of social support to a new population, and the construct has served its function well to shed light on the communication of army spouses.
Discussion of the Results

This is the section of this dissertation where the primary researcher’s own personal exposure to the army spouse lifestyle may be the most noticeable. The discussion of results is comprised of two subsections. The first focuses on five main findings of this dissertation. The second subsection unpacks and speaks to the themes which each directly address at least one of the original research questions.

Five findings.

There are five main findings that this researcher offers to the field of communication as the contribution of this dissertation. The first finding is that utilizing a pentad of emotional, informational, instrumental, belonging, and nurturing social support allowed for a legitimate assessment of social support, and that these five aspects seem to be necessary and sufficient to study social support. The second finding is that future focus group research of this population ought to contain (at least) the following elements to be thorough: consistency, hypocrisy, rank, and FRG reform. The third finding is that extrapolation of findings regarding social support to other civilian populations and to other military services might be acceptable if certain contingencies are taken into consideration. The fourth finding is that the field of communication can be of considerable assistance to others in training how to offer social support; in offering effective communication classes to the military dependent; and, in offering suggestions to the military leadership about the dissemination of information and interpersonal communication training. The fifth finding is that social support could be more adequately provided if the differences in culture between military member and military spouse were understood.
**Pentad of social support aspects.**

There can be no question from this sample that army spouses do constitute and receive support in all 5 of the ways identified in the Review of Literature. Using the pentad of emotional, informational, instrumental, belonging, and nurturing social support allowed for a legitimate assessment of social support; these five aspects seem to be necessary and sufficient to study social support. The closest attempt within the communication disciple to operationalize the aspects of support comes from Ong in 2005. Ong (2005) developed an otherwise thorough scale of social support to be used with intercultural sojourners. Absent from this scale is Weis’ (1974) aspect of nurturance. This researcher contends that to be of use to the study of the Military Family Culture, and likely others as well, Weis’ domain of nurturance must be readmitted to the pentad. As the reader may recall from the review of literature, Leavy (1983) expressed his concern that while most people know social support when it is seen, there was not a solid theoretical framework to build upon. It is hoped that this dissertation may add to the scaffolding of this construct within the field of communication.

**Focus group insights.**

Future focus group research of this population ought to contain (at least) the following elements if it hopes to be thorough: consistency, hypocrisy, rank, and FRG reform. As seen in the previous two chapters, these issues are evident and prevalent in the population of army spouses. These are issues that will not appear (in the same way) in civilian populations. These are some of the themes that seem to impact spouses the most in the construction and communication of social support, and as such, deserve attention in a focused manner.

Focus groups investigating social support in the army spouse community should start with some simple definitions, then move on to the following questions, and can gain in
specificity as time and resources allow: Do you receive the level of social support you would optimally desire? What prevents it if not? What helps you perceive social support? What types of social support do you perceive? Do you receive emotional social support? Informational social support? Instrumental social support? Belonging social support? Nurturing social support? Who are your support providers? Why do you turn to one instead of another? What information sources do you turn to? How do you decide where to turn for information? Do you feel that you have sufficient knowledge of the systems in place to offer you support? How could others be given that knowledge to help them? Please tell us about the good and that bad of Family Readiness (Support) Groups. What changes would you like to see implemented in regard to FRGs? Do you feel that the army is consistent in its support of you (and your family)? Are there inconsistencies in the Army lifestyle that you would like to see addressed? What is your overall attitude toward the military lifestyle? What factors go into that attitude? What media do you use? How do you use the media? How do you use computer mediated communication to gather social support? Do you have any issues with the military itself? How does rank impact any of your answers above this, or any other aspect of social support? What are the worst things about your military spouse experience? What are the best things about your military spouse experience? What advice do you have for new army spouses?

*Sharing with other groups.*

Extrapolation of findings regarding social support to other civilian populations and to other military services might be acceptable if certain contingencies are taken into consideration on a case by case basis. For example, applying research from the population of army spouses to the spouses from other branches of the service should require minimal adaptation for jargon, some lifestyle differences, and some differences in deployment experiences. Applying research
to the spouses of civilian contractors, FBI agents, or CIA agents would involve greater
reflections on the similarities and differences between the populations. Applying research to the
spouses of corporations who travel frequently could again be logical, but the cultures would have
to be carefully compared and contrasted.

The finding that many army spouses find support by nurturing each other; that they gain
support from the sense of family born of necessity with one’s colleagues – these are valuable
insights for many populations. The spouses of police officers could follow the lead of the army
and offer meetings for information and emotional support. Knowledge gained from this group
about how spouses deal with medical and mental recovery could be extrapolated to non-military
sectors. The families of cancer survivors or heart patients could use information delivery
mechanisms similar to those of army spouses. The strengths exhibited by this population may be
able to bolster others. In short, what helps one group may be able to help another, saving larger
and divergent populations the need to “re-invent the wheel.” The same five aspects of social
support should apply across population, but the findings about to whom individuals for support
may or may not be similar. It makes intuitive sense that FBI spouses could best supported by
other FBI spouses, and that CEO’s spouses could best support other the spouses of other CEOs,
but those are not tested assumptions.

*The role of the field of communication.*

The field of communication can be of considerable assistance to others in training how to
offer social support; in offering effective communication classes to the military dependent; and,
in offering suggestions to the military leadership about the dissemination of information and
interpersonal communication training. As the communication discipline gains ever more insight
into social support, scholars from the field should be at the forefront in establishing programs
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that train others how to offer social support. The typical army spouse has not been vetted for a leadership role, and has not been trained to lead or offer social support, and yet others are depending and relying on her. An ideal audience for early iterations of this training would be the population of army spouses, and those who would like to offer support to them. Army spouses are already attuned to the idea of support, and are looking for better ways to support their communities. While this kind of coaching would be a new avenue for the discipline, it is well within the area of expertise that is being developed.

It is also well within the communication discipline’s area of expertise to offer effective communication classes to the military dependent. Interpersonal, group, computer mediated, family, organizational and intercultural communication all offer insights that could be combined into a seminar or multiple session class. These could be conducted by individuals in a face-to-face format, or could be produced and distributed via webinars or other technologies utilized for distance education. Even fairly basic communication theory could deliver large impacts to the community of army spouses.

To start the last of these three goals for the field of communication, Appendix F compiles the suggestions made by the spouses in this study which it behooves the discipline to bring to the attention of the ARI. If spouses see that the Army is able and willing to act upon their suggestions, the army’s credibility may be enhanced to those same spouses who otherwise expressed concerns about hypocrisy from those in command. The communication field’s experts in public relations and advertising can certainly offer suggestions to the Army hierarchy about how to publicize the benefits and programs available to the army spouse. Information flow experts can also assist military leadership by analyzing what is being done well, and where improvements can be made. At a minimum, the knowledge in the army spouse community that
army leadership is trying to improve the flow of information will proffer support to them. Interpersonal communication classes offered by communication scholars to the army leadership could also prove invaluable. Knowing the themes of concern that have become clear through this dissertation, as well as the intercultural insights provided in the next subsection, ought allow scholars a good point of origin for aiding communication.

*The military culture and the military family culture.*

It was in the reading of this spouse’s comment that the primary researcher’s suspicion was confirmed. There is a difference between the mindset of active duty army members and that of the army spouse (italics added).

… [T]he commanders of the rear detachment… always treated us like a bunch of weak, teary-eyed women. Some of us Army wives wanted to feel that we were a part of the mission too. And that we were not only a woman who provided support to her soldier in every way but that we were soldiers too. And that is some of the problem here. *We are civilians married to soldiers. How can we fully understand the soldier’s mind? Who can train us to think like a soldier and be able to support our husbands in a more meaningful way, not only during a deployment, but during his short or long term military career? I believe that if someone could give us, Army wives, that kind of training to be able to develop a soldier’s mind, attitude, beliefs, pride, heart, we would be able to cope with deployments in a total different attitude and strength. And the training would need to be done by a professional speaker, someone who can really inspire us.*

The active duty military member has been acculturated into what this researcher is labeling the Military Culture. This happens in Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training where the new soldier is totally immersed for months in an intense experience of the most
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extreme version of the culture. To fully and definitively describe this culture is premature as this study does not directly address this question. However, as grounded theory allows for the formation of theory in stages, this researcher offers this tentative description, which should be further investigated through questionnaire and focus group studies. The Military Culture, with subcultures for each branch of service, as well as Reservists and Guardsmen, is a collectivist, low-context, monochronic, high-power distance, masculine, low need for certainty, high tolerance of ambiguity culture which, in matters of military technology are early adopters, while in many other ways are late adopters.

Military Culture has its own language of acronyms and jargon. Artifactual communication is of utmost importance in uniform appearance and insignia. Symbolism is rich in tradition, with banners and unit crests being held in a state of near-reverence. Nonverbal Communication is vital in military bearing. Personal space is very small to non-existent. The established and iterated values of the culture are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. Internalization and application of these values can be enforced via the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

This researcher would also like to put forth what she is terming the Military Family Culture. Questionnaire and focus group studies are also called for to expand upon and verify the elements of this culture. The Military Family Culture, which has subcultures of spouses and children, has no official acculturation process. In fact, while spouses have no official acculturation process, military dependent children are encultured into this culture through daycare programs, schools, and living arrangements while they grow up. The Military Family Culture is more individualistic than the Military Culture, but is more collectivistic than the civilian sector. It is a higher context culture than the Military Culture, where social niceties are
expected. It is strongly polychromic as military spouses often rely on multi-tasking to handle the myriad of responsibilities they face. The power-distance of the Military Family Culture is still a high-power distance culture, but while power in the Military Culture is based on legitimate rank, in the Military Family Culture the distances are based on less formal (and often resented) measures. The Military Family Culture is unarguably feminine. Its members have a higher need for certainty and less tolerance of ambiguity than the Military Culture. They are willing to be early adopters if a given technology will assist them in their responsibilities and connectedness with their military member or extended family.

While the Military Family Culture doesn’t have its own set of acronyms, the members do need to be bi-lingual and able to code-switch with the lingo of the Military Culture. The members of the Military Family Culture must understand the artifactual and symbolic communication of the Military Culture, and abide by the expectations of their own culture. Personal space distances vary within the Military Family Culture, and territoriality and the decoration of personal space is often limited when living in on-post housing. While UCMJ does not apply to members of the Military Family Culture, there is widespread acknowledgement that violations of the law by military dependents reflect poorly on the active duty member, and can even result in disciplinary action against that sponsor. Researchers who will carry on these studies must not forget that army spouses live in a large, bureaucratic organization the likes of which most people do not live with. This type and size of bureaucracy is simply unaccounted for by most interpersonal communication theory. The sheer size and magnitude of bureaucracy and the support mechanisms available to the army spouse are a factor which cannot be ignored. It is likely that no other population can show the effect of organizational culture on a population so vividly as the army spouse population, which in itself is a sizeable reason to study the culture.
Interactions between members of the Military Culture and the Military Family Culture are Intercultural Communication, and should be treated as such. This is spoken to by the following spouse, “I think I speak on behalf of several military spouses, that the system and its priorities neglect the families more than anyone in the upper Chains of Commands know. Thanks for listening. Have a Great Day.” Any attempts to offer social support from the Military Culture and from the Civilian sector both need to take this cultural dimension seriously as they plan for support measures in order to be the most efficacious, as is indicated by studies on the impact of culture on social support (Goodwin & Plaza, 2000; Feng & Burleson, 2005). The communication discipline is well placed to understand these differences, to understand how to offer social support, to be able to offer training in these ideas, and to be the professional speakers that the wife mentioned at the beginning of this section requested.

Unpacking the themes.

