

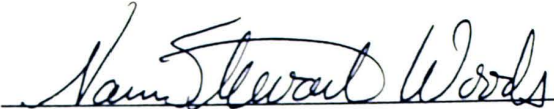
**EFFECT OF ARMY WIVES' EXTERNAL RESPONSIBILITY ON  
COPING STRATEGIES AND SELF-PERCEIVED SUCCESS AT MANAGING  
STRESS DURING MILITARY-INDUCED SEPARATION**

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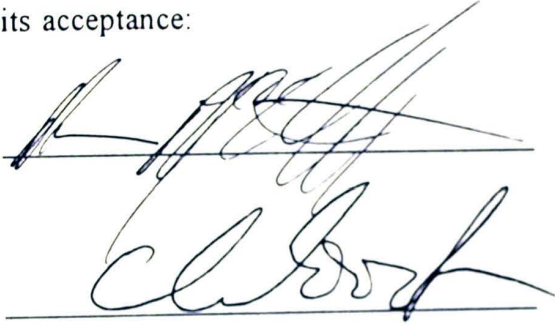
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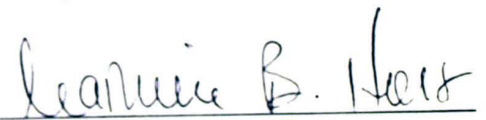
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Effect of Army Wives' External Responsibility on  
Coping Strategies and Self-Perceived Success at Managing Stress  
During Military-Induced Separation

A Thesis  
Presented for the  
Master of Arts  
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## ABSTRACT

Military wives deal with a unique form of stress during times of their husbands' deployments that results from both a major life event and an accumulation of everyday hassles. They, like all individuals, use a variety of coping strategies to help them deal with this stress. Categories of these coping strategies include problem-solving, seeking social support, and avoidance strategies, which are measured by the Coping Strategy Indicator (Amirkhan, 1990). Military wives are likely to play a number of different roles (e.g. volunteer, student, or employee) in addition to wife and mother, so this study attempted to determine whether the amount of time spent in these external roles (referred to as "external responsibility") was related to the types of coping strategies the women chose to deal with stressors that occurred during their husbands' deployments. Also, the study sought to determine whether amount of external responsibility was related to flexibility in using a variety of coping strategies, and whether there was a relationship between amount of external responsibility and how successful the women judged themselves to be in dealing with stress.

Contrary to expectation, no relationship was found between external responsibility and use of any type of coping strategy, nor between external responsibility and self-perceived success in coping. Possible explanations and contributing factors to the nonsignificant results of this study are discussed. Suggestions for further research are made.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Stress is a part of everyday life. It only becomes a problem when it causes a person to stop functioning normally. In 1984, Lazarus and Folkman reviewed the popular descriptions of stress and offered their own definition: "Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being" (p. 19). In other words, stress results from an imbalance between appraised demands and appraised resources (Matheny, Aycock, Curlett, & Junker, 1993). Stress can crop up as a result of major life changes and events or as an accumulation of everyday frustrations and irritations (Alpert & Culbertson, 1987).

Military wives suffer a unique form of stress during military-induced separation which results from experiencing both a major life event and an accumulation of everyday hassles. In addition to the distress of being separated from their spouses, military wives also have to manage all the daily activities usually performed by two people. Black (1993) enumerates many of the stressors specific to military families: frequent periods of separation, geographic isolation from extended family support systems, low pay, comparatively young age, and the ever-present threat that loved ones may be killed or wounded in combat or military training accidents. Ursano and colleagues also cite frequent moves and isolation from the civilian community as adding to military families' stress (Ursano, Holloway, Jones, Rodriguez, & Belenky, 1989). Given the chronic nature

of stress in this population, this study, focusing on military wives, will enhance and expand the growing body of research on managing stress.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Coping Strategies

Much of the research on managing stress has focused on the coping strategies used by individuals. In keeping with their earlier definition of stress, Lazarus and Folkman define the concept of coping as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (1984, p. 141). Many other coping researchers agree with this definition (e.g. Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Tobin, Holroyd, Reynolds, & Wigal, 1989). The two important factors in this definition are cognitive and behavioral efforts and appraisal of the demands. The two factors go hand in hand, as coping efforts used by individuals are expected to be consistent with their appraisal of the stressful situation (Peacock, Wong, & Reker, 1993).

It is very difficult to compare and interpret the research on coping with stress. There is currently no definitive agreement between researchers about how to classify the different ways individuals may cope. In early research on coping, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) divided coping efforts into two broad categories: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. Many other researchers still agree with this division (e.g. Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Endler & Parker, 1990). In fact, Endler and Parker (1990) say that this distinction between emotion- and problem-oriented coping is one of the few areas of consensus in the coping literature. Recently, however, researchers have used factor analytic approaches, which appear to be more psychometrically sound than the

methods employed by early coping research, and have moved toward a three dimensional focus by adding a third class of coping strategies: seeking social support (Amirkhan, 1990; Mattlin, Wethington, & Kessler, 1990; Ptacek, Smith, & Zanas, 1992; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

Each of the two basic types of coping described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) functions differently in the overall coping scheme. Problem-focused strategies are directed at managing or altering the problem causing the stress, and emotion-focused strategies are directed at regulating emotional responses to the stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Endler and Parker (1990) expand the description of the two categories by saying that problem-focused coping is oriented outward toward the task and emotion-focused coping strategies inward toward the person. Seeking social support may be considered in terms of both original categories. Support may be sought for emotional purposes (emotion-focused) or information purposes (problem-focused) (Ptacek et al., 1992).

### **Strategy Effectiveness**

Problem-focused coping strategies have generally been found to be more effective in managing stress (Bhagat, Allie, & Ford, 1991; Endler & Parker, 1990; Kuyken & Brewin, 1994; Ptacek et al., 1992). Endler and Parker (1990) found that college students who used more problem-focused than emotion-focused coping activities reported less anxiety or fewer depressive symptoms and generally scored lower on neuroticism scales. Bhagat and colleagues (1991) indicated that problem-focused coping strategies were more successful than emotion-focused strategies in moderating both work-related and personal stress. In another study, college students rated problem-focused coping more effective

than emotion-focused strategies overall in dealing with their daily stressful events (Ptacek et al., 1992).