The second half of the discussion section unpacks the ten themes of the thematic analysis of the study, and looks back to the secondary research questions.

Level of support perceived.

This theme addresses the question, “How do Army spouses constitute social support?” What do army spouses think of when they think of receiving support? What do they count as support when they quantify whether or not they are receiving sufficient support? It makes sense that anyone could always feel more supported, and that spouses could always answer that their support networks could do better. These responses do indicate that some support is getting through. The primary researcher was forewarned to expect more complaints than praises in these responses, as “the squeaky wheel gets the grease.” Even given a human propensity to complain when one couldn’t be bothered to praise, these surveys reveal a much
larger, much more verbose, and more emotional contingent of respondents who perceive that the level of support they receive is severely lacking. For some, this is so prevalent that they indicate that they feel support is non-existent. There is still, clearly, room for improvement.

The theory of social support reception does indicate that it is the perception of social support, not the actual support itself, which is most important. Those who wish to support spouses need to understand how the spouse perceives support. This entails understanding them more thoroughly. This researcher argues that this includes applying theories of culture to this population. This is possibly one of the largest contributions the academy can bring to the army spouse - knowing and understanding the Military Family Culture. Once this culture is described and defined, the academy will be able to do the same for the military culture itself. With these steps, one will be able to distinguish Military Family Culture from the culture of the military itself. In explaining the differences in culture to the bureaucracy who make decisions about what the spouses need, the academy will be able to help the leadership make changes in the provision of social support that the spouses will actually perceive. If both spouses and leadership speak the same “support language” it will be communicated more effectively.

**Types of support perceived/lacking.**

This theme addresses: “What are the biggest hurdles to well-being faced by spouses?” and “How do Army spouses constitute social support?”

The biggest outcry came in terms of the hurdle of negative informational support. This is the most substantial hurdle identified. Many of these spouses do not believe that they are informed correctly, consistently, and/or sufficiently. They need more information. Considering the tremendous levels of uncertainty which come with the lifestyle, to ask that that uncertainty be
counteracted by accurate, trustworthy, complete and timely information does not seem unreasonable.

There is no realistic way to provide better support in all five ways (emotional, informational, instrumental, belonging, and nurturing social support) to all people all the time, so prioritization of efforts is vital. Improving information systems should be one of the most cost effective ways to improve the quality of life for the most spouses, in the most timely manner. Helping the army find ways to more effectively communicate information is a goal that the communication discipline can assist the army in achieving. Additionally, finding and publicizing ways to allow nurturing to occur would give spouses a voice and an active role in helping themselves, while also helping others. Instrumental support is vital as a back-up in emergency situations, but as there are already programs in place in most scenarios, better knowledge and information sharing about them is likely sufficient to allow the perception of better instrumental support. A sense of belonging (and emotional support) can come from simple, everyday acts. Posting ideas on line or otherwise publicizing “100 random acts of inclusion and kindness you can do for your local army spouse” would provide guidance on how to make these ideas a reality. Ensuring better contact information for all spouses from entry through relocation would prevent so many from falling through the cracks. When researchers ask for their spousal input in forums such as this, or in study groups, this is also perceived as supportive.

Support providers.

This theme addresses the question, “Which interpersonal relationships are important to that sense of well being?”

Who spouses turn to seems to be personality and situation dependent, based on whether they turn to other army spouses, family, friends, the military itself, their places of employment or
their churches. Making sure that spouses have access to all of these desired options seems to be the surest way to improve access to social support. The role of the communication discipline in regards to this theme is to find ways to make communication easier when spouses are geographically separated from their sources of support. The relationship between having responsibility for others, either felt or imposed, at the same time as desiring support yourself, demonstrates the complexity of social support as the literature discusses in the context of responsibility and reciprocity.

**Information.**

This theme addresses “What are the biggest hurdles to well-being faced by spouses?” and “Where do they turn to get information?”

As mentioned just above, information dissemination is crucial, and is the biggest hurdle army spouses identified. They need more and better ways to get information. There were many mentions of the perception that it is not a good idea to depend on the active duty member to provide information to the spouse. There are a plethora of reasons explaining why the active duty member may not fulfill his role of information conduit. Similarly, FRGs cannot be the only place the spouse has to “go to,” since their efficacy as transmitters of information is suspect in some scenarios. Direct communication to the army spouse has to become a priority.

**Knowledge.**

This theme addresses the question, “How do spouses draw on different sources of information and communication systems?”

Many spouses do not know the range of support mechanisms and services available to them. Currently, spouses depend on traditional sources of support, such as those mentioned above. Since army spouses face unique stressors, they should also have unique support
mechanisms. While the support mechanisms may be there, if spouses don’t know about the options available, this does them no concrete good. “Welcome to the support mechanisms available to you as an army spouse” packets could be given as a “wedding gift” from each post to each new bride. “Welcome to the support mechanisms available to you at this post as an army spouse” packets could be handed to each spouse as the family moves to each new post. Online resources are available, but they are not always clear and easy to access, nor are they publicized. If mediated channels are used, real people must be assigned to follow up and help. After 6 months or so at a new post, there ought be some form of follow up to ensure that support information wasn’t misplaced in the piles of new paperwork. There should be follow up to see if any questions have developed since that time. This accountability step is vital to verify the information flow.

**Family readiness (support) groups.**

This theme addresses, “How do army spouses communicate social support?” and “Where do they turn to get information?”

A lack of clear cut and well articulated goals leads to confusion – what is the purpose of a Family Readiness Group? Is it a social group? Is it an information dissemination device? Spouses walk away from these meetings with unmet expectations. Often the leaders are not trained in how to run meetings, or how to counsel. The military should offer, or even mandate, training sessions to the FRG leaders. A lesson here could be learned from the Boy Scouts of America. They publish agendas on a monthly basis for leaders to follow which the leaders can then modify and send out in advance of meetings. If an agenda specified set times for crisis support, social interaction, complaint sessions, and information dissemination, spouses would know what to expect, and no one element of the meeting could overrun the other purposes.
When it is possible, it would be ideal for there to be time and space for families who have younger children to participate more easily by having older teens as child-care providers, or at least as entertainers in the back half of the room with quiet activities. There is a strong motion presented within the data that FRGs should let those who want to lead, lead, regardless of rank of spouse. That is an idea which should at least be addressed. Another recommendation is to mandate that at every post there should be a post-wide hired on consultant, who is also able to help with individual companies’ meetings at request. This should afford a higher level of consistency. Consistency needs to be higher for spouses who already deal with so much uncertainty in their lives. They need stability across assignments, across time, and across situation.

Consistency.

This theme addresses the question, “How do Army spouses generate a sense of well-being?”

Cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable mental state based on inconsistency. To relieve this inconsistency will decrease dissonance, and hence, increase a sense of well-being. FRGs being consistent will be a major help, as will information flow improvement. The majority of changes that have happened across time were mentioned as positive. Changes have come to provide more support to the army spouse. Consistency across assignments is not the reality for most spouses. More advanced knowledge that there will be changes based on the military assignment and based on the location of the assignment will at least help spouses prepare for the differences which cannot be minimized. Inconsistency across leadership, however, should be able to be minimized. There are leadership style differences that are individual and those differences can be beneficial, but the spouse should not have to fear
differences in the level of support she will receive under a new leader. Officer training can and should be adjusted to address this issue.

**Attitude toward the military lifestyle.**

This theme addresses, “How do Army spouses generate a sense of well-being?”

A sense of well-being comes from a sense of consistency between values and actions. Army spouses value the work their spouses perform. When spouses act in ways that support their active duty military member, they can experience a sense of well-being. They expect nothing less from the community around them, and from military leadership. Army spouses, on the whole, would prefer to support one another than to have their cohort suffer. Spouses would like the ability to help each other, while still balancing their own families’ needs.

Initial adaptation to the military lifestyle can be very difficult, and much is asked of soldiers who are early in their careers. That also means that the spouse is new to the spouse lifestyle. Finding ways to help them refresh from that intensive time (before they become frustrated) as they transition to mid and late career stresses is important. A more relaxed and positive outlook from the more senior spouses will have a large trickle-down impact on the incoming spouses, who will then see positive examples of leadership coming from entities like FRGs.

Making the message of the importance of family more tangible to spouses will strengthen morale. While there are things about the mission that the Army cannot change, when mission impacts family, every possible option should be considered, and considered in a highly visible manner. If families see that leadership is, in fact, concerned with family, even if they can’t decide in favor of the family this-specific-time, they will see that the leadership understands that this is an important issue. And, when the Unit does something that is family friendly, reminding
the spouses that the final decision was made because of the importance of family, more positives will help counterbalance the negative times. Since negatives like deployments cannot be avoided, they need to highlight family-positive decisions.

Most spouses seem to recognize that sacrifices come with the military lifestyle. Small acknowledgements from leadership and from other spouses would go a long way toward making those sacrifices seem more worthwhile. These acknowledgements do not need to come in the form of expensive programs, but could be verbalizations of thanks or written thank you notes. Since many spouses highlighted the sacrifices made by their children, more programs aimed at showing appreciation to the military child also seem like a way to make a noticeable difference.

*Media and the internet.*

This theme addresses the question, “How do army spouses communicate social support?” This theme also superficially addresses, “How do they combine traditional and more advanced technological forms of communication to communicate with their support networks and spouses?”

The lack of responses indicating media and technology as vital aspects of the military lifestyle is, frankly, surprising. Before taking any actions based on this finding, the researcher recommends that three steps be taken. First, researchers ought to use surveys with questions directly aimed at this element of communication. Secondly, since technology advances so quickly, a seemingly minor amount of time passage can mean that entirely new options are available which were not even included. For example, when this survey was completed in 2004, MySpace social networking site had only been launched a year before, and FaceBook was not yet even open to the public (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Thirdly, researchers should ask general, as well as specific questions, as this may be more accurate than using keyword searches.
Issues with aspects of the military itself.

Spouses have raised concerns ranging from mild to severe with specific aspects of the military lifestyle. There will always be problems and concerns in every lifestyle. The military may have more problems and concerns than other lifestyles, but each of these issues does highlight some of the challenges that are unique to the military lifestyle. Betterment in any of these areas might increase the quality of life for spouses, but other problems will likely take their place on the list, as is common to any lifestyle. Future studies aimed at assisting spouses with these individual concerns could use this study as a justification to look at communication’s relationship with military leadership, inter-service postings, the operational Tempo of the military culture, and, how issues like race, rank, and education interact in the population. Other issues raised centered around education, medical access and care, mental health issues and childcare. Matters of citizenship and language, as well as the rate of promotions, are also addressed in this data, as are issues which affect the service-member’s longevity in the career. Overall, spouses expressed a “Hoo-ah” attitude, as well as gratitude at being given the chance to participate in this survey.

One remaining research question.

As to the remaining question, “What is the impact of demographic factors such as age, gender, race, rank of service member and time in service of the service member?,” demographics, of course, colored the findings, and were specifically addressed in the background section of this dissertation. These demographic factors are important as this author establishes the “Military Family Culture.” Updating demographics such as (Harrell, 2000a), (Westhuis & Fafara, 2002), and (Harrell, Lim, Castaneda, & Golinelli, 2004), the SAFV found that, as of 2005, the military spouse is by definition, married, while females of the same age groups are not
as likely to be married. In the civilian population, only 54.1% of adults are married (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). Also, the military spouse is more likely to be female (96%, whereas in the civilian sector, this number is approximately 50/50) (SAFV Summary, 2005). The military spouse is younger than their counterparts in the civilian sector, who would be the “average aged individual.” The army spouse, on the other hand, is, on average, 32 years old (SAFV Summary, 2005). The military spouse is much more likely to have children living at home with them. Of all spouses, 79% say they have dependent children, while the percentage of households headed by a married couple who had children under 18 living with them declined to 21% in 2010 (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010b). For the military spouse, a racial breakdown is within 2% of the national demographics (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a). Of the spouses in the army, 64% have been married for less than 10 years, whereas only 59.5% of married females in the general population have been married for less than 10 years (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2005). A majority of army spouses have completed high school or have some additional education (71%), whereas just over 80% of the general population has a high school diploma or equivalent. Three percent more army spouses have a bachelor’s or higher education than does the general population (SAFV Summary, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010a).