Much research, however, points to a balance between problem- and emotion-focused coping as being most effective in dealing with stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; 1985; Hobfoll et al., 1991; Koch et al., 1991; Riggs, 1990). In fact, Carver and Scheier (1994) argue that the two types of coping typically co-occur and that the effects are difficult to distinguish. Patterson and McCubbin (1984) found that people who used a variety of coping behaviors experienced less distress. Mattlin and colleagues (1990) also emphasize the importance of using multiple coping strategies, saying that versatility in coping is associated with positive emotional adjustment. McLaughlin, Cormier, and Cormier (1988) studied women with multiple roles (e.g. wife, mother, employee) and found that "women who are using more coping strategies with greater frequency, regardless of what the strategies may be, are less distressed..." (p. 192).

### **Measuring Coping**

Measuring coping strategies is another major area of disagreement among researchers. Coping research generally relies on self-report measures to determine what coping activities are used by individuals; however, significant differences exist between the many instruments used in recent research. For some measures, subjects indicate the types of coping activities used in a specific stressful situation (Amirkhan, 1990; Folkman & Lazarus, 1988; Tobin et al., 1989; Vitaliano, Russo, Carr, Maiuro, & Becker, 1985). Other instruments are designed to tap an individual's typical style of coping (Carver et al., 1989; Endler and Parker, 1994). Endler and Parker (1990) provide a detailed evaluation

of the different assessment instruments for coping. A review of the various coping instruments is provided in Appendix A.

Amirkhan (1990) partially derived his Coping Strategy Indicator (CSI) from questions on the widely used Ways of Coping Checklist (WCC; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and other measures. He offers considerable evidence to back his claim that the CSI is psychometrically superior to the WCC and other coping measures (Amirkhan, 1994; 1990). The CSI was developed in a four phase process, beginning with 161 items and eliminating the items which were least discriminating with each successive phase. The final instrument contains 33 items for subjects to answer based on a single stressful event. The CSI is practical to use since it is shorter than other coping measures and takes less time to complete.

Factor analyses during the development of the instrument yielded three scales: Problem-Solving, Seeking Support, and Avoidance. These factors are similar to the problem- and emotion-focused strategies discussed earlier, although there are some differences. Amirkhan's (1990) Problem-Solving strategy is specifically action-oriented whereas the broader category of problem-focused strategies also includes simple awareness of the stressor. The Avoidance strategy is one of the emotion-focused strategies, although other emotion-focused strategies (e.g. wishful thinking) are not measured by this subscale. The Seeking Support strategy emerged as a separate factor, leading Amirkhan (1990) to suggest that human contact may be important for reasons other than mere sources of information or emotional aid.

Amirkhan (1990) used the fourth phase of the CSI development to test the psychometric properties of the instrument. Further factor analyses confirmed the

existence of three independent scales. Overlap between the three scales was near zero, other than a small overlap between Problem Solving and Seeking Support ( $r = .20$ ). Different samples were used to determine internal consistency, test-retest reliability, convergent validity, and divergent validity. The samples varied by gender, age, education, and income, but the CSI showed only slight covariation, indicating that the instrument is free from demographic influences. Internal reliability for the three subscales was high, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from .84 to .93. Test-retest reliability was determined by administering the CSI in 4-8 week intervals, with the subjects reporting strategies used to cope with the same event. Pearson correlation coefficients averaged .82.

Comparison of the CSI to the WCC indicated that the similarly-named subscales were moderately correlated. Amirkham (1990) says this suggests that the subscales are measuring similar, but not identical, strategies. He interprets the correlations with caution since the two instruments share a number of items. The CSI also correlated in anticipated directions to various personality measures (e.g. locus of control, depression, social desirability). Additionally, Endler and Parker (1994) compared their Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS) to the CSI and found moderate to strong correlations, providing further evidence of validity. In 1994, Amirkhan demonstrated criterion validity of the CSI through three phases of research in which the CSI correlated with predicted group differences in using the three coping strategies. The studies matched the results of the CSI to actual coping strategies chosen by subjects under threat of shock in a laboratory, participating in an educational program in college, or participating in a therapeutic program in the community.

## **Importance of Studying Coping**

Research on stress and coping has the potential for impacting vast numbers of people. One important topic of research is the impact of adaptive and maladaptive coping on psychological (Aldwin & Revenson, 1987; Bruder-Mattson & Hovanitz, 1990; Kohn, Hay, & Legere, 1994; Kuyken & Brewin, 1994; Vitaliano, Dewolfe, Maiuro, Russo, & Katon, 1990) and physical (Haney & Long, 1989; Olff, Brosschot, & Godaert, 1993; O'Neill & Zeichner, 1985) health. Aldwin and Revenson (1987) found a correlation between poor mental health and maladaptive coping strategies. Clinical depression has been associated with the use of more avoidance coping and less problem-focused coping (Kuyken & Brewin, 1994). Interestingly, there was an association between avoidance behavior and depressive symptoms even among the control sample. Other studies by Kolenc, Hartley, and Murdock (1990) and Vitaliano and colleagues (1990) found a positive correlation between depressive symptoms and the use of emotion-focused coping. Studies by Olff and associates (1993) and O'Neill and Zeichner (1985) both found that instrumental or problem-focused coping positively moderated the effects of stress on health outcome. Likewise, Haney and Long (1989) suggest that individuals who perceive problem-focused coping as more effective have fewer health concerns.

## **The Link between Coping Strategies and Other Variables**

Much of the recent research has sought to link a particular characteristic of individuals with their preference for coping strategies. Some of the independent variables have included age (Blanchard-Fields, Sulsky, & Robinson-Whelen, 1991), gender role (Blanchard-Fields et al., 1991; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984; Riggs, 1990), optimism

(Strutton & Lumpkin, 1992), self-perceived problem-solving ability (MacNair & Elliott, 1992) and employment status (Alpert & Culbertson, 1987; Amatea & Fong-Beyett, 1987; Canam, 1986; Harrison & Minor, 1978, 1982; Koch et al., 1991, Long, 1988, 1989; Meleis & Stevens, 1992).