In order to fully understand the results of this or any other study based on the military spouse, the Military Family Culture must be defined and understood. This study provides the groundwork for that culture, but more specific culture work will be required. There seems to be sufficient support here for the belief that the Military Family Culture is different from the overall Military Culture. It is this researcher’s belief that until leadership within the military culture
recognizes those differences, and starts to learn to account for those differences in its provision of social support, that the perception of social support by spouses will not increase.

**The Limitations of the Current Study**

The data analyzed were from a self-selected sample of survey respondents. Therefore, generalizability to the population of Army spouses is not justified, nor is generalizability to spouses of the other services. While there are insights gained into other populations, such as the children and parents of military members, as well as to the military members themselves, the actual findings of how army spouses construct and communicate social support are not inherently able to be applied with a broad brush. The findings are also set in a chronological context which is ever progressing. These are limitations of this dissertation. This study tells the story of those army spouses who wanted it told.

**Implications for a Research Agenda**

As this project was undertaken, there were no studies in the communication discipline applying this construct to the population of Army Spouses. Since the inception of this study, the continuation of world events has highlighted the need to understand how to provide support for these spouses, some of whom have active duty service member spouses who are on their seventh or eighth deployment to an active theater of war. The official biography of First Lady Michelle Obama on the White House website indicates that supporting military families is first on her list of issues close to her heart (First Lady, 2011). The presence of multiple panels at the National Communication Association every year since the beginning of this dissertation highlights that even greater attention has been given to this population, and that it is warranted. There is now a small but dedicated core of researchers who meet annually to discuss the status of current research in this area. These researchers represent interests from the Interpersonal, Intercultural,
Family, Applied, Computer Mediated, and Organizational Divisions. A dedicated special edition of the Applied Communication Journal is currently being planned, as these researchers rally around military spouses to help provide applicable insights.

There are many extensions of this research. These aforementioned scholars agree that issues of access must be addressed. Drawing connections between, and finding contrasts within, the different branches of service has been recommended. It is recommended that the themes garnered here be used to create an instrument to gather insights that are tailored specifically to the construct of social support in this particular population. The time that has passed since the beginning of this study, and the continuing high operational tempo, will allow for a longitudinal study. Dialectical Tension, Relational Maintenance, Relational Continuity, Resiliency, and Family Stressor measures may also be applied to research in this area. Finding ways to apply insights from this population to the civilian sector and to other high stress lifestyles is also a goal of this research agenda. The one insight that this researcher is the most passionate about is to establish that there is a definable military culture, which can be studied as any other culture. There are ample data within this current set to begin to support that claim.
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Recommended Web Sites:

http://www.armywives.com/

http://www.lovingyou.com/content/groups/military/

http://www.cinchouse.com/

http://www.ringsurf.com/netring?ring=mssn;action=list (all accessed 2/3/06).
WHY THIS SURVEY?
The 2004 Survey of Army Families V collects information on family member attitudes about the Army way of life and the well-being of Army families. Similar to the 1987 Survey of Army Families, 1991 Survey of Army Families II, 1995 Survey of Army Families III, and 2001 Survey of Army Families IV, it also will track trends in the characteristics of Army families, identify new and emerging family issues, and supplement other studies on Army families. In addition, recent Army multiple deployments may have changed the needs of Soldiers and their family members. These changes need to be identified.

WHY SHOULD I PARTICIPATE?
The Army leadership wants to know what it’s like to “walk a mile in your shoes.” Army leaders use the results of family surveys to make plans, assess policies, and evaluate program operations and outcomes. Army agencies and commands want information from the survey so they can respond better to family needs. In addition, Army spouses have identified family matters that need to be studied throughout the Army. We encourage you to use the "COMMENTS" sheet (page 15) to provide additional information and tell us about family matters/issues important to you.

WILL I BE IDENTIFIED?
Your responses to the survey will not be tracked back to you. Only persons involved in collecting or preparing the information for analysis of the data will have access to completed survey questionnaires. Only group statistics will be reported. Your written comments will be kept anonymous.

AM I ELIGIBLE TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY?
Only non-military spouses of Active duty soldiers are being asked to complete this survey. The Army family issues affecting members of dual military married couples and single parents require different, special surveys in order to address matters unique to these families.

If you are not eligible to complete the survey, please indicate why by marking the appropriate box below. Please return the survey in the enclosed Business Reply Mail envelope. No postage is required.

- Neither my spouse nor I am on Active duty with the U.S. Army.
- Both my spouse and I am on Active duty with the U.S. Army or the U.S. Armed Forces.
- I am not currently married to an Active duty Soldier.

WHO CAN I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?
The 2004 Survey of Army Families V is sponsored by the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC). CFSC will be responsible for distribution of the results and findings of the survey. The Army Personnel Survey Office of the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences is conducting the survey. For more information, contact:

U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center
ATTN: CFSC-SF
4700 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22302-4419
Telephone: (703) 691-7438
DSN 791-7438
E-mail: MWRResearch@CFSC.army.mil

U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences
ATTN: DAPE-ARI-PS
2511 Jefferson Davis Highway
Arlington, VA 22202-3926
Telephone: (703) 692-7877
DSN 332-7877
E-mail: ARI_ARSO@hqda.army.mil

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**MARKING INSTRUCTIONS**

**GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**
- This is not a test, so take your time.
- Select answers you believe are most appropriate.
- Use a blue or black pen.
- Please PRINT where applicable.
- Place an "X" in the appropriate box or boxes.

**Marking all that apply**

**Marking numbers**

**Marking all that apply**

**Using a common scale for more than one question**

**Selecting only one response**

Sometimes you will be asked to "MARK ALL THAT APPLY." When this instruction appears, you may mark more than one answer.

**EXAMPLE:**

Other than currently being married to a Soldier on Active duty, what types of experiences have you had with the military? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.

- Served on Active duty
- Served/serving with National Guard/Reserves
- Child of parent(s) in the military service
- Previously married to a military service member

Sometimes you will be asked to "MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH" to answer a number of different questions.

**EXAMPLE:**

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

- Level of support deployed Soldiers receive from the American people
- Level of support deployed Soldiers receive from the American media
- Reception of returning deployed Soldiers by the American people

**Using a common scale for more than one question**

**Selecting only one response**

Sometimes you will be asked to "MARK ONE." When this instruction appears, you may mark only one answer.

**EXAMPLE:**

Where are you currently living? MARK ONE.

- Alaska/Hawaii
- Continental U.S. (CONUS)
- Europe
- Korea
- Other location outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS)

(Please list Question No. and "Other location" on the "Comments" sheet on page 15.)
1. Where are you currently living? MARK ONE.
   - Alaska/Hawaii
   - Continental U.S. (CONUS)
   - Europe
   - Korea
   - Other location outside the continental U.S. (OCONUS) (Please list Question No. and “Other location” on the “Comments” sheet on page 15.)

2. Where are you and your spouse living?
   - Together, at the same location
   - Together, but my spouse is currently deployed
   - Apart, at separate locations

3. As of today, how many months have you been living in your current geographic location (the vicinity of the Army post/installation/area where you are living)?
   - Less than 1 month
   - [ ] NO. OF MONTHS

4. How far do you live from the nearest military installation or the one you use most?
   - I live on-post
   - 10 miles or less
   - 11-25 miles
   - 26 or more miles
   - Do not know

5. In which type of housing do you currently live?
   - On-post government housing
   - Off-post government housing
   - Off-post (own)
   - Off-post (rent)
   - Other (Please list on page 15.)

6. How satisfied are you with your current housing?
   - Very satisfied
   - Satisfied
   - Neutral
   - Dissatisfied
   - Very dissatisfied

7. How many Permanent Change of Station (PCS or official Army) moves have YOU made during the last 3 years? IF YOU HAVE NOT MADE A PCS MOVE IN THE LAST 3 YEARS, MARK “NONE.”
   - None
   - 1 PCS move
   - 2 PCS moves
   - 3 PCS moves
   - 4 or more PCS moves

GO TO SECTION 2, QUESTION 10 ON PAGE 4.

8. If your spouse requested a sponsor for your most recent PCS move, which of the following did the sponsor do for your family? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
   - Does not apply; we did not request one.
   - Does not apply; we had no sponsor.
   - Does not apply; we were assigned a sponsor but he/she did nothing at all to help us.
   - Greeted us upon arrival
   - Helped orient us with the community
   - Helped orient us with the installation
   - Accompanied us to ACS
   - Helped Soldier with military in-processing
   - Other important type of help (Please specify on page 15.)

9. For your most recent PCS move, how satisfied were you with the following Army relocation services? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.
   - IF A SERVICE HAS NOT BEEN USED, MARK THE FIRST COLUMN.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
<th>Not used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer program giving location</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information (such as the installation home page, SITES)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual/group relocation counseling and information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome packet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance from sponsor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending closet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official installation orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unit orientation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas orientation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### SECTION 2: FAMILY SEPARATIONS

10. Is your spouse currently away from home because of... MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
   - [ ] Does not apply; my spouse is not away
   - [ ] extended TDY?
   - [ ] schooling?
   - [ ] training exercise?
   - [ ] a deployment (e.g., Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF))?  
   - [ ] unaccompanied tour?
   - [ ] other reason? (Please list on page 15.)

11. During the last 36 months, how many months has your spouse been away from home for other military reasons (including assignments, training, TDY, etc.)?
   - [ ] Less than 1 month
   - [ ] NO. OF MONTHS AWAY

12. During the last 36 months, what was the longest single period of time (consecutive months) your spouse was away from home?
   - [ ] Less than 1 month
   - [ ] CONSECUTIVE MONTHS

13. How much of a problem would you have coping if your spouse had to go away on an Army assignment, such as a deployment, for... MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No problem coping</th>
<th>Slight problem coping</th>
<th>Moderate problem coping</th>
<th>Serious problem coping</th>
<th>Very serious problem coping</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than a month?</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 or 2 months?</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 to 6 months?</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 months to a year?</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over a year?</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a mission overseas of undetermined length?</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
<td>[ ] [ ] [ ] [ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If your spouse were to be deployed for a long period of time, you would have sole responsibility for some things you may not usually handle.

14. If your spouse were to be deployed for a long period of time, would you have the following? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

   - [ ] A Power of Attorney for you to act on behalf of your spouse
   - [ ] A Power of Attorney for someone else to act on behalf of your spouse
   - [ ] An up-to-date Will for your spouse
   - [ ] An up-to-date Will for you
   - [ ] A financial plan to meet emergencies

15. There are many documents and procedures which are unique to the Army.

   Do you know the following? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

   - [ ] Your spouse's military pay entitlements
   - [ ] How to read your spouse's LES (Leave and Earnings Statement)
   - [ ] How your spouse's pay entitlements are handled (sent to bank, allotments, etc.)
   - [ ] Your total family financial obligation (bills, loans, amounts, due dates)
   - [ ] Insurance entitlements (military and civilian) in the event of your spouse's injury or death
   - [ ] Location of insurance policies/other important documents
   - [ ] U.S. Army casualty notification procedures
   - [ ] Who contacts your spouse when there is a unit alert/emergency to report to work
   - [ ] Procedures for contacting your spouse in event of an emergency
SECTION 3: THE ARMY AND YOU

The ARMY FAMILY TEAM BUILDING (AFTB) program provides training and information to family members.

16. Have you participated in AFTB? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
- Yes, I attended Level I Classes: Overview of AFTB, Chain of Command, Mission Impact, etc.
- Yes, I attended Level II Classes: Relationship Building, Effective Leadership, etc.
- Yes, I attended Level III Classes: Listening, Building Self-Esteem, etc.
- No

17. How effective has AFTB been in helping you and your family adjust to Army life?
- Does not apply; I have not participated in AFTB
- Very effective
- Effective
- Neither effective nor ineffective
- Ineffective
- Very ineffective

A Family Readiness Group is an organization of family members, volunteers, and Soldiers belonging to a unit that provides mutual support and assistance, and timely, accurate and relevant Army information.

18. Below are some questions about Family Readiness Groups (FRGs). Please answer the questions for your FRG during the last 12 months. MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the FRG in your spouse's unit active?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you participated in FRG activities by attending meetings?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you participated in FRG activities by serving as an FRG leader?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is your FRG providing family readiness training?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the FRG in your spouse's unit well run?</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. During the last 12 months, why have you NOT participated in an FRG? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
- Does not apply; I do participate.
- There is no FRG at this location.
- Never heard about an FRG at this location.
- Don’t have time.
- Don’t feel that I need to participate.
- Times/hours FRGs meet are not convenient.
- Locations of FRG meetings are not convenient.
- Lack of transportation.
- FRG members are not my peer group.
- Want to keep my personal life separate from the military.
- I feel uncomfortable being in group settings.
- I am not comfortable with the current FRG leaders/members.
- I am not comfortable with spouses whose spouses are of higher/lower ranks than my spouse.
- My spouse did not encourage me to participate.
- Other reason (Please list on page 15.)

20. How would you rate how well your FRG has helped you and your family and other families in your unit?
- Does not apply; the unit does not have an FRG.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other families in your unit</th>
<th>You and your family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
21. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Undecided
- Agree
- Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My spouse has kept/keeps me well informed about the Army.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I keep myself well informed about the Army.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable dealing with Army agencies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel comfortable dealing with the Army medical system while my spouse is away</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At this location, I know where to go or how to get emergency assistance, if needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army civilian employees who deal primarily with Army families treat them with the appropriate amount of respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Army civilian employees who deal primarily with Soldier treat family members with the appropriate amount of respect.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. During the last 12 months, how well have you managed the following? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting daily household tasks done</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining needed transportation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining needed communication (e.g., telephone, email, Internet)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working at your paid job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to find a job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to quit a job or schooling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household repairs, yard work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car maintenance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pet care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping (for necessities)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling financial matters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your family having enough money to meet expenses, pay bills, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranging for child care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring child(ren) do schoolwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child(ren)'s participation in after-school activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating in activities at your child(ren)'s school (school events, PTA, Parent-Teacher conferences)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of child(ren) at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplining/handling child(ren)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of child(ren)'s health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of your own health</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handling your own loneliness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing your regular volunteer work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing additional volunteer work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining safety/security of your home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of extended family members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 4: YOUR BACKGROUND

23. Are you female or male?
   - Female
   - Male

24. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin or ancestry (of any race)? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
   - No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish ancestry
   - Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
   - Yes, Puerto Rican
   - Yes, Cuban
   - Yes, other Hispanic/Spanish

25. What is your race? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
   - American Indian or Alaska Native (e.g., Eskimo, Aleut)
   - Asian (e.g., Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese)
   - Black or African American
   - Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (e.g., Samoan, Guamanian, Chamorro)
   - White

26. What is the highest level of education you have completed? MARK ONE.
   - Less than high school, but no diploma, certificate, or GED
   - High school completed with diploma
   - High school completed with GED
   - Vocational/technical school graduate
   - 1-2 years of college, but no degree
   - Associate degree
   - 3-4 years of college, but no degree
   - Bachelor's degree
   - A year or more of graduate credit, but no graduate degree
   - Master's degree
   - Doctorate degree
   - Professional degree, such as MD, DDS, JD

27. How old were you on your last birthday?
   - AGE ON LAST BIRTHDAY

28. What is your current marital status?
   - Married for the first time
   - Remarried, was divorced
   - Remarried, was widowed
   - Legally separated
   - Filing for divorce

29. How long have you been married to your current spouse?
   - Less than one year
   - YEARS MARRIED

30. How satisfied are you with your marriage at the present time?
   - Very satisfied
   - Very dissatisfied

31. How satisfied are you with the way things are going for you personally?
   - Very satisfied
   - More or less satisfied
   - Not at all satisfied
   - Do not know

32. Other than currently being married to a Soldier on Active duty, what types of experiences have you had with the military? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
   - Served on Active duty
   - Served/serving with National Guard/Reserves
   - Child of parent(s) in the military service
   - Previously married to a military service member
   - Worked/working as a civilian for the U.S. Armed Forces
   - None of the above

SECTION 5: YOUR CHILDREN

Dependent children are UNMARRIED children, including adopted children or stepchildren, who are legally dependent on you for over half of their support.

33. How many dependent children do you and your spouse have LIVING WITH YOU for each of the age groups listed below? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.
   - Does not apply; we do not have any dependent children living with us.

GO TO SECTION 6, QUESTION 35, ON PAGE 8.
34. Have you noticed any of the following in your oldest dependent child as a reaction to Soldiers being deployed? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

- Very serious problem
- Serious problem
- Moderate problem
- Slight problem
- No problem
- Do not know

Fear of possibility that your spouse might be deployed
Fears about what could happen to his/her parent if deployed
Distress over media coverage of the war
Distress over rumors about the war

37. To what extent are you satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

Your educational opportunities
Your employment opportunities
Your long-term career opportunities

38. During the last 3 months, how many hours of volunteer work did you do for MILITARY-affiliated and/or CIVILIAN organizations?

HOURS DURING THE LAST 3 MONTHS:

IF NONE, MARK ZEROES (“000”).

SECTION 6: YOUR PAID AND VOLUNTEER WORK

35. What is your current employment status? MARK ONE.

- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Not employed, currently looking for employment
- Not employed, not currently looking for employment but would like a paying job
- Not employed, not looking for employment and do not want a paying job now

36. Which of the following best describes why you are working for pay? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.

- Does not apply; I am not working
- Does not apply; I am a full-time homemaker
- Need the money for basic family expenses
- Always planned to work/have a career
- Wanted extra money to use now
- Saving income for the future
- Independence/self-esteem
- Just enjoy working
- To gain experience for a future career
- Other (Please list on page 15.)

SECTION 7: YOUR ARMY SPOUSE’S BACKGROUND

39. What is your spouse’s present rank? MARK ONE.

Enlisted
- PV1 (E1)
- PV2 (E2)
- PFC (E3)
- CPL/SPC (E4)
- SGT (E5)
- SSG (E6)
- SFC (E7)
- MSG/1SG (E8)
- SGM/CSM (E9)

Warrant Officer
- WO1 (W1)
- CW2 (W2)
- CW3 (W3)
- CW4 (W4)
- CW5 (W5)

Commissioned Officer
- 2LT (O1)
- 1LT (O2)
- CPT (O3)
- MAJ (O4)
- LTC (O5)
- COL (O6+)

Other
40. To what extent are you and your spouse satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of Army life? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's Army job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for my spouse to serve in his/her country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for my spouse to develop job skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The security and stability of my spouse's job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's pay and allowances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spouse's retirement pay and benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deployments/amount of time your spouse is away from home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

41. At the present time, what are your spouse's Army career plans? MARK ONE.

- To stay in the Army until retirement
- To stay in the Army beyond his/her present obligation, but not necessarily to retirement
- To leave the Army upon completion of his/her present obligation
- To leave the Army before completion of his/her present obligation

42. At the present time, what would you like your spouse's Army career plans to be? MARK ONE.

- To stay in the Army until retirement
- To stay in the Army beyond his/her present obligation, but not necessarily to retirement
- To leave the Army upon completion of his/her present obligation
- To leave the Army before completion of his/her present obligation

43. How often has the following occurred at your spouse's duty assignment during the last 12 months?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very seldom or never</th>
<th>Seldom</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often or always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your spouse decided to stay at work beyond normal duty hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your spouse was kept at work beyond normal duty hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the start of the day you did not know when your spouse would leave work at the end of the day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You had to cancel important personal/family plans because of your spouse's work schedule</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your spouse was required to work on the weekend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SECTION 8: HEALTH CARE

44. In the last 2 years, to what extent are you and your spouse satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of Army health care? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medical care benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Army medical care and services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Army medical care and services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dental care benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Army dental care and services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Army dental care and services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 9: ARMY SERVICES

45. To what extent are you and your spouse satisfied or dissatisfied with each of the following aspects of Army life? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very dissatisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Very satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Does not apply; we have not used this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Commissary
Post Exchange (PX)
American Red Cross emergency messages
Army Legal Services
Family Assistance Center (FAC)
Availability of child care
Affordable child care
Programs for children/youth
Army support services available for family members
Chaplain's Family Life Center
Chaplain's counseling
Worship services
Overall quality of recreation programs and services at your post
Army Community Service (ACS)

SECTION 10: MWR RECREATION PROGRAMS

The questions below refer to core recreation programs, such as libraries, craft shops, auto shops, outdoor recreation programs, entertainment programs, dinner theaters, musical and play productions, recreation centers, BOSS program, sports programs, gyms, playing fields, and competitions.

46. How often do you (and your children) use/participate in your post/installation recreation programs and services? MARK ONE.

- Does not apply; I am not at or near a post
- Never
- Less than once per month
- 1-2 times per month
- 3-4 times per month
- 5 or more times per month

47. Generally speaking, why do you (and your children) use/participate in your post recreation programs/services? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.