Blanchard-Fields and colleagues (1991) questioned subjects from five different age groups (adolescents, young adults, adults, middle-aged adults, older adults). They found that age was related to type of coping and that it moderated the relationship between gender role orientation (masculinity/femininity) and coping. The study used a revision of the Ways of Coping Checklist (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986) and generally found a positive correlation between increased age and use of problem-focused coping. Degree of femininity was also related to coping style. Individuals high in femininity generally preferred emotion-focused coping strategies, although the use of problem-focused coping increased through middle age then declined through older adulthood. Individuals low in femininity continued to increase their use of problem-focused coping across the lifespan.

Another study examining gender role dealt specifically with Navy wives whose husbands were involved in an eight-month deployment (Patterson & McCubbin, 1984). Eighty-two wives were categorized as having a masculine/feminine/androgynous gender role orientation prior to the separation. During the deployment, the wives completed the Coping with Separation Inventory (McCubbin, Boss, Wilson, & Lester, 1980) establishing coping behaviors and patterns. As discussed in Appendix A, the instrument revealed five coping patterns: maintaining family integrity, developing interpersonal relationships and social support, managing psychological tension and strain, believing in lifestyle and

optimism, and developing self-reliance and self-esteem. A balanced coping strategy was defined as scoring higher than average on all five patterns. The most important result of this study showed that women who were not “distressed,” that is, did not increase use of prescribed stress management medication, were much more likely to use a balanced coping strategy than women who did increase use of medication. Additionally, women with an androgynous gender role orientation were significantly more likely to use a balanced coping strategy.

Optimism and self-perceived problem-solving ability have been shown to have a positive correlation with problem-focused coping. Strutton and Lumpkin (1992) categorized subjects as optimistic or pessimistic and used a condensed form of the WCC to measure coping behavior. The study supported the hypothesis that optimistic salespeople would be more likely to use problem-focused coping and that pessimistic salespeople would be more likely to use emotion-focused coping. MacNair and Elliott (1992) used the WCC to measure coping among college students. Those who perceived themselves as having effective problem-solving abilities used more problem-focused coping strategies than emotion-focused strategies.

Several studies have concentrated on women’s employment status as the independent variable in the use of coping strategies. Amatea and Fong-Beyette (1987) studied 135 professional women who reported a role conflict between their various life roles (e.g. work, spouse, parent, housework, self-development). Each woman completed a questionnaire designed by the researchers to determine background characteristics, role conflict, coping strategies, and levels of stress and satisfaction. The women were much more likely to use problem-focused than emotion-focused strategies (93.8% versus 8.1%).

In a separate study, Long (1988) interviewed 20 professional women about their work stress, coping strategies, and satisfaction with their coping. She found that effective copers tended to appraise stressful events as challenging rather than threatening and use problem-focused coping, whereas less effective copers appraised stressful encounters as threats and used emotion-focused strategies. The lack of non-employed control groups limits the usefulness of these studies.

Koch and colleagues (1991) and Long (1989) used modified versions of the WCC to study the coping strategies of women employed in traditionally female (e.g. clerical) or traditionally male (e.g. managerial, tradesman) occupations. Koch and her associates (1991) found that both traditionally and nontraditionally employed women used significantly more problem-focused coping strategies at work than at home. Additionally, the nontraditional employees used more problem-focused strategies than the traditional employees both at work and home. The traditionally employed women used more emotion-focused strategies at home, while the nontraditionally employed women used balanced strategies at home. Long (1989) classified women according to sex-role differences (high/low masculinity/femininity) as well as measuring their coping strategies. She found that low-feminine women in nontraditional occupations used more problem-focused coping than low-feminine women in traditional occupations. Also, high-masculine women reported less strain and work impairment and more problem-focused coping than low-masculine women regardless of their occupation. Again, there were no non-employed control groups identified in these studies, and neither study indicated how satisfied the women were with their coping ability.

Alpert and Culbertson (1987) focused on the coping strategy differences between employed and unemployed women. Their sample consisted of 41 women who were either married or cohabiting with a man who worked full-time and had at least one child under the age of 18 living in the home. Twenty-two women were employed; 19 were not working outside the home. There were no significant differences in age or number of children. As expected, the family income of the dual-earner families was significantly higher than the single-earner families. Stress was measured by a modified version of the Hassles Scale (HAS; Kanner, Coyne, Schaefer, & Lazarus, 1981). Coping was measured by a modified version of the WCC. The results of this study were that employed women used significantly more problem-focused strategies than unemployed women in the areas of practical hassles and family hassles. Wage earners used more problem-focused than emotion-focused strategies in the areas of practical, work, and family hassles; non-wage earners used more problem- than emotion-focused activities in the area of work (housework) hassles. There was very little difference between the two groups on the number of emotion-focused strategies used. A surprising result of this study, contrary to the hypothesis, was that the unemployed women were more satisfied with their ability to cope with practical hassles than were the employed women. One limitation of this study is the small sample size.

These studies suggest that women who are employed tend to use more problem-focused than emotion-focused coping strategies. This is consistent with Folkman and Lazarus' (1980) study in which a work context favored problem-focused strategies. The use of problem-focused strategies also seems to extend into areas other than work, although emotion-focused strategies are employed as well. Given the exclusion of

unemployed control samples in four of the studies and the relatively small sample in the fifth study, the difference between employed and unemployed women is not conclusive. Also, there is little mention of the women's satisfaction in the way they dealt with stress.