- Does not apply; I/we do not use post/installation recreation programs/services
- Education/homework
- Physical Illness
- Develop a leisure skill
- Participate with family
- Participate with friends
- Costs less than off-post services
- Esprit de corps with spouse’s work unit
- Avoid boredom
- Have fun
- Get away from home
- Be outdoors
- Better than off-post
- More convenient than off-post
- Relax/relieve stress
- Other reason (Please list on page 15.)
### Section 11: Other MWR Programs and Installation Services

#### 48. Below is a list of some of the Army Community Service (ACS) programs and services for families. For each, please use the FIRST column to indicate whether you have used the program or service DURING THE LAST 2 YEARS. Use the SECOND column to indicate which THREE programs and services you consider to be the MOST IMPORTANT (regardless of whether you have used them during the past 2 years).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Used During Last 2 Years</th>
<th>Most Important Mark Only Three (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consumer Affairs Program/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial counseling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(food/clothing/housing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for non-natives (ESL)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exceptional Family Member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program (EFMP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Advocacy Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Readiness Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support related to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mobilization or deployment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster child care</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income tax preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Referral (I&amp;R)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lending Closet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relocation Assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SITES (DoD Standard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation Topic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange Service)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welcome Packet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 49. Below is a list of some morale, welfare and recreation (MWR) programs, activities and services available at most Army installations. FIRST, indicate whether you have used the program within the last 2 years. THEN, (regardless of your use or their availability at your current installation), select the 7 categories you feel are MOST important in enhancing the quality of Army life.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Categories</th>
<th>Used During Last 2 Years</th>
<th>Most Important Mark Only Seven (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information, Ticket and Registration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel Agency Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library and Information Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(books, magazines, newspapers, reference services, CDs,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>videos, audio books, Internet access)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling (including pro shop &amp; snack bar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation Equipment Rental</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Services (e.g., boating, sailing, private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>berthing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Recreation Areas (e.g., camping, equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rental, picnic, and beach)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf (including pro shop &amp; snack bar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Crafts Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automotive Shop</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and Theater Programs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and Youth Services: CYS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CYS Liaison, Education and Outreach Services: LEOS (e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g., School Liaison, Central Registration, Resource &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral, Youth Sponsorship, Instructional Programs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Development Services: CDS (e.g., Child Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centers, Family Home Care)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-age Services: SAS (e.g., before/after school,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>camps)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Services: YS (e.g., youth sports, middle school/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>teen centers)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Recreation Centers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Catering/Banquet Services (provided by Army club(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Club Dining and Beverage Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Entertainment Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Club Beverage Lounge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gymnasium/Playing Courts/Fields (e.g., basketball,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volleyball, racquetball, softball, soccer, football)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming Pools</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Facilities (e.g., strength training machines,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aerobic machines, basketball/ racquetball courts)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
50. At your current location, how do you usually find out about the Army programs and services available for Army families? MARK ALL THAT APPLY.
- Friends and neighbors
- Bulletin boards on post
- Post newspaper
- MWR publications
- DoD radio/TV (i.e., AFN or installation cable)
- My children/children’s school
- Marquee/sbillboards (including electronic)
- Flyers
- Email
- Internet web sites
- Army One Source (AOS)
- Welcome packets
- Family Readiness Groups (FRGs)
- Command and Staff spouse meetings
- Installation orientation
- Village Mayors
- Other (Please list on page 15.)

SECTION 12: THE ARMY WAY OF LIFE

51. How satisfied are you with the following? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

The respect the Army shows Soldiers
The respect the Army shows spouses
The concern your spouse's unit has for families
How you would feel if your spouse were to make/has made the Army a career
The kind of life you can have in the Army

52. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the following?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

Do not know
Level of support deployed Soldiers receive from the American people
Level of support deployed Soldiers receive from the American media
Reception of returning deployed Soldiers by the American people
Level of support deployed Soldiers' families receive from the American people

53. How much of a problem is each of the following to you? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

- Not a problem
- Slight problem
- Moderate problem
- Serious problem
- Very serious problem

Coping with day-to-day stresses and problems
Demands the Army makes of family members
*Getting along* when my spouse is away because of training, field duty, PCS, TDY, deployments, etc.
Opportunities for me to achieve my personal goals
Possibility that my spouse may be involved in combat
Possibility that my spouse may be deployed on a peacekeeping (non-combat) mission
Separations from my own family (my parents, brothers, sisters, etc.)
Possibility that my spouse may re-deploy after returning from deployment

54. To what extent have you had/experienced in your family any of the following problems in the last 6 months?

- Slight extent
- Moderate extent
- Great extent
- Very great extent
- Does not apply

Emotional or nervous problem
Drug/alcohol-related problem
Marital problem
Caring for elders
Gambling-related problem
Financial difficulty
Family violence
Parenting difficulty

55. How satisfied are you with the support and concern the following Army leaders show for your family?

- Very dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Neutral
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied

Do not apply
Leaders in high post-installation positions
Officers in my spouse's unit/place of duty
NCOs in my spouse's unit/place of duty
56. To what extent do the following apply to the leaders at your spouse’s place of duty? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Slight extent</th>
<th>Moderate extent</th>
<th>Great extent</th>
<th>Very great extent</th>
<th>Do not know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The leaders of my spouse’s unit know about family programs.  
The leaders of my spouse’s unit are concerned about the welfare of Soldiers’ families.

57. At your current location, is there a friend, neighbor, or relative (besides your spouse) outside your home who will listen to you when you need to talk? MARK ONE.

- No
- Yes, sometimes
- Yes, always

58. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? MARK A RESPONSE FOR EACH.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

People can depend on each other in this installation community.
Families find it easy to make connections with other families at this installation.
If I had an emergency, even people I do not know in this installation community would be willing to help.

59. If I had a personal or family problem, I would be willing to turn to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help Source</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Not at an installation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- a neighbor for help
- a friend for help
- a family member for help
- services on the installation for help
- services off the installation for help
- religious leader(s) (e.g., priest, minister, rabbi) or friends from church or synagogue

60. In general, how well has your family adjusted to the demands of being an “Army family”? PLEASE USE THE FOLLOWING SCALE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremity</th>
<th>Extremely well</th>
<th>Extremely badly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

61. How satisfied are you with the support and concern the Army has for your family?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

62. Overall, how satisfied are you with the Army as a way of life?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neutral
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

We are interested in any comments you may have about Army families, even if the topic was not covered in this questionnaire. Do you have any comments?

- Yes
- No

USE THE SPACE ON PAGE 15.
If you would like to make any comments on the topics in this questionnaire or any other Army topics of importance to you and/or your family members, please write them in the space below.

If applicable, please indicate the question number to which your comment is related.

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
Appendix B HSRB Approval

February 3, 2005

TO: Brigit K. Talkington
COMS

FROM: Richard Rowlands
HSRB Administrator

RE: HSRB Project No.: H05D150GE7

TITLE: Communicating Support: Where and How Army Spouses Seek Community

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. As of February 3, 2005, your project has been granted final approval by the HSRB. This approval expires on January 13, 2006.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with recent federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsr@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/Modifications:
1. Stamped original consent form is coming to you via campus mail.
2. It is very important that the cohorts understand their obligations, as members of the research team, relative to the ethical treatment of human research subjects, including the maintenance of confidentiality. In this regard, the Board strongly suggests you spend some time with them making sure they understand those obligations.

cc: Dr. Catherine Cassara
Moderator Introduction and Script

Hello! My name is ______, and I am working with _______. You were all invited here today because it is important that we hear from Army spouses like you. However, don’t worry that anyone outside the group will know exactly what you said. No real names will be used when your comments are used in our research project. We can go by the name you make up, or we’ll make up a name for your responses. Also, we ask you to respect the privacy of other group members by not discussing anything that anyone else says. So, we all agree that our conversation will be confidential?

Let’s imagine that you go outside this building and ask someone, “What is the temperature right now at this spot?” There is a right answer that you can check with a thermometer. However, what we are discussing tonight is how you or your friends feel about things, and there could be as many different opinions as there are people in this room. Guess what? Every one of those opinions is right! Remember, we aren’t here to convince anyone of something in particular, or to change anyone’s mind. We are here to discuss things and hear what each and every one of you has to say.

Every opinion counts, so please feel free to share your thoughts. Sometimes, you will find that many people in the room have your opinion, and other times, you will be the only one with that opinion. It is important for us to learn about all the opinions, because even if you are the only one in this room who holds that opinion, there may be hundreds or thousands of other spouses who feel just as you do.

You’ll note the “carefully hidden” tape recorder. I am recording our conversation because we want to be able to remember everything you share, and to really listen to you now instead of spending time scribbling notes. Is it alright with everyone for me to continue taping? (Make eye contact with each, if all OK, then continue. If not, the tape recorder goes off and moderator takes copious notes.) Great, now the tape recorder does have one problem. It is hard to hear voices when more than one person is speaking. So I may remind you to take turns talking.

If you need to leave the discussion for some reason, please feel free to step outside, but I ask that you hurry back to rejoin us. So, sit back and relax. I know that we will all find the next hour or so very interesting and enjoyable.

First, please turn your name cards so we can all see the names everyone wants to go by today. Thanks. Again, just to clarify, when the results are written up we will not use your real names. I’d like to begin by asking you to hand me your signed consent forms — these will be kept separately from the information you give here today so there won’t be any connection to who’s who. Great, well, feel free to help yourself to refreshments, and be sure to ask any questions if you have them. Ok then, let’s get started.

This focus group is part of a research project by a doctoral student at Bowling Green State University. It is set up to see where Army spouses get their support - through friendships, family, formal support systems, informal groups, the media, or any other means. The result of the project will be the dissertation to help me get my Ph.D. Parts may be published as scholarly articles or even as a book.

1. What is the purpose of the study? The study looks at the role of communication in supporting Army spouses and how this information can best be used to make a difference in their lives. I hope that this study will start more research that really can make the Army culture better for spouses.

2. How was I chosen? You were chosen to be interviewed because you are an Army spouse. I want your input and stories to make the study real to those who read it.

3. What will be involved in participating? If you agree to help, a partner of mine will talk to you when it is good for you. This will be in person if possible, but we may follow up later by phone, email, or mail. It should only take about half an hour to an hour. If you are asked to as part of a group all at the same time, please don’t talk to anyone else about anything other participant says. If we choose to audiorecord the session, the tapes will be listened to and your answers written down word for word. If anyone says it is not ok to tape, we won’t. The tapes will be locked away in a top secret security level safe until this study is done, then the magnetic media will be shredded.

4. Who will know what I say? Your words will be available to the person you speak with, to me and my research advisor, and to journal and book editors. If an article or book is published the general public may read it. If you want to not have any particular answer used, then we would need to talk about that and come up with a plan at the time of the interview. You may go by a made-up name during the study if you’d like. This project is ongoing at different bases at the same time, with about 30 other spouses helping, so the chance of us figuring out who you are because of anything that you say is incredibly slim.

5. What risks and benefits are associated with participation? The risks to you are no greater than those normally found in daily life. There is no direct benefit from being interviewed, though I hope this information will lead to better conditions at each Army base.

6. What are my rights as a respondent? You may ask any questions about the research and they will be answered fully. You don’t have to be in this research study. You can agree to be in the study now and change your mind later.

7. If I want more information, whom can I contact about the study? If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 (hrbc@bgnet.bgsu.edu). If you have questions about the study, you may also contact my advisor, Dr. Catherine Cassara at the Department of Communication Studies, Bowling Green State University, at 419/372-2372 or ccaesar@bgnet.bgsu.edu. You can also contact me, Brigit Talkington, at 419/372-2372, or email me at btalkin@bgnet.bgsu.edu. You may also ask for a copy of the results from me at the email or phone number above.

You are deciding to participate or not participate in the study. Signing this means that you have read the information above. It also means you have had your questions answered, and have decided to participate. You are also giving us your OK to record your answers and to use the information for research and publication. Please keep the top portion of this form if you like.

__________________________
Signature of participant
__________________________
Signature of person obtaining consent
__________________________
Signature of main researcher, Brigit Talkington

Date ____________________ Date ____________________ Date ____________________

(Communicating Support: Where and How Army Spouses Seek Support)

APPROVED - BGSU HSRB EFFECTIVE 2/4/05
EXPIRES 2/4/05
Appendix C Discussion of Methodological Approaches Not Taken

There were many options to consider in making the choice of methodology for this dissertation; the one chosen is thematic analysis using secondary data. It is important to understand what thematic analysis is by exploring the choice that was made. Many methods were filtered through, and the process of residues led to a determination based on fitting the method to the questions being asked, the data extant, and the preliminary nature of this area of research within the communication discipline, as well as the epistemology behind this study. What was needed was a methodology that could be used to address open-ended text responses to specific questions. These open-ended questions were not responses gathered in conversation, but rather answers to a questionnaire.

To insure inclusivity and discrimination, the generated list of options was compared to the qualitative data analysis methods mentioned in what is widely accepted as the book of record for qualitative research studies within the communication discipline, Denzin and Lincoln’s *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005). Included within the list and the tome, therefore rating consideration in this document, are methodological options including componential analysis, CAP ethnography, narrative/life history analysis, material assemblages analysis, testimonio, meso analysis, longitudinal analysis, conversation analysis, compositional analysis, textual analysis, semiotic analysis, discourse analysis (non-Foucauldian and Foucauldian), content analysis, and of course, thematic analysis. Some of these came close to what was needed for this study, others were too far afield to justify more than a momentary glance.