### **Research on Military Families**

Military families are often placed in a uniquely stressful situation: separation due to military deployment. A survey conducted during the Persian Gulf War indicated that a substantial percentage of Army wives were not able to successfully cope with the stress they were experiencing (Rosen, Westhuis, & Teitelbaum, 1994). A greater understanding of coping with the stress brought on by separation has important implications for improving services provided for treatment of military families experiencing separation stress (McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson, 1976). Black (1993) emphasizes that military-induced family separation has been studied very little. Not surprisingly, much of the literature has been written shortly after a major conflict when public interest in the military and its families is high (e.g. Bey & Lange, 1974; Black, 1993; Figley, 1993; Hobfoll et al., 1991; Kaslow, 1993; McCubbin et al., 1976).

Even before the Persian Gulf War, however, interest and research on military wives had increased (e.g. Levy, Faulkner, & Steffensmeier, 1991; Ursano et al., 1989). Much of the research sought to examine the impact of military life stress on the general well-being of military wives (Klein, Tatone, & Lindsay, 1989; Martin, 1984; Rosen, Carpenter, & Moghadam, 1989; Rosen & Moghadam, 1991). Martin (1984) found four significant predictors of life satisfaction to be housing, employment, family life issues, and friendship issues. Klein and colleagues (1989) found that life satisfaction was related to

perceived social support from family and friends, an internal locus of control, and low levels of stress and emotionality. Rosen and her colleagues (1989) indicate that marital and financial satisfaction, health, and the number of days in the past six months that the husband was in the field contributed to wives' general well-being and life satisfaction. Rosen and Moghadam (1988; 1989a; 1989b; 1990) also conducted a substantial amount of research on social support and its role in military wives' well-being. Major findings indicated that perceived social support from other unit wives was the only type of support that significantly buffered the stress of separation, and that stress had an adverse effect only on those wives who did not perceive themselves as having social support from other unit wives.

Most of the published research on family stress during military-induced separation was generated during and after the Persian Gulf War (Knapp & Newman, 1993; Rosen, Teitelbaum, & Westhuis, 1993; Rosen, Westhuis, & Teitelbaum, 1994; Wexler & McGrath, 1991). These studies also examined the impact of the separation stress on psychological well-being.

Although coping with war-related separation stress is an extremely important subject, fortunately it is not the most prevalent type of separation military families endure. Peace-time separations due to training and other exercises also cause stress, so it is also important to consider these peace-time separations and the stress involved in these shorter periods of separation. The study conducted by Patterson and McCubbin (1984), reviewed earlier, does examine military wives' stress during a peacetime separation, although the study specifically deals with Navy wives. The study focused on the coping strategies employed by the women during separation, and used gender role as an independent

variable. The Coping with Separation Inventory (McCubin et al., 1980) used in the study did not categorize coping behavior as problem- or emotion-focused, although it did indicate that women who used a balanced strategy were more successful in dealing with the separation. The eight month Navy deployment was considerably longer than the usual 30-45 day deployments of the Army. Riggs (1990) also concentrated on gender orientation and its relation to coping strategies used by military spouses. She found that at-home-spouses with an androgynous gender orientation used more balanced coping strategies than those with traditional gender orientations, and were more successful in dealing with separation.

A few studies have looked at employment status and its impact on psychological well-being of military wives (Bowen, 1987; Ickovics & Martin, 1987; Martin, 1984; Rosen, Ickovics, and Moghadam, 1990). Bowen (1987) found that marital adjustment was influenced by wives' employment status, husband's rank, and location of assignment. Employment of officers' wives stationed overseas improved marital satisfaction, while employment of wives in the United States was detrimental to the marriage. Ickovics and Martin (1987) conducted a three-year longitudinal study and found that spouses who gained employment during the study showed the largest increase of general well-being, but those who were employed throughout the entire study decreased in well-being. Martin (1984) examined the relationship between military-related stressors and life satisfaction of 314 wives of enlisted soldiers. He found that employment and career issues were strongly associated with the women's overall life satisfaction and suggested further research. Finally, Rosen, Ickovics, and Moghadam (1990) studied the employment-related variables of time spent employed, role fit, and satisfaction with overall career development

prospects. They found that the first two variables were indirectly related to general well-being and the third variable was directly related to general well-being. None of these studies specifically examined military separation periods or coping strategies.

### **Purpose of This Study**

In tying the research together, it was hoped that this study would expand the knowledge base on managing stress as it specifically concerns Army wives and the effects of more frequent, shorter periods of separation during peacetime. This study focused on Army wives rather than Army spouses for reasons of simplicity, and because the units included in this study will be comprised of only men.

The results of previous research on military wives' employment status and their general well-being are mixed. Since Army wives relocate frequently, they often can't find jobs immediately or may have postponed their careers until their husband retires. For these reasons, the category of employment will be expanded in this study to include volunteer work and attending school. This variable will be called "external responsibility." This study will examine whether amount of external responsibility is related to how wives deal with the situational stress that results from the peacetime deployment of their husbands. Specifically, (1) is there a relationship between amount of external responsibility and use of problem solving, seeking social support, and avoidance coping strategies, (2) is amount of external responsibility related to flexibility in coping, and (3) is amount of external responsibility related to how successful wives perceive themselves to be in handling the chronic stressors encountered during military-induced separation?

Regarding the types of coping strategies, much previous research indicates that employed women use more problem-focused strategies than their unemployed counterparts, while both groups use about the same amount of emotion-focused strategies. This indicates that employed women use a greater variety of coping skills, thus tending to be more flexible in coping. Therefore, it is expected that women with higher amounts of external responsibility will use more problem solving strategies than women with lower external responsibility, and will be more flexible in their coping. Women with lower amounts of external responsibility are expected to use more seeking social support and avoidance coping strategies than women with high external responsibility. Much of the research summarized earlier showed that individuals who use problem-focused or balanced strategies are more successful in dealing with stress, which would suggest a hypothesis in this study that women with high amounts of external responsibility are more satisfied with their ability to manage stress. However, Alpert and Culbertson (1987) found that unemployed women were more satisfied with their ability to cope than employed women. In light of the conflicting previous research, this study will simply seek to determine whether amount of external responsibility is related to how successful wives perceive themselves to be in coping with stress.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHOD**

#### **Participants**

The target population included military wives whose husbands were stationed at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. The participants in the study were wives whose husbands were currently or recently deployed on peace-time training or other exercises. The husbands belonged to eight units which were all-male, special operations units. The soldiers in these units typically deploy more frequently than soldiers in non-special operations units. Since diversity is typical among military families, a wide range of backgrounds was expected.

#### **Measures**

##### ***Biographical Questionnaire***

The following demographic information was obtained through a biographical questionnaire: age, ethnicity, education level, husband's rank (junior or senior enlisted or officer), family income range, and ages of children (Appendix B). The questionnaire also requested information pertaining to employment status, volunteer work, and student status. Participants were asked to estimate the number and length of military-induced separations within the past 12 months.

##### ***Coping Strategy Indicator***

The Coping Strategy Indicator (Amirkhan, 1990) is a self-report questionnaire containing 33 questions that cover various coping behaviors (Appendix C). In the original instructions for completing the questionnaire, participants are requested to think of one

problem encountered in the last six months that was important to them and caused them to worry. They briefly describe the problem, then answer each question based on how much they used the coping behavior for that particular problem (e.g. a lot, a little, not at all). Participants receive scores for each of three scales: Problem-Solving, Seeking Social Support, and Avoidance. Scores are compared to the norms to determine whether the use of each type of coping strategy was very low, low, average, high, or very high.

Instructions for using the CSI in this study were altered from the original instructions. Participants were asked to recall an event during their husband's deployment that was important and caused them to worry. After completing the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate the degree to which they felt they were successful in managing the stress of that encounter. This instrument has not been specifically used to gauge flexibility in coping, although Amirkhan (1990) indicated that "high scores on multiple scales...reflect flexibility in coping" (p. 1073). Given that flexibility has not been clearly defined in the literature, for the purposes of this study flexible coping was determined by high scores in two types of strategies or one high score with at least average scores in the other two strategies.

### **Procedure**

The researcher requested command approval to solicit participation from wives through command-sanctioned Family Support Groups. Participation was solicited during routine family support meetings prior to, during, or immediately following the separation period. Potential participants were told that the study was examining how Army wives

deal with stress during their husbands' deployments. Potential participants were informed of the requirements of the study prior to completing a consent form (Appendix D).

Consent forms and biographical questionnaires were completed at the initial briefing. Each participant was given a Coping Strategy Indicator and a pre-addressed stamped envelope. They were asked to complete the CSI based on their husband's current or most recent deployment and return the completed questionnaires in the envelope provided. Data was identified through unique numbers assigned to the Biographical Questionnaire and the CSI. The consent form was not marked with a unique number, therefore, names could not be connected to the data.

### **Analysis**

The independent variable in this study was the amount of external responsibility reported by the participants on the biographical questionnaire. This variable was measured in number of hours; therefore, the data is on a ratio scale. Dependent variables varied according to the research question.

#### ***Research Question 1***

For research question 1 (was there a relationship between amount of external responsibility and use of problem solving, seeking social support, and avoidance coping strategies?), the dependent variables were the three subscale scores on the CSI. Possible scores on the subscales ranged from 11 to 33; therefore this variable yielded interval data. There were three parts to this question: External responsibility compared to Problem-Solving; External responsibility compared to Seeking Social Support; and External responsibility compared to Avoidance. Each was looking for a relationship or correlation

between two continuous variables. A Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine the extent to which the variables were related. Three correlations were performed to answer this research question.

### ***Research Question 2***

Research question 2 (was amount of external responsibility related to flexibility in coping?) had a dependent variable of flexibility in coping. A participant was labeled flexible or not flexible based on their scores on the three subscales. The data was discrete and nominal. This question also examined whether the independent variable was related to the dependent variable; however, the independent variable was continuous and the dependent variable was discrete. If significant correlations between external responsibility and the subscales of the CSI were found, a biserial correlation coefficient would be calculated to answer research question 2.

### ***Research Question 3***

The dependent variable in the third research question (was amount of external responsibility related to how successful wives perceive themselves to be in handling stress?) was the participant's self-reported estimate of how successful they were in managing stress. The participants judged their success by choosing the appropriate point on a six-point likert-type scale (1 = Not very successful; 6 = Very successful). A six-point scale discouraged participants from choosing the middle point, and offered participants an adequate but not overwhelming number of choices on the continuum. This yielded data on an interval scale. Similarly to research question 1, the correlation between the two continuous variables was examined by calculating the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Information about Participants

Approximately 150 women were approached to participate in the study. Ninety-one (60%) agreed to participate and completed the informed consent form and biographical questionnaire. Of the 91 participants, 46 returned the Coping Strategy Indicator, for a return rate of 50.5%. One of the returned surveys was unusable due to missing data; therefore, 45 participants were included in the final analysis.

Ages of the participants ranged from 22 to 41 years with an average of 31.6 (SD=3.47). The majority were of Caucasian ethnicity and had attended at least some college. All ranges of husbands' ranks were represented, with the majority being officers. Additionally, 78% of the participants reported having children. Detailed demographic information for the sample is presented in Table 1.

Twenty-two participants worked outside the home, 21 did volunteer work, 5 attended school, and 5 did not report participating in these activities. Three individuals indicated that they combined volunteering and attending school, while 6 volunteered and worked and 2 went to school and worked.

The total number of hours of external responsibility ranged from 0 to 80, with an average of 24.7 (SD=21.9). Participants reported that their husbands had been deployed an average of 122 days within the past 12 months, ranging from 42 to 280 days.