First addressed will be those methods that were so far afield as to deserve only passing mention here, those that were filtered out first. Then, the methodologies that came close to being what was needed but had some inherent weakness in regard to this study will be addressed.
Finally will be a brief discussion of some of the more common methodologies utilized in other disciplines and how those methods compare and contrast with thematic analysis.

As the first methodology that was considered and discarded, componential analysis is a theoretical paradigm commonly used in anthropology. As a linguistic analysis tool that came from Prague phonology, it uses the idea of opposition and contrast to define terms (blue vs. green) (Kronenfeld, 1996). It is not so much a method as a way of viewing data in an apolitical way that is not engaged with the public in any activist type of way. The research makes no call for action, and no attempts are made to promote the knowledge gleaned to the masses. An exemplar of this research is Gaenszle’s (2002) analysis of the Mewahang Rai people of East Nepal. This rather un-engaging mindset does not match the goals of this study.

Creative Analytic Practices ethnography focuses on writing as interpretation, as Richardson and Lockridge (2004) phrase it, writing is “a method of discovery” (p. 241). While this study focuses on the written word, and what is written can be loosely defined as narratives, they are not narratives written by the respondents to make sense of or interpret their positions, they are not creative writing exercises to be later analyzed in detail, the responses are answers to prompts.

In a sociolinguistic tradition, narrative analysis/life history analysis often focuses on the spoken word and grammatical syntax, such as Labov’s (1972) landmark examination of the ways language and grammatical structures differ within a society. Narrative life history analysis has been used to examine the lives of Polish peasants (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927) and female superintendents (Chase, 1995). This methodology is not appropriate because this study is not examining structures of language, nor the intrinsic order of speech nor large scale ordering principles from any one individual response set, but the combined whole. While spouses’ stories
are coming together based on this research, the instrument was not intended to capture, nor was the analysis intended to reveal, overarching narratives. This is a noble goal, which should be pursued, but not the one of this study. Another detail which eliminates this form of inquiry is that the sample size involved in narrative inquiries is typically very small - as small as one participant, and that definitely does not coincide with the sample garnered for this research.

Material assemblages analysis examines physical objects, not the written word. While this allows for fascinating and evocative pieces such as those of Saunders (2003) which examines war artifacts from World War I, it is dismissed out of hand as irrelevant to this dissertation.

Testimonio gives voice to the voiceless, but it is instigated by the research participant, not necessarily at the bequest of the researcher, as an active way to call attention to their situation. Steeped in the Latina Feminist tradition, these first person accounts are political and activist in nature. Indigenous researchers such as Battiste (2000) use this venue to call for often sweeping society reform (p. x). The SAF V was not approached from this position, and the imposition of this structure on the survey responses would be fallacious.

Meso analysis is an analysis that examines the in-between. Meso analysis examines the interaction between human activity and organizational forces, such as the management level of organizations. Meso research examines the connections that bind different units within organizations through their activities and routines (Ballard & Seibold, 2003). This analysis is most common in the feminist tradition, as seen in Clarke’s (1990, 1998) studies on reproduction, as well as in Gordon’s (1994) analysis of welfare mothers and may prove useful at later stages of analysis once determinations have been made about the role of power among and around army
spouses, but the presupposition of this interplay is premature at this juncture in the extant literature.

By design, this study is only examining data collected at one time, making longitudinal analysis an incorrect tool for this study, as longitudinal analysis examines data gathered across time. Longitudinal studies have to be carefully planned out to ensure data fidelity over time, as were the family medical pattern studies conducted by Miller, McDaniel, Crabtree, and Strange (2001) and Goodwin, Zyzanski, Zronek, Ruhe, Weyer, Konrad, Esola and Strange (2001). There is the option in future studies to compare the results from SAF V to later SAF (VI, VII, etc.), but that is research for another forum. It is important to note, however, that in the sense that this dissertation is the foundation for this researcher’s primary research agenda, the results of this study may ultimately fit the definition of longitudinal analysis.

With an ethnomethodological base, conversation analysis has tended to limit itself to the spoken word, not examining the written word, as is discussed in Silverman’s (1998) look at conversation analysis pioneer Harvey Sacks. Illustrations within Silverman’s text run the gamut from conversations about ordering from a restaurant menu (p. 8) to suicide threats (p. 2). Concerned with the structure of talk, conversation analysis is most often completed based upon audio and video recordings from empirical research. Studies that utilize conversation analysis often describe the rules and patterns of social interaction (Silverman, 1998). Zimmerman (1988) highlights that one of the main precepts of conversation analysis is the study of the interaction of language (p. 407). These tenants of studying the spoken word, emphasizing interaction, remove conversation analysis from contention as a methodological base for this study.

Compositional analysis seems to require a solid knowledge of the subculture that is fairly complete (Fine & Weis, 1998). It is not the best fit for a preliminary study. It takes apart and
reconnects institutions and organizations. Military dependents may fit here as they could be defined by contrasting them with civilians as “bordering groups,” but that is not yet known. This is not the time to connect the dots, as is touted as one of the goals of compositional analysis, to make links between this group and other groups. It is, however, reasonable to investigate the data in terms of Freire’s (1982) “limit situations” - these dependents are limited in their options and analysis of their own places in life by the historic moment, the power relations inherent in their positions, and the everyday and the not-so-everyday activities of their lives.

This acceptance of context and historical placement is one of the three main analytic moves at the heart of compositional analysis. Secondly, societal categories play a large role in this analysis. The categories which define institutional life (gender and rank, specifically) do have consequences in the lives of Army spouses. Examining how the wives of enlisted members and the wives of officers define themselves in relationship with the other group, and how they essentialize and reify the other may fit this framework well. This is not as poststructural as is much of today’s qualitative research which tends to deny categorization. This method, unfortunately, thirdly seeks to pull out the texture and variation within subgroups, and while it is presumed that there are those who resist category membership, this study is not designed to determine these outliers. This last of the main precepts behind compositional analysis makes this the wrong tool for this study, however, the framework may come in handy in the near future of this research agenda.

At first glance, textual analysis, the analysis of written documents such as medical records, legal texts, job manuals, printed media, and interviews, seems to be a good fit for this project. In qualitative methodology, textual analysis is often accomplished with an “informal approach” and a small sample size. This holds true in Seale’s (1998) case study on a booklet
based on an interview with one man after he learned of his terminal cancer. As was also the case in Seale (1998), textual analysis is often used not as the focus of the research, but merely as supplemental to the main study. These characteristics nullify what appeared to be a good match. This current research endeavor is not utilizing a small sample size, and the entirety of this research endeavor is focused on the responses to SAF V, so something more concrete is called for. More specific varieties of textual analysis include semiotic narrative analysis and discourse analysis.

Semiotic analysis of narrative does not fit well because of the concerns mentioned above regarding narrative/life history analysis. While spouses’ stories are coming together based on this research, the instrument was not intended to capture, nor was the analysis intended to reveal, overarching narratives. The term “discourse analysis” is often used interchangeably with conversation analysis which was discussed above.

Discourse analysis is popular in a “bewildering” variety of disciplines such as sociology, medicine, communication, education, linguistics and psychology (Atkinson, Davies & Delamont, 1995, p. viii). Discourse analysis in the field of social psychology is now mostly referred to as discursive psychology, as in Edwards (1997) discussion which attempts to chart the relationship connections between language and thought (p. 1). Discourse analysis allows scholars to begin to address the written word by recognizing the differences between speech and writing in manner of production, representation and form (Brown & Yule, 1983, pgs. 4-19).

To be more specific, non-Foucauldian discourse analysis is set up as being essentially synonymous with conversation analysis. It is steeped in the field of critical analysis with a strong emphasis on how location and position, setting and interactions, create meaning. Non-Foucauldian discourse analysis seeks to answer questions about how communication creates
meaning. This genre of discourse analysis hearkens back to semiotics, looking at the machinery of language, word by word, phrase by phrase and sentence by sentence. As Potter puts it, non-Foucauldian discourse analysis is broader than is conversation analysis, but more focused than is a Foucauldian analysis of discourse (1996, p. 105). To further compare non-Foucauldian discourse analysis with Foucauldian discourse analysis, and an overwhelming emphasis on culture and context springs forth as the main differentiation.

For Foucault, the system, culture, and institutions in which a discourse was situated played an overarching and formative role in its understanding. This was the case regardless of whether that discourse was verbal (spoken or written) or nonverbal (the architecture of prisons or patterns of behavior in medicine) (Foucault, 1979; 1965). In a broader sense, discourse analysis is seen as a tool to make order out of the social world and cultural phenomena, to offer what Goffman (1983) referred to as “interaction order.” Critical discourse analysis accomplishes much the same goal, with more emphasis being placed on power and inequality, looking at topics such as gender inequality in self-help manuals (Tainio, 1999). One other subcategory of discourse analysis which does not present a useful model for this study is historical discourse analysis, in which the researcher examines texts from a broad swath of historical documents to determine (retrospectively) trends in social order. One such exemplar of this is Armstrong (1983, 1987, 1993, 1998, 2002), who conducted a series of studies in this vein regarding issues of public health.

Based on the form of data to be analyzed and the concerns explored above regarding other methodological options, a methodological decision was reached. This study will employ qualitative content analysis in the form of thematic analysis. Content analysis most commonly refers to the quantitative forerunner of qualitative analysis of content. These studies are
frequently found in mass media studies, as well as clinical settings, as evidenced in Gottschalk (1995). The method of content analysis was developed in the communication discipline and successfully exported to fields such as history, literature, law, economics, anthropology and natural science (Berelson, 1952, p. 9). As early as Berelson’s (1952) primer on content analysis came the recognition of the value of qualitative content analysis (p. 114). Today, many of the studies that are identified purely as “content analysis” studies examine the content of visual artifacts, mainly photographs and videotapes, as in Harper’s (2001) study of photographs taken in agricultural rural America. The use of the term “content analysis” does not seem to be popular at this juncture to mean qualitative analysis of textual material; this is why a derivation, thematic analysis, is the more appropriate choice. The clear structure provided by the specific lens of thematic analysis provides guidance and boundaries, as well as the rigor that was sought after in this analysis. It is for these reasons, informed by the above analysis of alternate methodologies, both those that were not applicable and those that were closer to being included, that this dissertation employs thematic analysis as the methodology of choice.
Appendix D Random Sample Responses

Random selection from data:

Communica

You guys need to handle deployment much better than when my husband went, the unit didn't know when they were leaving or coming home!!! There were no communications, while my husband or my son were over there in Iraqi, 'YES' I had both of my men over there, and my son was the only blood line left, to carry on my husband name, but that's another story, everything from mail-getting there combat pay, was very unorganize!!!