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Sample in Each Demographic Category

Demographic Category	n	Percentage
<b>Age</b>		
22-25	2	4.4
26-29	7	15.6
30-33	22	48.9
34-37	12	26.7
38-41	2	4.4
<b>Race</b>		
White	40	88.9
African-American	2	4.4
Hispanic	2	4.4
Asian	0	0
Other	1	2.2
<b>Education</b>		
Some High School	0	0
High School Degree	4	8.9
Some College	13	28.9
Associates Degree	5	11.1
Bachelors Degree	15	33.3
Post Graduate Degree	8	17.8
<b>Husband's Rank</b>		
Junior Enlisted (E1-E5)	3	6.7
Senior Enlisted (E6-E9)	9	20.0
Junior Officer (O1-O3; WO1-CW2)	15	33.3
Senior Officer (O4-O6; CW3-CW5)	18	40.0
<b>Family Income</b>		
Less than \$20,000	0	0
\$20,000 - \$34,999	10	22.2
\$35,000 - \$49,999	16	35.6
\$50,000 - \$64,999	13	28.9
More than \$65,000	6	13.3

## **Analysis of Research Questions**

All descriptive statistics and correlations were computed through the use of SPSS.

### ***Research Question 1***

The range of scores for the Problem-Solving scale on the CSI was 12 (Very Low) to 33 (High), with a mean of 26.89 and a standard deviation of 4.71. The correlation between amount of external responsibility and use of problem-solving strategies was  $r = .100$  ( $p = .52$ ).

Scores on the Seeking Social Support scale ranged from 13 (Low) to 33 (High). The mean was 23.62 and the standard deviation was 5.56. The correlation between external responsibility and seeking social support was  $r = -.096$  ( $p = .53$ ).

On the Avoidance scale, scores ranged from 11 (Low) to 24 (High), with a mean of 16.33 ( $SD = 3.55$ ). The correlation between external responsibility and use of avoidance strategies was  $r = .032$  ( $p = .83$ ).

The hypothesis that women with higher amounts of external responsibility would use more problem solving strategies than women with lower amounts of external responsibility was not supported. The hypotheses that women with lower amounts of external responsibility would be expected to use more seeking social support and avoidance coping strategies than women with higher amounts of external responsibility were also not supported.

### ***Research Question 2***

Flexibility in coping was determined by scores on the three scales of the CSI. Individuals who scored high on two of the three scales were classified as flexible.

Individuals who scored high on one of the scales and at least average on the other two scales were also considered flexible in coping. Overall, 14 participants were labeled flexible in their coping and 31 were not flexible. Based on the lack of correlation between external responsibility and any of the subscales of the CSI in research question 1, it was elected not to proceed with the analysis of research question 2.

### ***Research Question 3***

Participants judged their success in dealing with their stressful encounter by selecting the appropriate point on a six-point likert-type scale. One participant did not rate her success in coping. Over 70 % of the women rated their success as a 5 or 6. Information regarding number and percentage of responses is presented in Table 2. The correlation between amount of external responsibility and self-perceived success in coping was  $r=.164$  ( $p=.29$ ). The hypothesis that there would be a relationship between the two variables was not supported.

Table 2

#### Number and Percentage of Responses to Self-Perceived Success in Coping

Response	n	Percentage
1	0	0
2	1	2.3
3	2	4.5
4	10	22.7
5	17	38.6
6	14	31.8

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Military wives deal with a unique form of stress during times of their husbands' deployments that results from both a major life event and an accumulation of everyday hassles. They, like all individuals, use a variety of coping strategies to help them deal with this stress. Nowadays, military wives are likely to play a number of different roles, such as volunteer, student, or employee, as well as being a wife and mother. This study was interested in whether the amount of time spent in these external roles (referred to as "external responsibility") was related to the types of coping strategies the women chose to deal with stressors that occurred during their husbands' deployments. Also, the study sought to determine whether amount of external responsibility was related to flexibility in using a variety of coping strategies, and whether there was a relationship between amount of external responsibility and how successful the women judged themselves to be in dealing with stress.

Previous research (Alpert & Culbertson, 1987; Ickovics & Martin, 1987; Rosen, Ickovics, & Moghadam, 1990) has focused on whether a woman's employment status was related to type of coping strategy she preferred or to her general well-being. As discussed previously, employed women tended to use more problem-focused coping strategies than unemployed women. Also, employment status was related to general well-being and life satisfaction. These studies used employment as a categorical variable in that women were either employed or unemployed. This study expanded the category of employment to include volunteering and attending school, and used this variable as a continuous variable.

Thus, this study asked new questions concerning the relationship between the amount of time spent performing external responsibilities and the types of coping strategies used. Also, this study asked new questions regarding the relationships between amount of time spent on external responsibilities and whether the woman was flexible and/or successful in her coping.

Contrary to expectations, there were no significant correlations between the amount of external responsibility and the use of any particular category of coping strategy (Problem-Solving, Seeking Social Support, or Avoidance). The results were more likely to be due to chance than to be related in some meaningful way. Also, amount of external responsibility was not related to flexibility in coping, defined as scoring high in two of the three categories of coping strategies, or high in one category and at least average in the other two. Finally, there was no significant relationship between amount of external responsibility and how successful the women rated themselves in dealing with the stressor that occurred during their husbands' deployment.

In attempting to explain the nonsignificant results of this study, it is notable that the sample of military wives who participated in this study may differ from the population of military wives as a whole. These women's husbands all belong to units which deploy more frequently than other units, which means that these participants may have more experience in handling stress on their own than the average military wife.

The units these husbands belong to are also involved in special operations, which means that they may be called upon to deploy with very little or no notice, have no contact with their families during the deployment, and may not be able to tell their wives when they are coming home. When this happens, the husbands are usually involved in a real-

world situation that could involve combat operations. When this type of mission is compared to a routine peace-time training exercise, the routine deployment may seem easy to handle. The experience of real-world past deployments may have “seasoned” the wives so that a routine deployment is actually less stressful for them than it is for the average military wife. In fact, several of the wives mentioned that their husband’s deployment was fine with them as long as they knew when he was returning.