I believe that the support for family/soldiers start with the COC. If the COC has poor leaders, failure to comply with the NCO creed, favoritism, or 'cliches' of any sort (racial etc.)it causes the soldiers to loose faith in their leadership. The soldier is not able to communicate issues to their COC, and or the COC is not willing to help or stand by the soldier when needed. The COC is now viewed as the problem, not the solution. Its a breakdown of leadership within the company.

no communication from the FRG

1. I am currently deployed to Iraq for OIF 2. 4. I live on a FOB in Iraq. 5. I live in a containerized housing unit. 19. Communication was difficult -- we were both deployed to Iraq (at different locations). 20. Moved to Iraq. 21. Involuntarily call-up of National Guard. 22. Most do not apply because my parents had to take care of our household while we were both deployed. 26. Extra baggage charges on credit card when spouse deployed as an individual ($900). 32. We have not reunited due to my deployment. 34-36. Can not answer -- wasn't home. 40. Mobilizing
and deployed since SEP 03. 79-80. Have not lived with husband since SEP 2002 due to a tour in Korea and our combined deployments. OPTEMPO is too high to have a family life in the Army.

lack of communication to meet

Community

I just wish that when my husband was deployed, we had the support of the FRG but it was really unreliable and not a very good source of information, I also would have liked to been notified when my husband was coming home. I did not find out until 12 hours beforehand, and I had thrown out my back, it was hard to get help to go pick up my husband. Also during my husbands deployment we were forced to move to a different housing area, and we received no sympathy from community army leaders for help on how we would accomplish this.

40. I was never invited or made welcome at FRG meetings and activities. It would be helpful to spouses and families of soldiers if it were mandatory for units to give all information about all programs, activities, counseling, etc. on post. I do not feel that I would know where to go or what to do if I needed help or to get involved in the community.

My husband has moved to a new job since being deployed in the area, he is tdy alot. He has moved to an air force job were he was previously in army. Since he has moved to his job in April, I have not been contacted by any spouses or given any information about the unit. I basically feel lost and the only info I get is from my husband who is TDY most of timee. I'm not sure how the air force works but I find little support and felt more connected with spouses groups
in the army community. The other complaints I have is about medical care. I have a special needs child and have found that accessing care can almost be a full time job. Referral are not timely and tri - west is only helpful after taking with supervisors about your kid. I've waited 4 months to see specialist. Getting an appt for myself is equally as hard. They want me to access the er more for simple problems, so I spend 4-5 hrs in and ER and get stressed out with child care issues. This is also at an Air force base. My husband has been through 2 deployments to Iraq the 1990-2004- I felt the most connected and got the most info from support groups. Outsiders and family would be sympathetic but that was fleeting, the military community was the only one who really understood. Our children where stressed and the best advise I could give was be positive and don't watch the news with your kids, limit exposure. Be more active and surround them with activities and give them time to talk and vent. E-mails were very important and they could write their dad. I rarely wrote because it took too long to get there. When my husband got back, I eased him back into things, did not place many demands on him and waited till he got over his jumpiness. On the way home from the air port he was searching the roads and holding onto the dashboard. He would wake up at night and he said he would not know where he was. He was tired for a while and it took him time to ease back into our life here and he was only deployed 2 months this last time. I can only imagine how the other spouses are feeling after a year deployment. Even though I have some complaints, our experience in the army has been one of ups and downs, more ups than downs. My husband sat me down and said this is what to expect and I think all spouses need to know if they are going to be in it for the long haul. I have meet the most intelligent, funny, talented, crafted , caring people in the army and would not change it for anything. Our children are proud and two out of three even now are talking about
military career. I wouldn't discourage them for the world. It has been our life and a life that I wish everyone could be a part of to focus in on what's important in life.

My husband and I have only been married for 3 years and most of that time I was so busy teaching that I didn't really get too involved in the army life. Plus, we didn't live on post. However, the services I've interacted with the most involved the health care and at our post installation it was horrible. Kimbrough seems to have no consistent management. If I call and ask for information and then act using what I have learned I will invariably find that I was given incorrect information. I will also find that no three people will have the same answer. During my pregnancy and afterwards (my husband was deployed) I went through a series of issues with Kimbrough trying to have my baby taken care of- it was incredibly disheartening and stressful. I am also VERY disappointed that Tricare dropped their 24 hour nurse phone line. I have found that to be invaluable since I had my baby and could have used it so many times and it has only been defunct for a few weeks. I also made an effort to learn about programs available to family members while my husband was gone and because I had more time available due to not teaching. I was offered very little. On a positive note, I have been very impressed with the childcare facilities. I hope that I will become more involved with the army and become more a part of the community now that I'm not working full-time. It seemed that many functions were offered during weeknights or weekdays which is not very accessible to spouses who work fulltime.

My husband entered the Army in 1984, became dissatisfied and left in 1997. Finding civilian life not containing the unity of the Army community he returned to active duty in Sept 2000. The Army he returned to is not the Army he left. Todays Army and community are short sighted and
self involved. The soldiers no longer carry themselves with the honor and self-respect they once did. My husband is sorely disappointed in the officers and enlisted members that he deals with on a daily basis. The command doesn't seem to care about their staff, they are just after their next promotion. More and more must be done with less and less resources. We cannot generate more staff to run things if there is none available. The pay does not keep up with cost of living or what can be made in the civilian world. My husband, a medical professional, makes about 75K a year while his civilian counterparts are making upwards of 160K. The Corps is only at about 60% strength and it is no wonder, with the difference in pay. We have both always loved the Army life, but lately it is just not as rewarding as it once was. I miss the Army of the 80's and 90's.

*Informat*

Q. #40. There is too much drama, fighting and lack of real information here. I refuse to waste my time. The Army claims to have such concerns for the soldiers and the families, but shows no real concern. This is the worst experience I've ever had and I would never recommend it to anyone. It tears families apart and screws people up inside. I can't wait for my husband to get out so we can try and fix our lives!

They need to make an effort to keep families aware of what is going on in their spouses deployed unit, even if they are separated. I was not living near my spouses duty station at the time of his deployment, we are separated but have 2 children and I never received any type of information, neither was I told he was returning from deployment.
26. When my husband processed into his new duty station they did not change BAH location and I was paid old BAH the next month and when they caught their mistake the next month I received two paychecks both for $150 and my husband had just deployed and I was not near an Army installation because they deployed him out of alt before he could move us. I had to go to AF base for help and more myself and our children from MA to TX alone. 40. FRG isn't very informative.

40. FRG never contacted me, my husband told me about the meetings before he deployed. I went and I was angry because they never called me or greeted me and we have lived here for almost 4 years. They only contacted me after I went to the meeting my husband informed me about and added my information to the list. They only called while he was deployed now that he is back I haven't heard from them since.

26. When my husband processed into his new duty station they did not change BAH location and I was paid old BAH the next month and when they caught their mistake the next month I received two paychecks both for $150 and my husband had just deployed and I was not near an Army installation because they deployed him out of alt before he could move us. I had to go to AF base for help and more myself and our children from MA to TX alone. 40. FRG isn't very informative.

Friend

We are currently at a post where almost, if not every, unit is deployable. Because of that the organizations on post put forth great effort to host family activities such as fairs and free movies
to give families things to do. I would like to see more posts become 'family friendly'. We came from Ft. Benning and very little was done on post to get residents out in the post community. Ft. Campbell is a great example of a 'family friendly' post, even though we spend a large amount of time without our spouses.

21. I was 1 month pregnant when he deployed. I needed care and support from our families and friends because it was our first pregnancy and he was deployed to Iraq.

40. FRG either provides inaccurate or no information to the spouses therefore spouses whom have friends within the unit communicate between themselves.

Spouse friend helped

I live 800 miles from my friends and family. I have lived in El Paso almost a year now. No one from FRG or any other military group has done nothing to get in touch with me or to invite me to meetings. While my husband is in the field I am here alone without a person to contact in case of emergency. I would be a lot happier with my husband in the military even till he retired and lives close to home.

Know

A student; unable to fit work in the schedule, but do need money. I don't know why its such a hassel to get an appoitment and then get quality treatment at the medical facilities. I definately don't feel as if I can count on them to take care of my family or any type of illness.
40. FRG never informed me of activity despite giving information repeatedly prior to deployment. No one acknowledged me even when my brother was killed 2 days prior to deployment. 57. Get out of house.

The military, especially the Army, is currently stretched to thin. The unprecedented call up of National Guard and Reserves is evidence of this. The continued strain of back to back is also putting a strain on all aspects of military life, from soldiers to families, to retention issues. Continuous stop loss measures, or forcing soldiers to stay in past retirement, are not feasible options on a continuous basis. I realize force size is a congressional issue, military leaders need to start the problems and strain known.

I feel that the military active duty soldiers are not paid enough. I know of families and seen them on my local news station that go to the food bank and shop at thrift, goodwill stores. I think that is terrible. Soldiers put their lives on the line for this country and a small fifty or less raise is nothing. We pay athletes millions but our soldiers near to nothing. It's a shame!

I am very thankful for the many benefits the Army provides, but sometimes it seems as though the cost is too high. I understand my husband's job is very demanding but my children do not. My three year old displays discipline problems when my spouse is gone and my infant does not even know who he is. While my children are this young they need their father at least half of the year. My husband left for extended TDY when my daughter was 10 days old. He will not return until May. She will be 9 months old. I am afraid of the damage this may create in their relationship.
My spouse was gone for training a lot when my older child was a baby, but it was at least broken up and about half and half. I would prefer shorter deployment cycles more often so that there are not large chunks of time where my spouse is separated from my children.

Support

The past few years have been very difficult as an Army family. Long, back to back deployment with very little communication are very tough on a marriage. I had very little support. Would move home to family for another long deployment. I am an RN. Work in a NICU, 12 hour shifts including, nights and weekends and child care was a huge issue for us. While our child care expenses increased, I was forced to work less and we are still recovering financially.

23. Child needed healthcare cancer doctor. During my spouse's deployment our son was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. My spouse's unit did a great job supporting me and getting my spouse home to his son during the first several treatments. My spouse asked to return to Iraq and did so to his unit. During this whole time his unit did everything it could to make this easier on my family. The Red Cross was outstanding. The first Red Cross message did not go through to the unit correctly. The Red Cross sent out another message and followed it up. I am not satisfied with children's healthcare on post.

when my husband was deployed to Iraq last year a old foster family who works for a court in Kentucky took my son and no one in the army or in the community would help and I am still going through this and the lawyer fees have been tremendous and cant afford our every day
living and still no help from no one and I dont understand why no one would help. My husband supported his country and no one is supporting us through this dilemma.

church we attend got alot of support

I believe the Army should respect soldiers more. I believe the length of deployments should be shortened to six months in support of OIF, OEF. I believe the commander in chief should have served on active duty to deserve the honor of commanding America's military.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>CODER:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CODE mnemonic and full name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Full Definition</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Would do it all over again</td>
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NEW CODES Developed IN VIVO
Appendix F Suggestions Made by Spouses in the Data Sorted for this Study

“In my opinion the Army is all show when it comes to the happiness of the family as a whole and they want families to be behind deployments, etc then they should entice not only the soldiers but entice the families to sign on to re-enlistments also. The family makes the soldier happy, the Army is just the job.”

**FRG Changes Are Needed**

“The Army needs to take a look at the FRG structure and find a way to make them function as intended or get rid of them”

“it is my feeling that the organization that dictates how FRGs should be run needs to re vamp its system. In my experience, the FRG serves not only as a means to disseminate information, but a very important supportive community, especially during extended deployments. Considering how frequently soldiers are being deployed, and for such extended periods of time, the effectiveness of the current FRG system needs to be reexamined and changed to fit the Army's increasing deployment schedule.”

“FRG's I'm sure were designed to be a support group to wives who need it - not a gossip, poorly run/managed program. You say 'FRG' to a wife who has been connected to the Army for any period of time and they will give you a crazy look and run the other way. The standard thought is 'stay away from FRG's...there is nothing good about them'. If I could make an impact at all in the above survey that I've completed - fix the FRG's, give the young wives (or older wives if they need it) a support group, a place to go to help each other out, a place where lip service isn't given. It would be better to have no information than to be given lip service.”