In addition to asking new questions from previous research, this study also differed from previous research in how participation was obtained. Many previous studies involving military wives were part of larger projects conducted by military agencies (Bowen, 1987; Ickovics & Martin, 1987; Rosen & Moghadam, 1991). Usually the questionnaires were mailed to potential participants (Rosen, Moghadam, & Carpenter, 1989; Rosen, Teitelbaum, & Westhuis, 1993). The participants in this study were attending a family support group meeting when they were asked to be involved in this study. It is likely that women who attend support group meetings are fundamentally different in some way from women who do not attend meetings. The most likely difference is that these women were already seeking information and social support on a routine basis, and considered it an important part of their role as a military wife. The women who did not attend the meetings and therefore were not eligible for inclusion in this study may cope with stress in an entirely different manner. Also, almost 50% of the women who originally agreed to participate did not mail the CSI to the researcher. It is possible that the women who did not return the survey felt less comfortable with their coping, or were busier and more stressed than those who did return the CSI.

This study chose to use an instrument that evaluates the situational factors of coping. The CSI (as well as many other instruments) asks participants to think of a specific stressful event, which may or may not be representative of the individual's overall coping style. The question of situational coping versus an overall coping style is discussed at great length by Carver and Sheier (1994). As mentioned previously, there is no easy answer to determine whether it is better to measure coping activities for a specific stressful event or to try and tap into a typical style of coping. It is possible that the way the participants dealt with one particular event may not be the usual way in which they handle most stress.

A final factor which may have impacted the results of this study is the specific stressful event chosen by each woman to refer to when completing the CSI. It is human nature to try and present oneself in a good light, so it would be natural for these participants to choose stressors which they felt they had handled well. The implication is that they chose an event which they felt they were successful in handling. In fact, a large majority (over 70%) did rate their success in dealing with the stressor as a 5 or 6 on a six point scale. It is also possible that the wives overestimated how successful they were or did not want to admit that they did not feel successful with how they managed stress.

Future researchers may wish to improve upon this study by expanding the sample size and soliciting participants from a wider variety of units. Because there is likely a difference between wives who do and do not attend support group meetings, strong military support is needed to access events such as deployment briefings which wives are generally expected to attend. To address the issue of situational coping versus coping style, future researchers may want to have participants complete a greater number of

questionnaires over a period of several deployments, which would give a better picture of the individual's usual method of dealing with stressful events. Finally, self-perceived success may always be tainted by a participant's desire to present themselves in a good light; however, by giving very clear instructions and obtaining ratings for several different events, it may be possible to obtain more accurate ratings of success in handling stress.

Although no significant correlations were found in this study, this researcher still believes that the study of coping involving military wives is of valid concern and would add valuable information to the body of research on coping. Military wives generally come from a cross-section of the American population and experience an unusual amount of stress. Further research should take into consideration some of the lessons learned from this study.

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## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### **Review of Instruments Used to Measure Coping Strategies**

The most widely used measure in coping research is the Ways of Coping Checklist (WCC) and its revisions (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980, 1985, 1988). Folkman and Lazarus' 1988 version, called the Ways of Coping Questionnaire (WCQ), includes eight subscales: planful problem solving, seeking social support, confrontive, distancing, self-controlling, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, and positive reappraisal. The instrument requires subjects to think of one particular stressful encounter and answer 66 Likert-formatted questions about their coping responses for that event.

The Coping Strategies Inventory, developed by Tobin and colleagues (1989), is derived from the WCC, but contains 72 items and expands the number of subscales to eight primary, four secondary, and two tertiary scales.

Other instruments measuring coping include the COPE (Carver et al., 1989) and the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS; Endler and Parker, 1994). The COPE contains five scales of problem-focused coping, five scales of emotion-focused coping, and three other scales. The CISS includes five subscales: task, emotion, avoidance, distraction, and social diversion. These two instruments are different from the Ways of Coping in that they were designed to elicit answers based on what subjects usually do in stressful situations as opposed to what they do during one specific situation. However, both can be used with instructions to think of ONE particular situation as well.

A recently developed instrument is the Coping Resources Inventory for Stress (CRIS; Matheny et al., 1993). As the name indicates, the CRIS measures coping

resources (e.g. confidence, financial freedom, physical health, tension control) instead of coping responses.

The Coping with Separation Inventory is an early instrument used by McCubbin and associates (McCubbin, Boss, Wilson, & Lester, 1980; McCubbin, Dahl, Lester, Benson, & Robertson, 1976; Patterson & McCubbin, 1984) to provide information about coping behaviors of military wives during extended separations from their husbands. The instrument yields five different coping patterns: maintaining family integrity, developing interpersonal relationships and social support, managing psychological tension and strain, believing in lifestyle and optimism, and developing self-reliance and self-esteem. Although it appears to be a useful instrument, the coping information yielded by the Coping with Separation Inventory is inconsistent with the majority of the research in coping, thus is not comparable.

Some researchers have chosen to develop their own questionnaire, usually employing a likert-type scale for responses to the items (e.g. Mattlin et al., 1990; Ptacek et al., 1992). Mattlin and colleagues acknowledge that using single-item measures rather than multi-item measures does limit the sensitivity of the analysis, but indicate that they were still able to detect substantial patterns. Ptacek and colleagues also argue that this approach facilitated collecting daily data and allowed them to consider the order in which the strategies were used as well. Both of these studies based their categories on the work of Stone and Neale (1984). Long (1988) used an interview format, also basing her questions on Stone and Neale. Amatea and Fong-Beyette (1987) used an open-ended response format, seeking more descriptive information about coping efforts, whereas Rosen and colleagues (1994) used a simple single-item likert-like measure indicating how

well the subjects were able to accomplish daily tasks. Finally, McLaughlin and colleagues (1988) used a structured interview to elicit the number, type, and frequency of coping strategies used by their subjects.

### Biographical Questionnaire

Please answer these questions as best and as truthfully as you can. Your answers will be completely anonymous. The researcher will not be able to connect your name with your responses on this sheet.