“My husband and I hope that in the next few years there will be some changes made to FRG’s and how we can use them to support, encourage and empower these young spouses so they in
turn can support their soldier better. Too many times we have seen FRG leaders afraid to get involved in situations because they may be too time consuming or too much out of their comfort zone. So they don’t do anything. They do the worst possible thing and ignore the spouses they think they will have problems with. Or even more so, they ignore some of the most important spouses, the junior enlisted spouses, (who make up the majority of all the units we have been involved with). What a shame.”

“Much of the hard work fell to the FRG. These volunteers are wonderful, but we are not qualified in suicide prevention, child abuse or financial abuse situations. I feel that a standardized in-depth training should be developed for all Commanders to help them understand how FRGs in their unit should be structured and run and what functions an FRG should and should not take on. I also feel that a standardized Family Readiness Plan should be published for units to ‘fill in the blanks’ with. It is sad to see units (Rear Detachments and FRGs) that are functioning well and others that fall apart as soon as the soldiers deploy.”

Hire someone to run FRGs.

“Army wife support definitely needs to be better during stressful deployments for a long periods of time. I had the privilege of being a POC for our unit and I see just how BADLY it’s needed. If push comes to shove, make it a paying job with training. Alot of wives ended up needing help during and after deployments for mental health, nerve problems, and a host of other things. When mom’s not doing good, who in the house is?”

“Many things I felt could and should be handled by the rear detachment was put off on the volunteer FRG leaders and company commanders’ spouses. I don’t mind helping out and enjoyed getting to know the soldiers’ families as I did during deployment. However, I feel for the amount of support and work required to care for families as families now demand based on what
the Army leads them to expect, needs to be re-evaluated. If the Army wants families cared for, then someone should be paid to care for them. Extremely unrealistic expectations are placed on volunteers who are also coping with deployment and taking care of their own families.”

“Likewise, it is not the FRG leader's job to make sure every private's family has transportation and groceries. Hire a PAID and experienced liaison at every Brigade or even Battalion; make this person responsible for information flow and referrals for problems. Don't simply hope that a nice spouse will volunteer to handle these issues for you. It is not a spouse's job to make sure Private Joe's wife has baby formula, and a commander's wife should not be knee-deep in a Specialist's personal and financial problems. That is her husband's job as Commander. The FRG leader and Commander's wife has her own family and maybe a job to worry about. Don't forget that her husband is gone, too.”

“An FRG is a voluntary organization. You cannot hold a commander accountable for voluntary activities. You cannot hold a commander responsible for a spouse who doesn't feel like printing a newsletter every month, or organizing meetings while handling 3 children and their school, homework, and activities at home. PAY SOMEONE TO DO THESE THINGS!”

“When the balloon goes up (and it's still up), he will be thousands of miles from the homefront and 'mission' of family support. It's not his job to worry about it; he and his leaders are conducting real Army missions. Hire someone to worry about it - DO NOT rely solely on volunteers. Volunteers are not (all) specially trained, do not have the time to devote to it, and have personal concerns and needs of their own. The bottom line is to take the 'family support' job description off the Commander's plate. Clear his mind so he can focus on his job. Make the Army family responsible; empower them with knowledge through well-conducted training; hire full-time professionals to deal with problems that arise. Hold those representatives accountable,
and then you will truly serve Army families. I hereby allow you to utilize my personal information on this survey. I can talk these issues all day and give workable solutions. You're running yourselves into the ground, Army families are running all over you, and you're running good leaders out of the Army over petty expectations that take away from the globally important missions they are given. Thank you for your time.”

“Things are better for units that are currently deployed, I suppose on account of lessons learned when my spouse's unit was deployed. One example is the **FRG Assistant program** just initiated in FORSCOM. I wish we had had something like that in place when my husband was gone, because the burden the Army puts on FRG leaders is enormous and outrageous. The support was just not there when my husband was deployed and I was the FRG leader. FRGs are mandated, but receive little or no support from most commanders, which is a shame. To truly be successful, FRGs need appropriated funds to operate and they need full-blown support at every level of command.”

“I applaud FORSCOM for the new paid FRG Assistants. I think this will alleviate some of the burden on the Rear Detachment and Volunteer FRG Leaders and provide the much needed continuity that the families expect and deserve. With current OPTEMPO we need to educate and empower all of our family members to become proactive in the military lifestyle. We need to stress that this isn't a job, but a way of life. I wish we could make AFTB Level 1 mandatory for not only family members, but soldiers as well. I think that units that take the time to have their soldiers do AFTB for NCOPD and OPD due not only those future leaders, but their families a great service.”

**FRGs should be run by military member.**
“I am concerned with the direction the FRGs are heading. The FRG should be the commander’s responsibility and in his/her absence it should then be the rear detachment commander’s responsibility and they should be evaluated on their OER for this. It should be treated as a very important ‘command’ position by the Army and it should be staffed accordingly. It is far too much to be asked of spouses who are trying to care for their own families during a deployment to have to care for 20 or more other adults!! I have seen too many spouses burn out or be over stressed by having to take on that role. It should not be a program run for the Army by volunteers. As a volunteer I am unable to do anything for another spouse other than emotional support. Any real problem solving has to be done by an active duty military member. It is my hope that the Army will move toward making the rear detachment command as important a position (and staff the positions) as any other command.”

“FRG’s need to be headed up by a military member, someone who knows about the army. I don’t care if a spouse has been married to a soldier for 20 years, they have no concept about what it is to be a soldier. FRG’s need to stop running amuck and need to be headed up with an actual soldier.”

Rear Detachment Needs to Change

“I also believe that we need to change the way we look at Rear Detachment Duty. We need to leave behind well schooled, strong leaders and not broke soldiers. Families have a direct impact on the mission and need to have somebody that they can turn to for answers and resources. The Army needs to recognize the Rear Detachment as a combat mission. My husband wanted to go to war, it is what he trained for his entire career, I understand that, but we need to let the Rear Detachment know that they are vital to the families and it is also a combat position and should be equally important in the rating on the NCOER and OER.”
New Programs and Better Communication of Those That Are There

“I sensed a very disrespectful attitude toward the wives from the commanders of the rear detachment doing the briefings for us during the deployment of our soldiers to Iraq. They always treated us like a bunch of weak, teary-eyed women. Some of us Army wives wanted to feel that we were a part of the mission too. And that we were not only a woman who provided support to her soldier in every way but that we were soldiers too. And that is some of the problem here. We are civilians married to soldiers. How can we fully understand the soldier’s mind? Who can train us to think like a soldier and be able to support our husbands in a more meaningful way, not only during a deployment, but during his short or long term military career? I believe that if someone could give us, Army wives, that kind of training to be able to develop a soldier’s mind, attitude, beliefs, pride, heart, we would be able to cope with deployments in a total different attitude and strength. And the training would need to be done by a professional speaker, someone who can really inspire us.”

“I am aware the Army is in the national security business and is not designed to coddle its members. With services like legal aid, emergency relief, AFTB, eArmy-U and the like, it seems the powers that be in the Army do want to assist its members in leading successful lives. I think we need better designed programs to address family relations, money management, and personal development. These services would be especially beneficial if they were made available in such a way to avoid the typical stigma of participation in such programs. I truly don’t see many services that are presently offered actually making a difference and wish the Army would better manage its assets to truly affect the change and other support its leaders wish to provide – especially in times of deployment. Much of the current situation (deployments for indeterminate
lengths of time, vagueness of mission, etc) is unavoidable – I only wish it could be made more bearable.”

“Also, we live off base because there is no available base housing. My kids go to a school where there are almost no other military kids. I asked the school on base if my kids could participate in the support group for children of deployed parents and was told it was only for the children attending the school.”

“When moving to a new installation, I believe the gaining company Commanders or 1SG’s wives should make contact with the spouse to welcome her to the installation. Also, letting them know if they need anything how to direct them. The contact would be ideally made while staying at the lodge. It can become very difficult not having a good sponsor program and also not receiving any contact from anyone.”

“The usual difficulties lie with a spouse trying to fix military issues such as pay and financial issues such as taxes and mortgages when the people you are dealing with will not accept a power of attorney. The Army leadership needs to be aware that media misinformation and biased reporting can cause emotional distress, especially to newer/younger family members. The integration of the media into the lower level units during Opn Iraqi Freedom seemed to help limit that problem a great deal and raised the credibility of the reporters somewhat.”

“After two days of no answers, I was notified (by my husband) that he was in the US. When checking in at Rear Detachment, he was told they had no soldiers arriving from Iraq. (Basically, they had no idea he was even going to be in country.) These two problems are ones I’ve heard time and time again from several people and they, I think, boil down to a severe lack of communication... something I believe everyone could improve upon. (Perhaps a class for soldiers, spouses, kids on improving communications???????)”
“The Army has come a long way in educating and empowering the military families with programs like AFTB, AFAP, and FRGs. I still think that the military needs to do a better job of educating young officers and NCOs early about the community resources that are available to the families. Increasingly we are seeing that Family readiness = Mission Readiness, but the leaders aren't getting the connection and are not schooled enough in dealing with the families.

“When relocating …, my husband and I have found welcome centers closed on Sat. and Sun. Mini maps with common points of interest would be extremely helpful to those who are newcomers and or visitors on the installation.”

“It would be helpful to spouses and families of soldiers if it were mandatory for units to give all information about all programs, activities, counseling, etc. on post.”

“I feel family members are not in touch correctly with the Army. They need training, should be mandatory, for them to learn what the military member really does and knows.”

“I think it would make things easier for families if they had a sponsor to show them around when they arrive at a new installation and not just the soldiers. Sometimes spouses at a new place don't know where to go for questions or just to find information.”

“Please make sure that any new spouses (even if only to the area) are informed with where and how to get the information they may need.”

“There are many great programs, but for some reason people don't know about them or don't choose to utilize them. Quit creating new programs, take the ones you have and make them better!”

“I think one issue that needs to be stressed is communication between the active duty spouse and their husband, wife. Often times the active duty person gets the bulk of helpful information and does not pass it along, they need to realize that they are the conduit of information for their
spouse who may, may not be busy full time with kids, job and do not have extra time to look for
needed information!"

“A simple thing—every installation has a similar post phone book. They are not user friendly.
Ask anyone!”

“Would also recommend putting more interest in sending welcome packets for a new location as
soon as a soldier gets orders for that facility. Understanding that orders can change, the majority
of the packets would be well received and used for those whos orders to do not change. This
would give them more time to prepare to move to a new area and know what it is like, than to
wait until the soldier checks in and then hand send them.”

“Would also like to see more doctors at the hospitals. Most are very understaffed.”

“Before sending people overseas, I think language classes should be offered.”

“I think there should be some kind of outreach program for those families that live off post.”

“I was unable to participate in so many programs because I am working full-time and
evening/weekend programs were not available.”

“I think had we had a briefing when we first got stationed here, or if we could have one now, on
all the services available, how you use them, their contact info, ect. that would have made my
life much easier when he was deployed. I think the Army is trying to make life easier for the
'family' but they are doing a poor job at getting the information out.”

“I just wish the Spouses could get one day a month for a special event, something offered world
wide for all the branches of Service Wives/Husbands from the Military. Lastly don't forget the
New Spouses, they need a lot of TLC (Tender Learning Care). I have often said if a manual were
to be written, I would love to be a part of it to help the Spouses of the world know, other spouses
love them and are there for them. Like forming a World Wide Spouse Network. Think about it. If
we could all share our knowledge as Spouses how wonderful and helpful it could be for the new and upcoming wives. I'm going on and I do have a gift for gab. I do not know the people of your facility, but, I only hope all of you are there for each other. Take care and God Bless all of you...Hooah!”

“Please remember that, ‘we are not all the same’.”