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Race: White \_\_\_\_\_  
 African-American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
 Asian \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Education:**

Some High School \_\_\_\_\_  
 High School Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
 Some College \_\_\_\_\_  
 Associates Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bachelors Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
 Post Graduate Degree \_\_\_\_\_

**Family Income:**

Less than \$ 19,999 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \$ 20,000 - \$ 34,999 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \$ 35,000 - \$ 49,999 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \$ 50,000 - \$ 64,999 \_\_\_\_\_  
 More than \$ 65,000 \_\_\_\_\_

**Husband's Rank:**

Enlisted E1-E5 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Enlisted E6-E9 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Officer O1-O3 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Officer O4-O6 \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children: \_\_\_\_\_ Children's Ages \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Children living with you \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you do volunteer work? \_\_\_\_\_ (Examples: Red Cross, hospital, school)  
 On the average, how many hours per week do you volunteer? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you attend school? \_\_\_\_\_ (High School \_\_; Undergraduate \_\_; Graduate \_\_)  
 On the average, how many hours per week do you spend on school or school-related work? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you work outside the home for pay? \_\_\_\_\_  
 On the average, how many hours per week do you work? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many times has your husband been away on military duty for more than a week within the last 12 months? \_\_\_\_\_
5. On the average, how many days was he gone during each deployment? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What day did/will your husband leave for this deployment? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Approximately how long do you expect him to be gone? \_\_\_\_\_

## Coping Strategy Indicator

Dr. James H. Amirkhan  
Department of Psychology  
California State University, Long Beach

We are interested in how people cope with the problems and troubles in their lives.

Listed below are several possible ways of coping. We would like you to indicate to what extent you, yourself, used each of these coping methods. All of your responses will remain anonymous.

Try to think of one problem you have encountered during the time your husband has been deployed. This should be a problem that was important to you, and that caused you to worry (anything from the loss of a loved one to a traffic citation, but one that was important to you).

Please describe this problem in a few words (remember, your answer will be kept anonymous):

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With this problem in mind, indicated how you coped by checking the appropriate box for each coping behavior listed on the following pages. Answer each and every question even though some may sound similar.

Did you remember to write down your problem? If not, please do so before going on.

(Sample Questions)

**Keeping that stressful event in mind, indicate to what extent you...**

Let your feelings out to a friend?	A lot __	A little __	Not at all __
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Brainstormed all possible solutions before deciding what to do?	A lot __	A little __	Not at all __
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Accepted sympathy and understanding from someone?	A lot __	A little __	Not at all __
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Talked to people about the situation because talking about it helped you to feel better?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

Tried different ways to solve the problem until you found one that worked?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

Told people about the situation because just talking about it helped you to come up with solutions?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

Formed a plan of action in your mind?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

Went to a friend to help you feel better about the problem?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

Wished that people would just leave you alone?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

Tried to carefully plan a course of action rather than acting on impulse?

A lot \_\_\_ A little \_\_\_ Not at all \_\_\_

On the following scale, please circle the number that best describes how successful you were in dealing with the stress of this particular event.

1  
Not very  
successful

2

3

4

5

6  
Very  
successful

## **Informed Consent To Participate In Research**

**Austin Peay State University  
Clarksville, Tennessee 37044**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form is designed to provide you with information about this study and to answer any of your questions.

### **1. TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY**

How Army Wives Cope with Stress during Military-Induced Separation.

### **2. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

Kristin M. Peterson, Graduate Student, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN, (615) 572-0863

### **3. FACULTY SUPERVISOR**

Nanci Stewart Woods, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Psychology, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN, (615) 648-7236

### **4. THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH**

Everyone experiences stress during their daily living. It only becomes a problem when it causes people to stop functioning normally. In order to manage stress, people use various types of coping strategies. Military wives, in particular, experience a special form of stress during military-induced separation because they are separated from (and worried about) their husbands and they are required to manage all the daily activities usually performed by two people. In the past, the coping strategies of military wives have usually been studied during times of war; however, wives also experience stress during the shorter, more frequent deployments of their husbands during peacetime. This study focuses on the types of coping strategies and activities women use during peacetime separation from their husbands and how successful the women believe they are in handling stress.

### **5. PROCEDURES FOR THIS RESEARCH**

You will be asked to answer written questions about your age, race, education, husband's rank, family income, and children's ages. The form also asks you about the number of hours per week that you volunteer, go to school, or work. Finally, you will be asked about your husband's deployment during the past 12 months. After completing this form, you will receive a questionnaire called the Coping Strategy Indicator and a pre-

addressed stamped envelope. Approximately mid-way through your husband's deployment, the researcher will telephone you to ask you to fill out the questionnaire. It should take less than 30 minutes to complete the form. You will then be asked to mail the questionnaire back to the researcher in the envelope provided. The biographical questionnaire and the Coping Strategy Indicator will be marked with the same number so that they can be matched. This consent form, which has your name and phone number, will *not* have the number on it, so the researcher will *not* be able to connect your name to the answers you provide on the two questionnaires. This will ensure that your answers are completely anonymous.

## 6. POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU

There are no known risks from participation in this study.

## 7. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO YOU OR OTHERS

The benefits to you from participation in this study are minimal. You may enjoy filling out the questionnaires. It is hoped that the results of this study will be able to help other Army wives who are experiencing stress during their husband's deployment by finding out what types of coping strategies and activities were useful to the women participating in this study.

## 8. INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I agree to participate in the present study being conducted by Kristin M. Peterson, a graduate student at Austin Peay State University. I have been informed, orally and in writing, of the procedures to be followed and about any discomfort which may be involved. Ms. Peterson has offered to answer any further questions that I may have regarding the procedures and she can be contacted by phone at 572-0863.

I understand that I am free to terminate my participation at any time without penalty or prejudice and to have all data obtained from me withdrawn from the study and destroyed. I have also been told of any benefits that may result from my participation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
NAME (Please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

(Best times to call: \_\_\_\_\_)

\_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE NUMBER

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

**VITA**

Kristin Michelle Peterson was born in Bend, Oregon on September 21, 1964. She attended elementary through high school in Madras, Oregon, graduating from Madras High School in May, 1982. In July of 1982 she entered the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, and in May 1986 received the degree of Bachelor of Science in Basic Sciences Interdisciplinary. She was commissioned an officer in the United States Army and served on active duty until August 1993. In June, 1994 she entered Austin Peay State University in Clarksville, Tennessee and in May 1997 received a Master of Arts degree in School Psychology.